

FOREST CAPITAL

Canberra's foresters and
forestry workers tell their stories

Interviews conducted
and edited by
Brendan O'Keefe



ACT
Government



ACT Parks and Conservation Service

Forest Capital

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*Canberra's
Foresters and Forestry Workers
Tell Their Story*

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ACT Parks and Conservation Service
Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate
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Canberra ACT 2601

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Front cover photos: Forests cover the flanks of the Cotter Reservoir, about 1972
(Archives ACT, NDC1732/39)

Logging operations at Pierces Creek, 1961
(Archives ACT, Logging Study – Part 2 – 59/282F, Figure 5)

Back cover photo: A logging truck laden with freshly cut pine logs makes its way along a dirt road through the forests (J. Drysdale)

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Foreword

Brendan O’Keefe has played a key role in documenting the history of forestry in the ACT for several decades. In 1994 he was commissioned to undertake a series of video interviews with key people who had been influential in the history of forestry in the ACT. The original project was the brainchild of Graham McKenzie Smith who was the Director of ACT Forests and a keen historian in his own right. Graham had the foresight to identify the value in recording this unique history for future generations.

On 18 January 2003, disastrous fires swept into Canberra, killing four people, destroying more than 500 houses and devastating more than 60% of the plantation estate. The vast majority of ACT Forest’s historical records and photographs were also destroyed when these fires swept through the main Stromlo office and until recently it was thought that the recordings and transcripts also perished in this catastrophic event.

In 2016, during a routine office clean-up at the Hume Weighbridge, we discovered a copy of the transcripts of all ten interviews that had been conducted in 1994. Although the sound recordings are almost certainly gone forever, we have again engaged Brendan O’Keefe to restore to life the interviews of these key people who shaped the early forest industry in the ACT.

What follows in this book is a fascinating venture into the history of forestry in the ACT as told through the eyes of those that help build and shape the industry. It is fitting that this book is now launched in 2017 – 100 years since Thomas Weston undertook the first planting of commercial forestry on the slopes of Mt Stromlo.

It makes me immensely proud to be one small part of this fascinating and enduring story around the longest continually running industry in the ACT.

Neil Cooper

Manager Fire, Forestry, Roads, ACT parks and Conservation Service

Introduction

The landscape in which Canberra as the 'bush capital' sits is to a large extent a forest landscape. This is not just in the immediate city environs, but also in the Capital Territory at large. The term 'bush capital' when applied to Canberra's surrounding forests conveys the impression that the city occupies a pristine natural environment. However, the native tree species that populate Canberra's hills and ridges are as much a man-made artefact as the exotic species or, indeed, as the trees and shrubs that adorn the city's streets. By the time Canberra was chosen as the site for the nation's capital, the hills and ridges had largely been stripped of trees for grazing purposes and for firewood, and they were eroded and infested with rabbits. The clearing and erosion extended much further afield, too, notably to the Cotter River catchment. It was one of the principal purposes and tasks of a concerted program of forestry to redress the ravages that had taken place.¹

Quite apart from restoring the forest cover and arresting erosion, Canberra required for its development a ready supply of timber for construction purposes. At that time, 'very little timber of commercial value exist[ed] in the Territory.' The native timber that was available was generally not suitable for building and what did exist was inaccessible and in short supply. Nothing less

¹ Griffith Taylor, 'The Physiography of the Proposed Federal Capital Territory at Canberra', Commonwealth Bureau of Meteorology, Bulletin no. 6, Melbourne, 1910, pp. 12, 13; John Gray, 'The initiation of planting, afforestation and conservation at the federal capital site 100 years ago', *Canberra Historical Journal*, no. 67, December 2011, p. 28; Ken Taylor, *Canberra: City in the Landscape*, Canberra and Sydney, Halstead Press and the National Capital Authority, 2006, pp. 46-7, 59-60, 64, 69.

was needed than the establishment from scratch of a local forestry industry.²

Although forestry was one of the earliest industries to be established in and for the Capital Territory, few people are aware of the role it has played in the capital's development. Canberra's pine forests are more likely to be associated with the terrible bushfires of January 2003 and, conversely in a positive light, with providing an aesthetic backdrop to the capital and an outlet for recreational activities. Notwithstanding the tragedy arising from the forest fires of 2003 – as well as similar conflagrations in 1939 and 1952 – forestry has been an important and, indeed, essential element in the development, economic and otherwise, of the nation's capital.

Forestry in the ACT is more than a century old, originating with the appointment of Charles Weston as Officer-in-Charge of Afforestation in Canberra in May 1913. As part of his duties, he was given responsibility for laying the foundations for a program of afforestation in the Capital Territory. The first manifestation of his program was the planting of *radiata* pine on Mt Stromlo in mid-1915 to reintroduce forest cover on the hill's summit which had been ravaged by fire, deliberate clearing and the depredations of rabbits. Native trees were also planted to replace those lost on Mt Pleasant and Mt Mugga Mugga, while the natural regeneration of native tree species was encouraged on Mt Majura. From the outset, however, Weston had been well aware of the commercial dimension to establishing forests in Canberra. Earlier in 1915, for example, he had floated the possibility of setting up a 50-acre experimental plantation of wattle on Mt Stromlo to produce bark for tanning hides.³

In the end, the wattle bark proposal came to nothing, but the pine and native plantations started by Weston marked the origins of forestry in the ACT for both aesthetic and more utilitarian purposes. As with much else in the development of the national capital, it was the inception of the Federal Capital Commission (FCC) in January 1925 under J.H. Butters – later Sir John

2 *Second Annual report of the Federal Capital Commission for the period ended 30th June, 1926*, p. 39; G.J. Rodger and M.R. Jacobs, 'Forestry', in H.L. White (ed.), *Canberra: A Nation's Capital*, Canberra, 1954, pp. 191–2.

3 Greg Murphy, 'Weston, Thomas Charles (1866–1935)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 12, Melbourne, 1990; L.D. Pryor, 'Landscape Development', in White (ed.), *Canberra: A Nation's Capital*, p. 221; Taylor, *Canberra: City in a Landscape*, pp. 64–70; *Queanbeyan Leader*, 17 June 1915, p2; 26 August 1915, p2; *Leader* [Melbourne], 15 May 1915, p5.

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Butters – that spurred a more ambitious and vigorous forestry program in the ACT. The commission wanted to put afforestation ‘on an economic basis as early as possible.’ A Forestry Branch was established in 1926 and Geoffrey Rodger appointed Chief Forester, with Max Jacobs as Assistant Forester. Jacobs’ first and most important task was to carry out a detailed survey of the whole of the Territory’s forest resources. As well, two new forest areas were established at Pierces Creek and Kowen, in addition to that at Mt Stromlo, with an overseer was appointed at each of them. One of the original overseers was Harold Tuson who was briefly at Pierces Creek before moving over to Kowen. He is the one of the forestry workers whose interview transcript is presented in this collection.⁴

As Jacobs embarked on his survey, Rodger expanded Weston’s existing pine plantings on Mt Stromlo and established fresh pine plantations at Uriarra and Kowen in 1926 and Pierces Creek in 1928. Another 5,000 eucalypts were planted on Mt Pleasant and native tree species were allowed to regenerate in part of Kowen, while other parts were prepared for plantation pine by clearing wattle that had colonised former grazing land. Apart from commercial and any other projected uses in the medium to long term, one immediate purpose of the plantings was to conserve and improve soils, especially on slopes like Mt Stromlo that had been largely denuded of tree cover. There was also a particular additional need for, and value in, the plantations at Uriarra and Pierces Creek. These plantations helped to protect the Cotter River catchment, the source of Canberra’s water supply.⁵

The new forestry program was also needed to address a looming crisis in the capital. As part of his survey, Jacobs found that supplies of firewood near the city were ‘rapidly diminishing’, an alarming prospect for a place with such long and hard winters. In 1928–29, with the Territory’s population only

4 *First Annual Report of the Federal Capital Commission for the period ended 30th June, 1925*, p. 6; *Second Annual report of the Federal Capital Commission for the period ended 30th June, 1926*, pp. 10–11, 39–40; *Third Annual Report of the Federal Capital Commission for the year ended 30th June, 1927*, p. 65.

5 *First Annual Report of the Federal Capital Commission for the period ended 30th June, 1925*, p. 17; *Second Annual report of the Federal Capital Commission for the period ended 30th June, 1926*, p. 40; *Third Annual Report of the Federal Capital Commission for the year ended 30th June, 1927*, p. 22; *Fourth Annual Report of the Federal Capital Commission for the year ended 30th June, 1928* [typescript version], p. 38, in CRS A1, item 1929/1797, National Archives of Australia; *Fifth Annual Report of the Federal Capital Commission for the year ended 30th June, 1929*, p. 41.

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around 8,500, there was just eight years' supply within a ten-mile radius of the city. When Canberra reached its projected population of 50,000, Jacobs and Rodger calculated that the city would need at least 60,000 imperial tons of firewood per year. As native hardwood trees in the area were the source of firewood, they set aside reserves at Kowen and Black Mountain as some kind of insurance against rising demand, though they well knew that this fell far short of a complete solution to the problem.⁶

From an economic point of view, however, the greatest value of the Territory's forests lay in their future exploitation as timber for building purposes in the national capital. Overwhelmingly, this applied to the new softwood (pine) plantations. Timber from local native trees that could be used as building material for houses and other structures in the city was neither abundant nor accessible. Hence, the plantation pine around Canberra was vital for the building of the federal capital and this was in fact the principal rationale for developing the plantations from 1915 onward. In that regard, the creation of a local industry for building timber was analogous to the establishment of facilities for manufacturing bricks and concrete pipes in Canberra or the opening of quarries in the area to provide aggregate for concrete and road-making. However, it is something of an irony that when the new Forestry Officer, Cyril Cole, first made building material available from thinnings of the Mt Stromlo plantations in 1930, construction in Canberra was petering out with the onset of the Depression and the winding-up of the FCC.⁷

It is noteworthy that forestry eventually became one of the Territory's 'export' industries, unlike the other local enterprises that were established to serve the capital's development. From the capital wealth that had been built up in Canberra's forests, the Territory was able to export its timber to other Australian states. In this sense, it somewhat resembled Canberra's pre-existing primary industries – those producing wool and wheat – whose products were

6 *Third Annual Report of the Federal Capital Commission for the year ended 30th June, 1927*, p. 65; *Fifth Annual Report of the Federal Capital Commission for the year ended 30th June, 1929*, p. 81; Rodger and Jacobs, 'Forestry', in White (ed.), *Canberra: A Nation's Capital*, p. 192.

7 *Second Annual report of the Federal Capital Commission for the period ended 30th June, 1926*, p. 39; *Third Annual Report of the Federal Capital Commission for the year ended 30th June, 1927*, p. 65; Rodger and Jacobs, 'Forestry', in White (ed.), *Canberra: A Nation's Capital*, pp. 191–4.

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sold beyond the Territory's borders. Cole, who was the ACT's sole Forestry Officer from 1929 until 1936 when he gained an Assistant Forester in the person of Lindsay Pryor, was able to maintain the program of planting and thinning softwoods throughout the Depression. But the commercial exploitation of Canberra's pine forests really picked up in the decades following World War 2. The local industry received a major stimulus when the business-minded and innovative Mark Edgerley took up duty as Senior Forestry Officer with the ACT Forestry Section in early 1965.⁸

Almost all of the interviewees whose interview transcripts appear in this volume worked in one capacity or another in the ACT's forests in this post-war period; indeed, the experience of eight of the total of ten interviewees belongs exclusively to those years. From their different viewpoints as participants in the events of that time, their interviews tell in their own words the story of forestry in the ACT from the late 1940s to the mid-1990s. But the interview transcripts also reach back to the 1920s and even earlier. This derives from the personal knowledge of such interviewees as Professor Lindsay Pryor, Ian Gordon, Ron Murray and Tony Fearnside, as well as the direct experience of Harold Tuson who started work in Canberra's forests in 1926.

The interviews were recorded by Brendan O'Keefe in the sound studio of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra in the period May 1994 to March 1995. Funding to conduct the interviews was provided by an ACT Heritage Grant. The whole idea for the interview program originated with Graham McKenzie-Smith, who was then Director (Forests) in the ACT and who has a keen interest in history in general and of his chosen field of forestry in particular. Graham selected the ten subjects to be interviewed, taking good care to choose a range of individuals who occupied different positions and performed a variety of roles in the forests. His subjects included professional foresters, forestry overseers, logging contractor Frank Rosin and the manager of the Integrated Forest Products facility at Hume for fifteen years, Terry Connolly, who was himself a fully qualified forester.

Generally, oral history interviews offer personal views and insights that are absent from sober official reports and files; in so doing, they complement and

8 Rodger and Jacobs, 'Forestry', in White (ed.), *Canberra: A Nation's Capital*, pp. 190, 194.

enlarge upon the official version of events. Such is the case with the interviews here. However, the interviews have attained some additional significance as historical sources in their own right because many of ACT Forests' records were lost in the bushfires of 2003. While it is by no means impossible to reconstruct the pre-2003 history of forestry in the ACT from annual reports and other published and oral sources, the interview transcripts provide details that are now no longer available anywhere else.

Among the records that were destroyed in the 2003 bushfires were the original sound recordings of the interviews themselves. Unfortunately, therefore, it is no longer possible to listen to the interviewees speaking in their own voices. What remains are the interview transcripts. While they cannot replicate all the shades of meaning communicated by the spoken word, they at least convey the views and information the interviewees gave, provide a sense of their way of expressing themselves and reveal something of their individual personalities. As should be in apparent in the transcripts, their personalities varied from the rather taciturn to the exuberant and voluble. Thus, at one extreme, it was a challenge to extract much information, while at the other the information just poured forth in a torrent.

At the opening of most of the interviews, the interviewees were at first a bit stiff and formal. This came about as a consequence both of their being in the unfamiliar environment of a sound studio and of the necessary formalities that preceded each interview: clipping a microphone onto their coat or jumper, testing sound levels and reading out the formal identification at the start of the interview (which, incidentally, has been omitted from the transcripts published here). After the first two or three questions, however, the interviewee typically forgot about the microphone and the studio environment, relaxed and talked more freely. In other words, they slipped comfortably into conversation mode, often accompanying their words with facial expressions and hand gestures. Such use of expressions and gestures was more pronounced with interviewees like Attilio Padovan where English was not his first language and where gestures accompanying speech were part of his native culture. But the less demonstrative personalities among the interviewees also garnished their words with gestures and facial expressions. In all cases, while the meaning of what they were saying was perfectly clear to

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the interviewer, the gestures and expressions do not of course translate into the sound recordings or transcripts.

Hand gestures actually created something of a technical problem now and then. In waving their arms about to illustrate a point, the interviewees not infrequently brushed the microphone clipped to them, thus obliterating from the recording what they were actually saying. These occurrences immediately drew frantic hand signals to stop from the technical officer who was monitoring the sound recording from the other side of the sound-proof glass. The interviewee then dropped the hand gestures until the next time he forgot about the microphone and started gesticulating all over again. In this way, a number of blanks cropped up in the recordings and transcripts where words or phrases were lost because of accidental interference with the microphone.

The transcripts published here retain the exact words as spoken by the interviewees. However, at various places where the meaning of what the interviewee said is unclear, clarification is provided by the insertion of words or short phrases in square brackets; the brackets indicate that they are additions to the text and not part of the original interview. At other places, footnotes have been added to further explain or expand upon something that an interviewee referred to. In a couple of instances, short phrases in which an interviewee repeated himself word for word have been omitted. In like manner, a few repetitions or superfluous comments made by the interviewer have been left out with no detriment to the transcripts.

Without altering the actual words spoken, an effort has also been made to improve the readability of the transcripts, especially in those cases where interviewees tended to talk in almost endless sentences containing a multitude of conjunctions and subordinate clauses. This has been done by introducing punctuation marks to split these sentences into more easily understood chunks. For the sake of readability, too, intimidatingly long blocks of text in the original transcripts have been broken up into smaller paragraphs.

The interviews do not appear in the order in which they were conducted. Instead, they are arranged in a generally, but not wholly, chronological order in which the interviewees became involved in forestry work in the ACT. The order is not rigidly chronological because some preference has been given to

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those like Ian Gordon and Lindsay Pryor who had a more extensive or longer-term view of the historical development of the forests and forestry in the national capital. In other words, the interview transcripts of some of those who became involved in forests and forestry later in the piece have been placed earlier because of their particular knowledge of the historical background and development of ACT forestry.

Brendan O'Keefe, Canberra, 2017

Chronology of ACT forestry, 1913–1995

References to the interviewees in the chronology appear in *italic*.

1910s

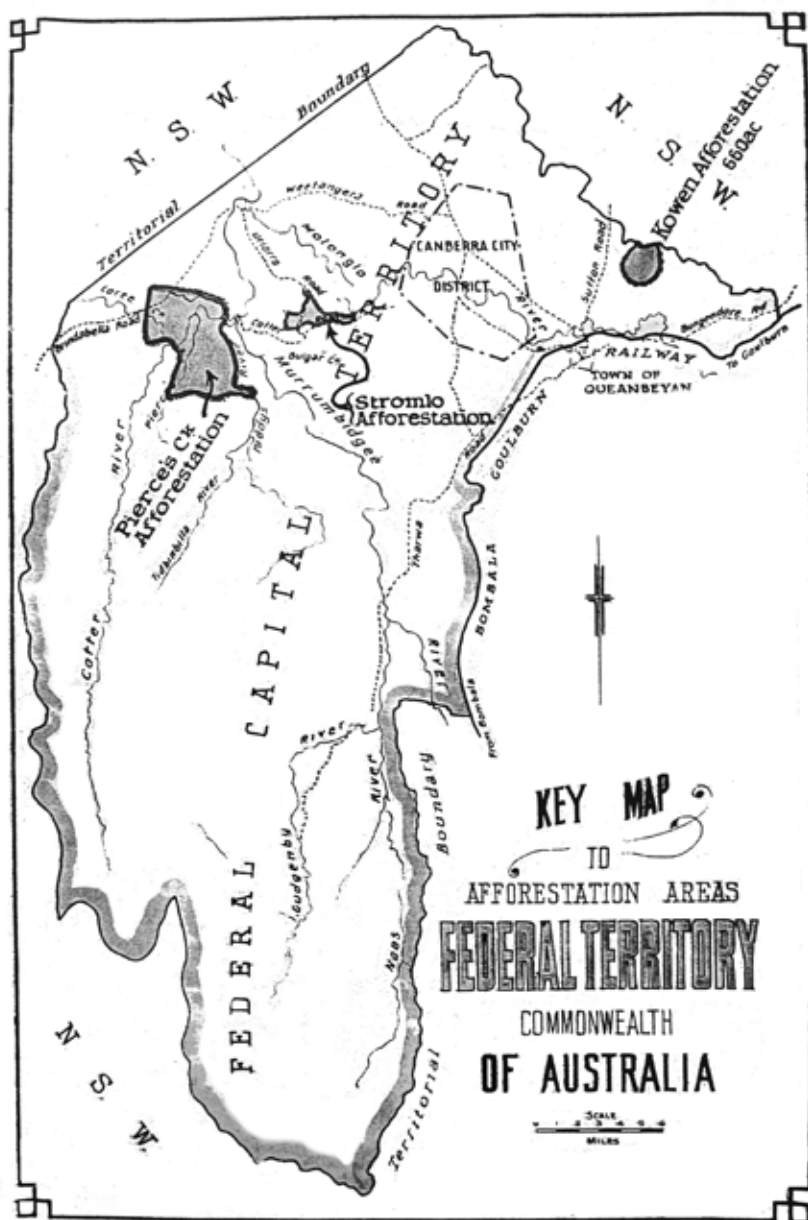
- 01 Jan 1911 The Commonwealth assumed control of what was called the Federal Capital Territory as the site for the federal seat of government.
- 1912 A nursery was established at Acton under Thomas Charles Weston to test a variety of species for their suitability for the Canberra environment.
- May 1913 Weston was appointed Officer-in-Charge of Afforestation in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Among other responsibilities, he was charged with founding a forestry industry in the capital.
- 1914 Weston established an arboretum in Westbourne Woods, now part of Yarralumla, to trial a range of tree species in the Canberra environment.
- 1915 Most of the operations at the Acton nursery were transferred to the new nursery at Yarralumla.
- Mid-1915 Weston commenced establishing pine plantations on the slopes of Mt Stromlo which had been stripped of native species to allow grazing and to supply firewood, and on which serious erosion was occurring.
- 1918–19 A severe drought killed 32 per cent of the nearly 830,000 plantings that Weston had made up to that point.

1920s

- Sep 1923 Charles Edward Lane Poole was appointed the Commonwealth's adviser on forestry for a period of three years.
- 01 Jan 1925 The Federal Capital Commission began work under J.H. (later Sir John) Butters. A Forestry Branch was formed as part of the Commission, while the former Afforestation Branch became the Parks and Gardens Branch with Weston at its head. The Forestry Branch was to take over the pine plantation on Mt Stromlo and to develop a plantation policy to supply Canberra's requirement for sawn timber.

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- Apr 1925 In a report to federal Parliament, Lane Poole recommended that 20,000 acres [about 8,100 hectares] of pine forest be established for commercial purposes in the Federal Capital Territory. The planting rate would be 500 acres per year.
- By Oct 1925 A private sawmill was operating at Kingston. The Federal Capital Commission later set up its own joinery mill in the same area.
- 15 Mar 1926 Geoffrey James Rodger commenced as Chief Forester in the Federal Capital Territory and soon inaugurated the larger program of planting softwoods for commercial exploitation. Apart from extending the area planted on Mt Stromlo, he made preparations for plantings at Uriarra and Kowen.
- Winter 1926 The first plantings were undertaken in the Cotter Catchment when 48 acres of eroded farmland were planted at Uriarra. The plantings were designed to arrest the erosion of soil that was silting up the catchment, the source of Canberra's water supply.
- 20 Nov 1926 Charles Weston retired from his position in Canberra and moved to Sydney, though he continued as a consultant to the federal capital until May 1927.
- c. Oct 1926 Three forest overseers were appointed, one for each of the three forest areas: Stromlo, Uriarra and Kowen. *The overseer at Kowen was Harold Tuson.*
- Dec 1926 Maxwell Charles (Max) Jacobs was appointed Forest Assessor. He and his boss Rodger formed the Forestry Branch of the Department of the Interior. Jacobs undertook extensive surveys of potential plantation land in the Cotter Valley and at Tidbinbilla, Stromlo and Kowen.
- 1927 A small fire control organisation was established, but Rodger warned that a more extensive organisation would be needed in the future.
- Apr 1927 The Commonwealth Forestry Bureau was established under an Inspector-General to advise the Commonwealth government on forestry in Australia, to provide higher education in forestry for the State forestry services and to conduct research. Charles Edward Lane Poole was appointed Inspector-General.
- Apr 1927 The Australian Forestry School, which had been established on a temporary basis in Adelaide in March 1926, moved to permanent quarters at Westridge, now Yarralumla, in the FCT and was placed under the Commonwealth Forestry Bureau. Charles Lane Poole, the Commonwealth's Inspector-General of Forests and Forestry Adviser, was appointed Acting Principal of the school.
- Sep 1927 Rodger left Canberra for Tasmania, on loan to the Development and Migration Commission for six months. Jacobs, who had been



Map showing areas in which forests had been established in the Federal Capital Territory in the late 1920s. (Ann Gugler Collection, HMSS8, ACT Heritage Library)

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- promoted to Assistant Forester, acted in his place. Alexander Lindsay was appointed Forest Assessor, but left the position the following year.
- Winter 1928 Plantings commenced in the Cotter Catchment area at Pierces Creek.
- Late 1928 Rodger joined the Commonwealth Forestry Bureau.
- Jul 1928 The Federal Capital Commission decided to close down and dispose of its joinery mill at Kingston because it was operating at a loss.
- 1929 Jacobs resigned to join the Commonwealth Forestry Bureau and C.R. (Cyril) Cole was appointed sole Forestry Officer in the FCT to replace both Rodger and Jacobs.
- 1929-34 During the first few years of the Great Depression, men on workers' relief were employed in the ACT forests and the planting rate increased.
- 1930s**
- 1930 The commercial exploitation of the softwoods in the FCT commenced when Cole started to carry out thinnings of the first plantations at Mt Stromlo. The thinnings were processed at the Canberra Saw Mill and Joinery Works in Kingston which were privately owned and operated by the local master builder, Christian Banks.
- 1930 A timber mill was established at Lees Springs to process native hardwoods.
- Kowen was abandoned – temporarily, as it turned out – *and Harold Tuson moved to become overseer at Pierces Creek.*
- 01 May 1930 The Federal Capital Commission was wound up and the Forestry Branch became part of the Department of Home Affairs.
- 1932 What was now called the Forestry Section became part of the new Department of the Interior.
- Sep 1932 The private sawmill that had been operating at Kingston closed down at least temporarily. Sometime later, the Department of the Interior established its own mill in the area to process softwoods.
- 1935 Plantings of pines recommenced at Kowen.
- 1936 *Lindsay Pryor became Assistant Forester to Cole in the FCT.*
- An area of 2,000 acres [about 810 hectares] was set aside at the head of the Tidbinbilla River as the site of a National Park Reserve.
- 1937 Another private operator, G.R. Cavanagh, established a sawmill at Kingston.

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- 1938 Logging of hardwoods in the Bulls Head area ceased and the Lees Springs mill closed down.
The Federal Capital Territory was formally renamed the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).
- 13 Jan 1939 A major bushfire burned out 3,600 acres of plantation pine at Pierces Creek and Uriarra. This led to the establishment of a Bush Fire Council headed by a Chief Fire Control Officer. This position was occupied from the start and for most of the time since by a Forestry officer. Cyril Cole was appointed the inaugural Chief Fire Control Officer. Under the Bush Fire Council, a network of watch towers was set up in the mountains to the northwest, the direction from which bushfires usually entered the ACT, and an extensive program of constructing roads and fire-breaks in the mountains was undertaken.
- 1940s**
- Apr 1940 Cyril Cole enlisted in the 2nd AIF. *Lindsay Pryor took over as Acting Forestry Officer in the ACT.*
- 1940-45 As a result of the war, timber supplies from the US dried up, forcing Australia to rely more heavily on its own timber industry. Timber produced by the logging of pines at Mt Stromlo rose from 2,500 cubic metres per year immediately before the war to 5,000 cubic metres per year. Over the same period, the rate of planting declined.
- 1943 A camp for Italian nationals who had previously been interned as 'enemy aliens' was established at Blue Range, while another was established for Germans and Austrians at Pierces Creek.
- May 1944 *Lindsay Pryor was appointed Superintendent of Parks and Gardens in Canberra, but continued in the role of Acting Forestry Officer pending Cole's return from war service.*
- Dec 1944 Charles Lane Poole retired as Principal of the Australian Forestry School and was succeeded by Max Jacobs.
- Dec 1944 On his return from the war, Cyril Cole resumed the position of Forester in the ACT.
- Aug 1945 Following the end of the war, the planting rate in ACT forests increased to 1,000 acres per year.
- 01 Apr 1946 The Commonwealth's Forestry Bureau became the Forestry and Timber Bureau, still within the Department of the Interior. G.J. Rodger was appointed Director-General of the Bureau.
- Early 1947 Hardwood logging was resumed to meet the demand for timber in the post-war building boom in Canberra. The existing government timber

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mill at Kingston was expanded to handle native hardwoods that were being harvested in the Cotter Valley.

1949 *Bill Bates started as a forestry worker in the ACT's forests.*

1950s

Aug 1950 The Forestry Section became the Division of ACT Forestry within the Forestry and Timber Bureau.

1950 The ACT now had more than 15,000 acres [over 6,000 hectares] of softwood plantations in four areas – Stromlo, Pierces Creek, Uriarra and Kowen. Thinning of the plantations produced 9,000,000 super feet [21,240 cubic metres] of pine logs per year.

05 Feb 1952 A severe bushfire destroyed 600 acres of pines on Mt Stromlo, including Weston's original 1915 plantings. In the ensuing two years, some 25,000,000 super feet [59,000 cubic metres] of timber was salvaged from cutting of the burnt trees.

1952 *Attilio Padovan started as a forestry worker in the ACT's forests.*

1953 Some 16,470 acres of plantations had been established in the ACT by this time.

1954 In a major revision of commercial forestry in the ACT, the area to be planted was to be doubled from the original 1925 plan for 20,000 acres to 40,000 acres. The Commonwealth government gave approval for the clearing of native timber at Jervis Bay and the planting of conifers.

1955 The first trial plantings were undertaken at Jervis Bay.

1956 The forestry camp at Blue Range was closed down. The first forester was appointed at Jervis Bay in the person of Brian Patton.

Jan 1958 *Ron Murray commenced work in the ACT's forests and was initially in charge of the native hardwood forest in the Cotter Valley.*

1958 *Frank Rosin started working for a logging contractor in the ACT's forests.*

Jan 1959 On reaching his 65th birthday, Cyril Cole retired as the Supervising Forestry Officer, the title by which the ACT's chief forestry officer had been known since the previous year. He was succeeded, though not immediately, by R.G. (Ron) Green as Acting Supervising Forestry Officer.

1959 Max Jacobs retired as Principal of the Australian Forestry School to become Director-General of the Forestry and Timber Bureau. He was succeeded by K.P. McGrath as Acting Principal.

A further 6,900 acres of the upper Tidbinbilla Valley was added to the reserve created in 1936.

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1960s

- 01 Apr 1960 *Harold Tuson retired after working for over three decades in the ACT's forests.*
- 11 Apr 1960 Brian Patton died a few weeks after being struck by a falling tree at Jervis Bay.
- 1960 *Frank Rosin and his brother Gino bought out the logging contractor for whom they had been working, thus founding the Rosin family logging business.*
By now, 25,253 acres of plantations had been established in the ACT.
- Late 1960 Bill Bateman transferred from the Northern Territory as Assistant Forestry Officer and *Bob Cruttwell started as Assessment Officer with the ACT Division of Forestry.*
- 1962 Logging of native hardwoods in the Cotter Catchment came to an end when the last economically viable area of timber was harvested.
Ron Green resigned and was succeeded by Bill Bateman as Acting Supervising Forestry Officer.
- 1964 The Division of ACT Forests remained as the ACT Forestry Section within the Department of the Interior when the Forestry and Timber Bureau was transferred out of the department.
- 18 Jan 1965 Mark Edgerley took up the position of Supervising Forestry Officer when Bill Bateman returned to his position as Assistant Forestry Officer.
- 1965 The Australian National University assumed responsibility for forestry education from the Australian Forestry School, though classes continued to be held at Yarralumla as part of the ANU's newly-established Forestry Department.
- Dec 1965 *Both Ian Gordon and Tony Fearnside started with the ACT Forestry Section.*
- 1966 A further addition was made to the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, bringing it up to 10,000 acres.
- 1967 In a major policy change, the first steps were taken to open up the ACT's forests, which had previously been closed to the public, for recreation. The first forest to be thrown open to the public was Mt Stromlo.
The use of horses to snig logs in ACT forests ceased. Increased mechanisation also saw the end of the practice of loading logs by hand.
- 1967-70 ACT Forests undertook a comprehensive review of the economics of forestry practices, with particular emphasis on land acquisition and the development of a system that would allow it to place a forest land

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expectation value on all land in the ACT. This shifted the emphasis for new planting onto flatter sites close to markets rather than the more productive but steeper sites more distant from the market.

1968 ACT Forestry Section became the ACT Forests Branch within the Department of the Interior.

The Forestry Department of ANU opened in a new purpose-built building on campus.

1970s

1972 The Integrated Forest Products [IFP] mill opened in Hume.

Fire destroyed half of plantation forest at Jervis Bay.

Early 1973 The ACT Forests Branch transferred into the new Department of the Capital Territory.

1973 *Terry Connolly took up the position of manager of the IFP mill at Hume.*

20–21 Jul 74 Severe winds flattened about 400 hectares of mature pine forest at Uriarra and Pierces Creek. About 120,000 cubic metres of timber was salvaged from the windthrow.

1975 The ACT Forests Branch formally took over the management of the Cotter Catchment Area.

The CSIRO took over the former Australia Forestry School site in Yarralumla and incorporated it into its new Division of Forest Research.

06 Sep 1978 The government sawmill at Kingston was sold to private enterprise. It had been extensively damaged by fire in late February.

1980s

Jul 1981 Mark Edgerley retired. *Tony Fearnside then became Director (Forests).*

Jan 1983 Fire destroyed approximately half of the pine plantations at Boboyan.

Mar 1983 *Bob Cruttwell retired from ACT Forests.*

1984–92 The plantations at Jervis Bay were progressively clearfelled over this period.

Sep 1984 The Director's position was upgraded to Assistant Secretary (Forests) and *Ron Murray rejoined ACT Forests in the position.*

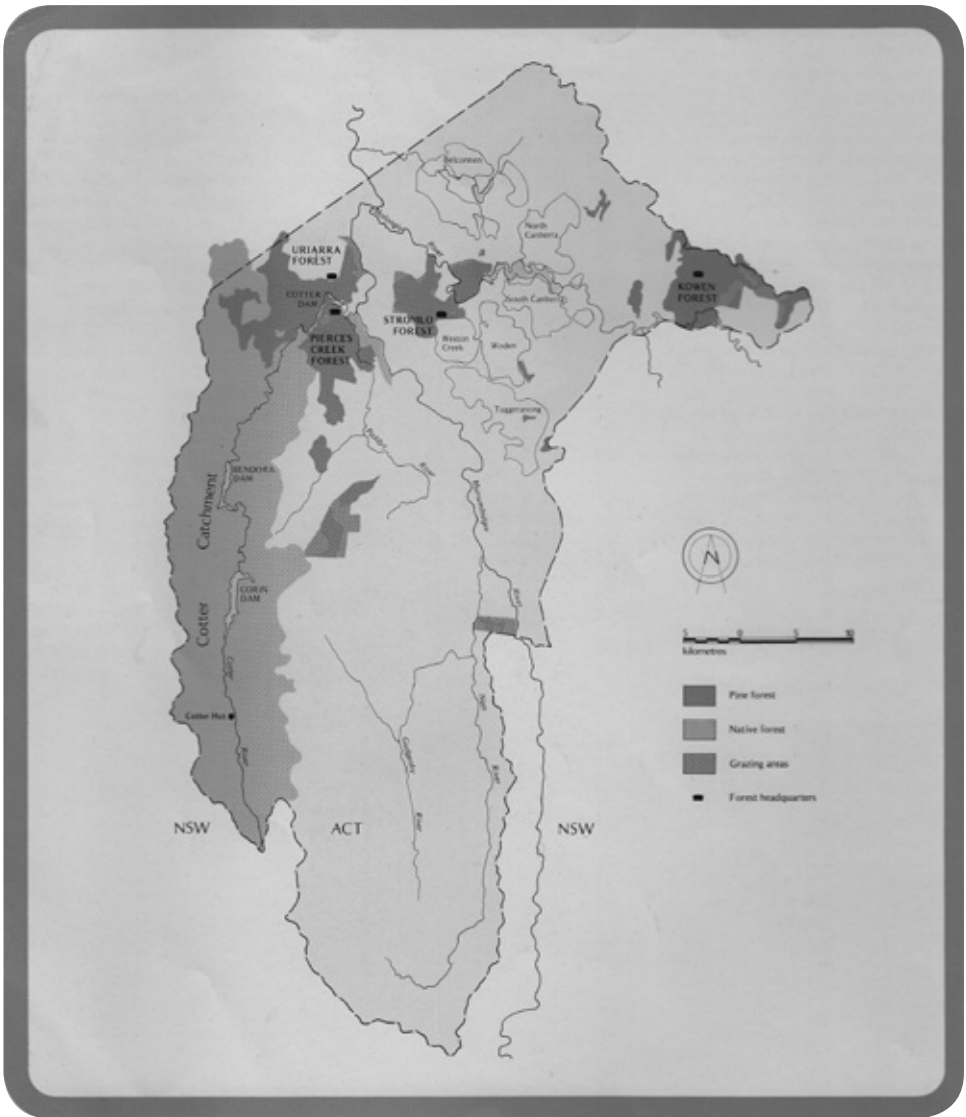
1984 Namadgi National Park was formed by the amalgamation of the Gudgenby Nature Reserve with the Cotter Catchment, which had hitherto been managed by ACT Forests. The creation of the park greatly reduced the area of land in the Territory that ACT Forests had to manage.

2–4 Mar 85 Parts of the ACT and neighbouring NSW were ravaged by serious bush and grass fires. The Smith Brothers' timber mill at Hume was

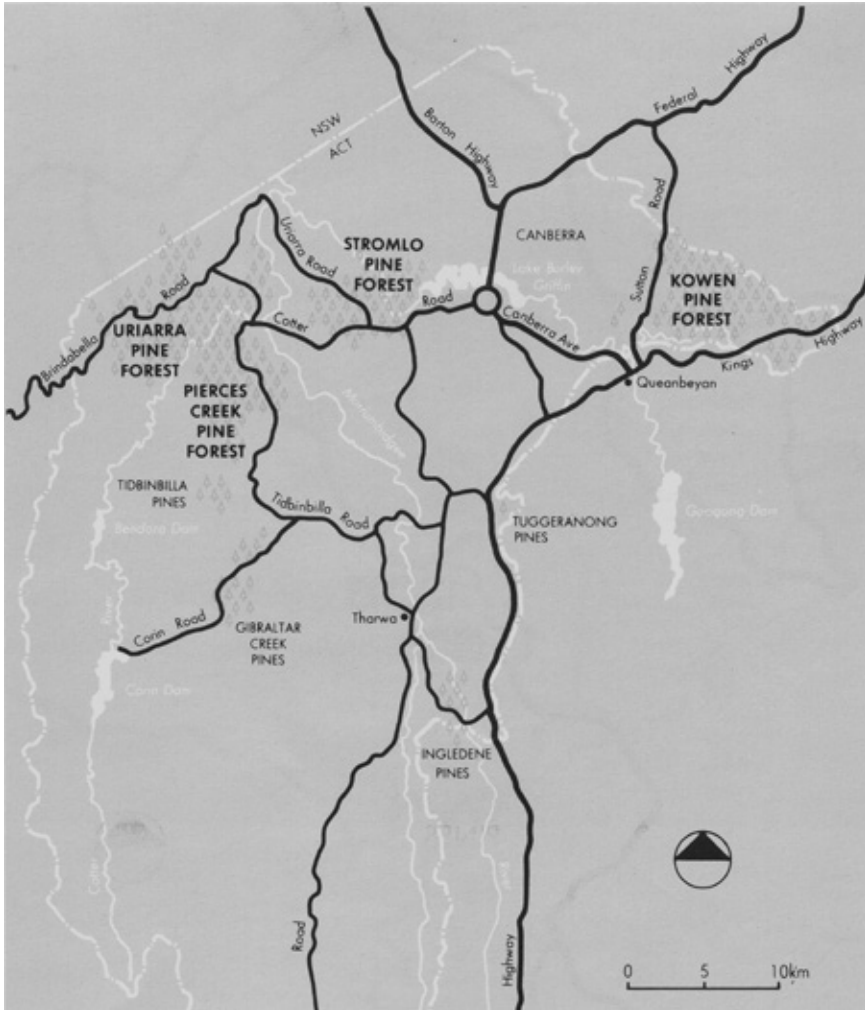
Acknowledgements

destroyed, but the IFP mill remained completely intact. At Majura, the fires burned out about 20,000 hectares, including 120 hectares of plantation pine.

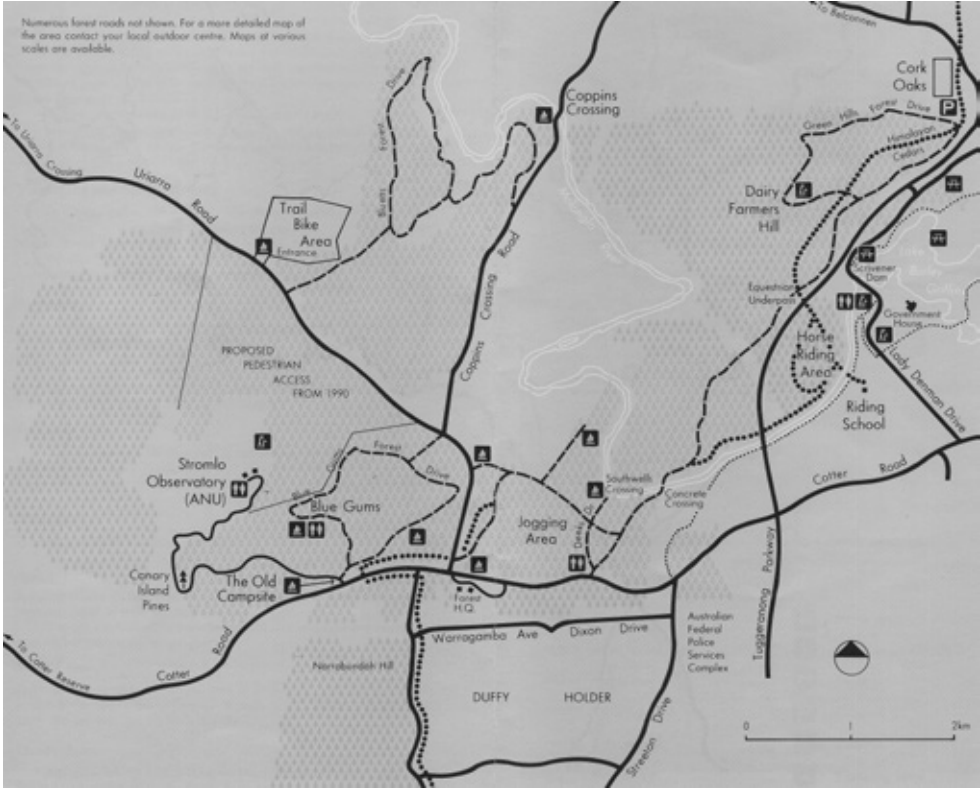
- Dec 1985 Alf Sebire was appointed General Manager ACT Forests when *Ron Murray* was promoted to *First Assistant Secretary of Parks and Recreation*.
- 1986 *After suffering separate accidents in the forests, Frank and Gino Rosin retired from the family logging business.*
- Aug 1986 *On reaching retirement age, Attilio Padovan retired after working for 34 years in the ACT's forests.*
- Mar 1987 Bryan Pratt was appointed Assistant Secretary (Forests) until mid-1988 when Geoff Wells became Director (Forests).
- 1988 *Terry Connolly retired as manager of the IFP mill.*
- Apr 1989 *After moving in and out of positions with ACT Forests for 24 years, Tony Fearnside retired from the Public Service.*
- 16 May 1989 The ACT achieved self government. ACT Forests Branch became part of the new government's Department of Urban Services.
- 1989 The first commercial hardwood plantation was established at Gungahlin.
- 1990s**
- 1990 The plywood mill at the Integrated Forest Products mill was closed down
- 1991 Graham McKenzie-Smith is appointed Chief Executive Officer of ACT Forests.
- 1992 *Ian Gordon retired from ACT Forests.*
- 1993 The four separate depots that ACT Forests and its predecessors had operated until this time was reduced to one located at Mt Stromlo.
- Mar 1993 *Ron Murray retired from a senior executive position in the ACT Public Service.*
- 13 May 1994 *The Oral History Program commenced with the interview with Harold Tuson.*
- Mar 1995 ACT Forests transferred into the Department of Environment, Land and Planning in the ACT, but returned to the Department of Urban Services about six months later.
- 30 Mar 1995 *The Oral History Program concluded with the interview of Bill Bates.*



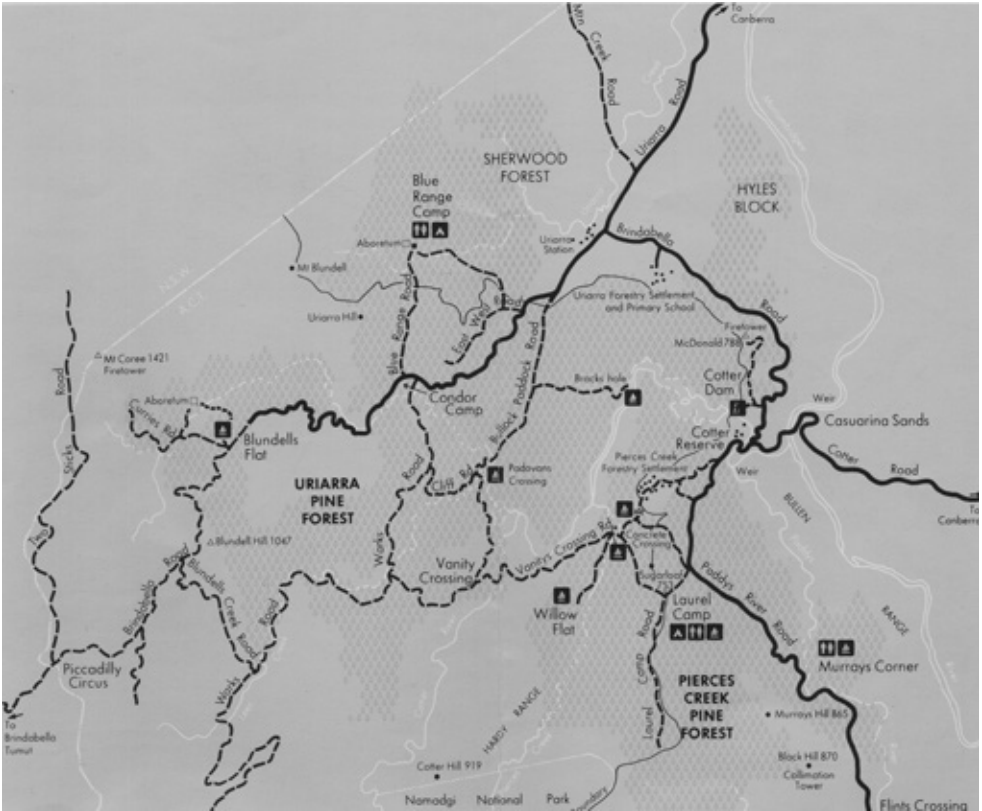
Map showing areas managed by Forests Branch, Department of the Capital Territory, in the late 1970s. The areas include pine forests, native forests and grazing land. (Forests Branch, Department of the Capital Territory, *Forestry in the ACT, c. 1978*)



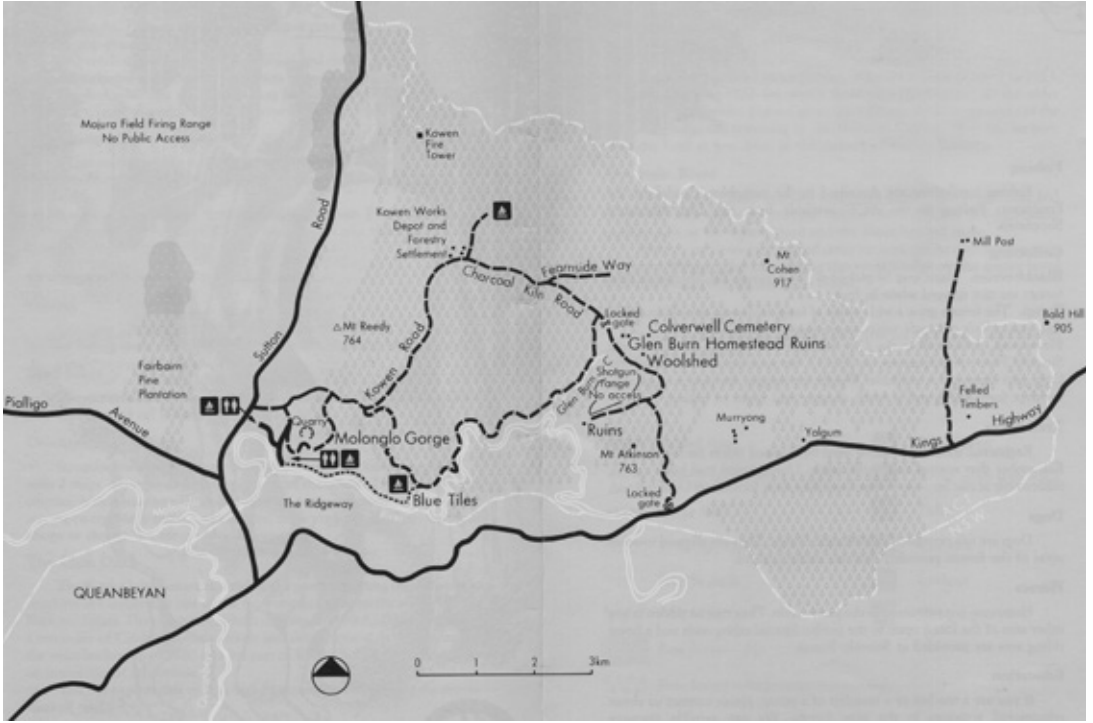
The Pine Forests of the ACT in the late 1980s.
 (ACT Parks and Conservation Service, *A Guide to ACT Pine Forests*, c1989)



Stromlo Pine Forest in the late 1980s. (ACT Parks and Conservation Service, *A Guide to ACT Pine Forests*, c. 1989)



Uriarra Pine Forest and the northern section of Pierces Creek Pine Forest in the late 1980s. (ACT Parks and Conservation Service, *A Guide to ACT Pine Forests*, c. 1989)



Kowen Pine Forest in the late 1980s.
 (ACT Parks and Conservation Service, *A Guide to ACT Pine Forests*, c. 1989)

Acknowledgements

This publication would never have come to be had not Graham McKenzie-Smith, then Chief Executive of ACT Forests, conceived the idea back in 1994 to institute a program of oral history interviews of forestry in the ACT. With the more recent decision to publish the transcripts of the interviews, Graham has continued to supply much invaluable information and commentary on the transcripts and other material in this book.

Peter Langdon must also be thanked for overseeing the publication process while juggling such an unfamiliar task to him with his other important responsibilities as Forest Coordinator in the ACT Parks and Conservation Service.

Thanks are due as well to quite a number of other people who helped in various ways with this project, notably in providing information, comments and photographic images. Their help was not just valuable, but essential. They are:

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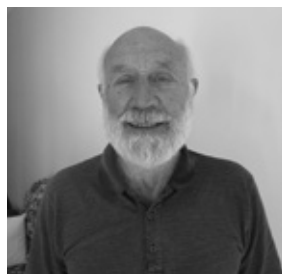


Thomas Charles Weston, the pioneer of forestry in the Capital Territory.
(National Archives of Australia, A3560, item 233)

Interviews

Ian Gordon

Interview with Ian Gordon recorded in the sound studio of the Australian War Memorial on 16 August 1994.



Ian Gordon was born in September 1937 at Paddington in Sydney. After the war, his family moved to Holbrook in southern NSW and it was there that he spent the greater part of his childhood and youth. On finishing school, he studied engineering for two years in the latter half of the 1950s at the University of Sydney before deciding that it was not what he wanted to do. Looking around for an alternative, he discovered forestry, which he had never actually heard of before. He switched over to complete a science degree in Sydney and then moved to Canberra to study at the Forestry School in 1961–62.

Immediately on completing his Diploma in Forestry, he was employed as a demonstrator in the Forestry School. He occupied the position for three years before joining the ACT Forests Section under Mark Edgerley in December 1965. In 1969, he was appointed Deputy Forester to Tony Fearnside at Stromlo and became Officer-in-Charge of the forest in 1971 when Fearnside was promoted to another position. Having already carried out an evaluation of land in the ACT for plantation purposes, he shifted to the head office in town a couple of years later to take charge of planning and assessment of the ACT's forests. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, he did some stints as the Acting Director (Forests) in the ACT. He went on leave in 1991 and retired from ACT Forests the following year.

In his retirement, he has continued his involvement in forestry. He has an interest in a private plantation venture to the southeast of Canberra, in New South Wales. Pursuing an interest of a wholly different kind, he took part in the building of a ski lodge at Smiggins Holes in the Perisher Valley and then found himself managing the place for quite a long period.

Ian Gordon married in 1967 and has two sons, as well as a number of grandchildren.

Ian Gordon

I'd like to welcome Mr Gordon to the sound studios of the War Memorial and start off by asking him how on earth he got involved in forests in the first place?

I started off to be an engineer; I didn't start off to be a forester at all, but after a couple of years of that, I swapped over to forestry.

Where was this?

That was in Sydney, the University of Sydney.

So you're a Sydney person originally, are you?

Yes, born in Sydney, but we shifted up to Holbrook early in World War 2. I can't remember quite when. I was quite young and so I grew up in Holbrook and then went to school in Albury – to high school – and then to university in Sydney and then from Sydney to the Australian Forestry School, as it was then.

Why did you change from engineering to forestry?

It wasn't working out the way I thought it [would] ... It wasn't the sort of thing that I ended up wanting to do. I got much more interested in the biological side of science than the hard mechanical and mathematical side of science that relates to engineering, so I swapped over to forestry and I was pretty happy with that. It was a good choice.

What period are we talking about when you were studying?

That was mid 1950s at university to the late '50s and then 1961 and 1962 at the Australian Forestry School.

Who was in charge of the school at that stage?

For the first couple of weeks in 1961 it was Max Jacobs, but then he left at that stage to take over as Director General of the Forestry and Timber Bureau of which the forestry school was part. And then Kel McGrath was Acting Principal there for the rest of my time and for a few years after that, prior to the appointment of John Ovington as the first Professor of Forestry with the Australian National University. There'd been a whole bunch of changes in administration for forestry at that time. I ended up ... after graduation I came back and worked as a demonstrator at the school for a while, so we started off as part of a Commonwealth government department and by the time I'd finished there I ended up as being part of the Australian National University staff.

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The Australian Forestry School, 1951. (ACT Heritage Library no. 009132)

When you were going through the forestry school how did you find the teaching and the standard of courses and so on?

The first thing is the classes were small, thirty or thirty-two people in our year which was regarded, I think, as a somewhat larger than [the] average year. It was a great time. We had, all of us, had part of a degree, at least, completed by the time we went to forestry school because you finished there, rather than started there. The accommodation was excellent; it was really quite comfortable.

Were you living ... ?

Yes, we lived in that building behind the oval at Yarralumla which is really beautiful and the staff were all helpful. They were quite interested in ensuring that everybody got a top education and went to a lot of trouble. It was quite different from the University of Sydney where at least in engineering you were tossed into a huge class, massive class. You never ever met the lecturer. It was just totally impersonal and pretty bewildering for somebody like me who'd grown up in a small country town and went to a high school where the largest class ... well, I ended up in classes with eight or ten sometimes in the final year at high school. I found that very, very uncomfortable.

I went to Sydney University, too.

It was terrible. By the time I got into botany, class sizes particularly were much smaller and much more fun and we had the great good fortune there to be lectured by Spencer Smith-White who interestingly was the brother – the twin brother, I understand – of one of the lecturers in mathematics that we had in engineering.

That was quite a coincidence.

Yes, and they were both pretty smart blokes. At that time that's when you started to sort out the foresters in the group; you could start to get to know them, and that's where I started off some friendships that I still have.

What about fieldwork in the course? Did this take you into ACT forests?

Not initially. I was on a Commonwealth Forestry Scholarship which meant that, well, as I could see it at the time, there were some advantages and some disadvantages. If I had accepted a state-based forestry scholarship, the pay was probably better but you were bonded. There was this business of bonding in those days. You were indentured basically. You had to work for a certain period of time after you graduated, with the people who were paying your way through. I thought that was pretty reasonable at the time but if I could avoid that I would, so I was able to accept a Commonwealth Forestry Scholarship which meant that you still got the same basic benefits. They paid your fees at university. They paid you a living allowance which was adequate but you weren't bonded. You had to work in Australian forestry, but it could have been anywhere. It could have been any of the States or it could have been in the Commonwealth and they accepted a pretty broad definition.

Was a stipulation of the Commonwealth award that you had to work in Australia after school?

No, in Australian forestry and I think generously interpreted that could have meant that if somebody wanted – I didn't – but if somebody wanted to go overseas and do a higher degree or something, that would have been acceptable. But that was back in the days when people were crying out for graduates and they were chasing people all over the place. You never had less than a couple of offers of jobs; it was nothing like today. Today's a complete reversal and so we were in a very fortunate position. For fieldwork, we had to do a certain minimum with the State forest services.

You had to do a field year mostly. That was a year, generally at the end of

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your preparatory university courses and prior to going to the forestry school. For the Commonwealth – I can't remember the exact figure it was – but you had to have a minimum, I think, of about twelve weeks of approved fieldwork which meant that you had to have a reasonable variety of different fieldwork. Usually what happens: you'd be put out into a forestry district somewhere. All the State forest services and the Commonwealth cooperated; there was no problem about getting a job. You just assumed that you could work just about anywhere you wanted during vacations, and they paid you, which was very nice. You got paid labourers' rates and you were expected to work though. You're not sitting on your backside, you're out there to do a job and you learnt a lot of the basic sort of skills that you would need later on in those situations; and you also broadened your experience generally – you saw different sorts of forest, learnt some basic things about getting on with people in the bush, which is pretty important. Some of us students were pretty brash and full of ourselves. It was a salutary thing for most of us, I think, to meet people whose business it was to live and work in the bush and they pretty soon brought most of us back to earth. It was good, everybody should have that experience.

Where did you do your fieldwork, anyway? Was it ACT or ... ?

No, I did some work at Urunga up on the north coast, working in Urunga State Forest. Then at Batlow, down near Tumut, and Batlow and that district. I worked at Uriarra with the ACT Forests. This is all while I was at university and then for the summer vacation prior to coming to the forestry school I worked down on Flinders Island, not in forestry but with the Agricultural Bank of Tasmania. They had a big land development project going which consisted of a systematic rape of the island; they just ploughed everything, and I mean everything, and even picked up the sticks and then planted improved pastures so the people who bought the farms that resulted from that could grow fat lambs that nobody really wanted, I think. It was a bit of a pity. Two of us went down there and we found that was interesting for a while, got boring after a while, but we were surprised, I think, that that sort of development was going on. That's the sort of thing you associate with back in the pioneering days, but it was certainly not pioneering days by that stage of the game. It was mainly to accumulate some money, I think. I was able to save about £160 or £180, I think – something like that.

Big money for those days.

Yes, seven and twopence farthing an hour was the basic rate and, of course, we were working as much overtime as we could get. We were sometimes working twelve and thirteen hours a day loading superphosphate into hoppers so they could go into an aircraft. So that was basically the fieldwork plus with a couple of university excursions. You had geology excursions and botany excursions here and there, so it introduced us to almost ... I hadn't seen any of that country at all, so I saw lots of Australia. While we were at the forestry school, of course, we had some major trips down the south coast, up to Queensland, inland New South Wales and northern Victoria, South Australia. We were all pretty hosed off because the Tasmanian trip was off that year. We didn't actually get to Tassie. It was quite some time before I managed to get down there. So we saw a good bit. Didn't get to Western Australia either.

Yes, I noted you'd omitted that. When you graduated you became a demonstrator at the forestry school.

I didn't have much of an idea really of what I was going to do at all. It was my sort of vague intention to up stakes and head to New Zealand just to see what it was like over there. I could have probably got a job of some sort over there, so I came up here to just see a few people and say goodbye basically and they offered me a job there. They were desperate. They didn't have anybody to organise the basic materials for classes and that sort of stuff, so I took that on and I started out quite hopefully to study for a masters degree as well which didn't eventuate in the end for a whole variety of reasons, but that was good too because I was doing some of the classes again basically because just being in them you can't switch off, you've got to listen, and that reinforced a few things that I'd missed the first time round. From that point of view it was quite valuable. And, again learnt something about, in a mild way, very minor way, how to interact with people that I now regarded as students; me being a fully-fledged graduate, and how to handle that. So I was there for nearly three years and then I got talking with Mark Edgerley who had recently been appointed to run ACT Forests and we talked about a few things about this and that and the upshot of that was I got offered a job there, so I took that and I think it was the 13 December 1965 I started with ACT Forests.

That's a pretty good memory.

Yes, it's a funny date. It was right at the death. One good thing about it, as

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I discovered when I retired, that I had continuity all the way through from when I started. When the ANU actually took over [the] Forestry School I had employment continuity, so I had an extra year or two of service over and above what I thought, which I meant a couple of weeks pay at the end.

Always handy.

Yes, it was good.

So when you joined ACT Forests what were your first impressions? What did you find there?

I already knew something about it because I'd worked there some years previously and with the local field excursions we'd learnt a little bit. It was inevitable that ACT Forests would be a sort of outdoor laboratory for the Australian Forestry School and I believe to some extent it still is. So there were no shocks involved or anything like that. I wasn't put out onto a forest at all. I was in the office in Civic at which time I was operating as a projects officer. There were a couple of ideas that Mark had that he wanted to develop and I did the researching through files and what have you.

What were these projects?

Max Jacobs had done an investigation of the possibility of irrigating pines in Greenhills Forest with effluent from the Weston Creek sewerage works.¹ It was acknowledged that Weston Creek sewerage works was a problem or at least the effluent from it was. Canberra was growing pretty rapidly. Weston Creek wasn't the only sewerage treatment works, but it was easily the biggest one and it had a number of problems.

The most interesting one was an odour problem associated with Government House. At that stage of the game, the Woden Valley was just under construction and there was also an odour problem strangely in the Woden Valley. So one of the early projects that I was involved with was in, first of all, confirming that it was in fact sewage-contaminated air from Weston Creek that was impinging on Government House and up into the Curtin shops. You could smell it up there sometimes. We had to identify the conditions under which it occurred and that involved the security guards at Government House keeping a smell register. Every time they could smell it they had to note the time and put it in the book. That was quite useful because that identified the times. Then we had to confirm it.

¹ Greenhills Forest was part of the Stromlo complex of forests.



Dr Max Jacobs in 1965, during his tenure as Commonwealth Director General of Forests. (National Archives of Australia, A1200, item 52274)

We went out one morning, one very cold, frosty morning – it would be very like this morning, I could imagine – and we burnt 44-gallon drums with sewage sludge in them to get a nice smoky trace and then traced that with spotlights to see where it went, and indeed it went up to the dam wall – the Scrivener Dam wall – a branch of it went up Yarralumla Creek as far as Curtin shops and indeed it did go over the dam wall and in the Governor-General's bedroom window. So we were able to confirm that it was the Weston Creek works that was the problem. It was the katabatic wind down Weston Creek, which wasn't developed at that stage, that was the mechanism for it. It was just a little river of cold air that used to run down the Weston Creek valley, through a gap in the pines between the Cotter Road and the sewerage works and then it would pick up the odour from the works, it would continue flowing down Weston Creek. When I say a river, it was only about twenty or thirty feet deep – at the most ten metres deep – and strangely instead of going downstream it had enough momentum, because of the peculiar shape of the last little bit of Weston Creek, to go up the Molonglo River, and it had enough momentum to continue up the Molonglo River and that appeared there was the source of the problem. So we ended up, we cut an outlet for it through the trees to see if we could steer it downstream through the little ridge and that was partly successful. We took some willows and what have you out of the bed of the Molonglo River to try and smooth it a little bit aerodynamically. The wind speeds were quite low, so boundary effects were pretty significant

in governing those winds. It wasn't really successful, I think. Development of lower Molonglo was the answer, but that was an interesting one.

I'm quite surprised that foresters were involved in this kind of work.

They were involved in a very practical sort of way. Because of the dimensions of the body of moving air it was quite conceivable that thirty to forty metre high trees could in fact channel this in a particular way, so we did in fact clearfall a patch of forest there, as I say, in an attempt to give it an outlet downstream. We weren't too concerned about people downstream; they had less votes than the Governor-General. There weren't very many people down there, anyway.

What about the irrigation proposal?

The irrigation proposal failed, not on economics or practicalities but on health grounds. Because of the potential for picking up diseases from the effluent which was another reason why Weston Creek was being replaced; because it didn't do a particularly good final treatment. The Health people said, no, even though the salt content and the soils and the trees and everything, that's all okay, and the economics of getting it there seemed to be reasonable, you could end up still with potential health problems and they weren't prepared to give it the approval, so that was the end of that one.

And you mentioned there were another couple of projects.

There were a few others. CSIRO land use research at the time was attempting to classify land and classify it in a way that would enable people to develop predictions for productivity under various agricultural and other activities – grazing and so forth. They were putting a lot of work in on that. In terms of *Pinus radiata* plantations, we had a particularly good record of productivity on a variety of sites locally and they were interested, too, in extending their understanding from the traditional agricultural sorts of crops that they had a handle on into those areas like *Pinus radiata* plantations – soft wood plantations generally – which were becoming important at the time because of the perceived deficiency in softwood production in Australia.

Softwood in particular had already been identified nationally as a major deficiency, resulting in a very large import bill, and there was Commonwealth government incentives to the States being made available to encourage the planting, the establishment of plantations for softwood production. There was a big expansion in softwood plantation establishment in the 1960s and early 1970s.

There had been a burst of planting in the 1930s, at least in part for relief work for unemployed people. It was an interesting concept. New Zealand did the same thing and they ended up with a very large resource as a result of that and a very useful one. The Australian experience, I think, produced a bit less in total but was still very useful. So all those things were raising the questions of where do you put them and how well are they going to grow? Trying to predict what you were going to get out of it to enable you to get some notion of what sort of a total you might have in the end. It was never envisaged, I think, as an open-ended thing. There was always some target in mind which was derived from somebody, in the end, back-of-the-envelope calculation about how much you were using, how fast you could grow it, therefore how many acres you needed.

What areas was ACT Forests looking at to take over for plantation purposes?

Well, that was the nub. At that time there was a whole area to the south of the ACT which was and still is, [has] got eucalyptus forest on it – hardwood forest – that was being considered for conversion to *Pinus radiata* plantation.

What area exactly is this?

This is the area around Boboyan. The area basically through from the southern border – the hilly country, hilly and rolling country from the southern border up to, basically, the Orroral Valley, so starting to get relatively high altitude but in terms of potential to grow, quite reasonable. It would have involved, of course, something which is an environmental no-no today and fortunately it never got that far. But what happened was, this project that Mark Edgerley was trying to get moving involved applying some economic analysis to some of these things.

You can grow pine trees in a whole lot of different places. Whether you're ever going to make any money out of it would be a question that involved practical things like distance to markets, logging difficulty, all those things that the straight biology doesn't recognise at all. So what I started out doing was working on a project that involved both the biological side, trying to predict from our experience so far, and the records so far, trying to predict basically for the whole of the ACT what the growth rate might be for plantations established on them and then going back through the financial records and seeing for a variety of country, a variety of terrains, variety of sites, how distance from market affected the residual value of the stand and how the

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terrain affected the logging difficulty, and put all that together and come up with a rating for all land in the ACT in terms of its economic performance as *radiata* plantation. We were able to do that. It was a lot of donkey work on just going back through old financial records. Some of them were in not real good shape, but fortunately business-like financial records had been put in place just shortly before 1969 and they were actually up and running in real time, I think, in about 1969 or 1968.

Yes, I was about to ask, was this sort of rigorous economic approach ever tried before or was this the real beginning of it?

No, the rigorous economic approach had been tried before, probably not with the level of detail that had been done for this particular exercise. It was just the fortunate availability of the financial records and the way they were organised which enabled ... We were following the South Australian style of accounting. They were very forward looking and they'd already gone on to venture-style accounting; ACT had followed mainly because Mark Edgerley had done all his work, training and what have you in South Australia.

So he was part of the South Australian 'mafia', as Lindsay Pryor calls it.

We had the records available but, more importantly, they were organised in a way that you could use them for this sort of analysis, so I was lucky. Looking at it now, gee whiz, I just sat there and I got calluses on the end of my finger from punching one of these 'you beaut' calculating machines.

We started off with a hand-cranked Facit which was the one that everybody took out to the field. We've still got it, out in a particular building out at Stromlo. They were a great machine. They would add and subtract and multiply and divide and then with the advent of electric ones, not electronic ones but electric calculating machines – they were still mechanical but driven by electric motors, so instead of winding a handle you had a motor that turned the works, just made them a little bit easier – that speeded things up. I can remember when I was doing some of this work a salesman lobbed in with an actual, fair dinkum electronic calculator and, oh gee, was that good! It wasn't programmable or anything. It was a desktop thing, like a big typewriter-size thing, which would do what these little or half or less of what these little credit card calculators will do today and much slower and use a hell of a lot more power, but gee, it was an enormous improvement. I persuaded him to

leave it so I could really get to understand it for about a fortnight. I did a lot of work in that fortnight.

It was running red hot. We couldn't buy it because in those days, of course, even though we were attempting to operate as a separate entity, in fact all sorts of people had fingers in our particular pie. The public service was reluctant to divest itself of any power at all. They were real centralists and it was a pretty uncomfortable sort of relationship sometimes. It got quite heated. Anyway, we got this massive project done and then I had to turn around and learn how to do the land use analysis that the CSIRO had set up and done, so I did that. They'd already done the Queanbeyan/Shoalhaven district which took in a little bit of the ACT, including a little bit of ACT Forests which was fortunate, and with their help I was able to extend the important – for forestry – elements of their analysis over the rest of the ACT. Drew up all the maps and then applied all that information to come up with a map showing where plantations in economic terms should be put, as well as having them in terms of biological suitability as well.

The CSIRO land use analysis, can you just explain what that consisted of?

It consisted of looking basically around air photo interpretation. You looked at terrain and patterns on terrain and after a while you could home in on particular patterns that repeated – terrain and terrain types and vegetation patterns. And you just drew lines around the edges of those and they were remarkably consistent in how different operators would come up with the same sort of analysis. It was quite useful. And then you went out and analysed systematically-derived samples of terrain on the field. The key to it was that if you recognised a particular pattern in one spot and you went and analysed on the ground, the detail there, if your analysis was good enough and you recognised the same pattern on the air photo elsewhere, you could confidently predict that the same sorts of details would apply in that area even though you didn't visit it. And that was a big step forward because that represented a massive improvement in efficiency and mapping basically and in analysis. It was a real good way of doing it. Nowadays they do it differently. They'll use satellite imagery and what have you to map on single characteristics and you can just pull as many together as you want and come up with any combination you want, but back in the '60s that sort of stuff wasn't available. Air photos were a pretty neat tool and they still are, but air photo interpretation was a big part of it.

So with the CSIRO land use data and your own economic data, you put them together and you produced a map showing where the best locations for plantations were in the ACT.

That's right, and we were able to take that to NCDC who were the Commonwealth authority that was responsible for the development of the ACT. No doubt anybody who talks about Canberra in those days will be talking about the NCDC. They were a big organisation and they did a terrific job, really good, and they had their planners and their landscapers were able to appreciate the logic and the commonsense in what we were proposing and we were able to have incorporated in the land use plan that was being developed in the early '70s, we were able to have our proposals incorporated and as a result we ended up with the particular target that we wanted. One of the things that I should mention is that in the ACT there was a very specific target in mind for a softwood plantation estate. It was 40,000 acres or 16,000 hectares net of *radiata* plantation, based on an understanding of – and this is an understanding that Jacobs and Cole² and so forth and the old foresters had had – of the likely productivity of the area and an estimate of what a reasonably viable industry might want in terms of input and the area that you would need to get that amount, and 40,000 acres was the target. And so fortunately at that time there was more than 40,000 acres of suitable country, economically viable country, that wasn't going to be built on. Fairly obviously Canberra itself has got top priority in the land use allocation. It didn't involve clearing of native forest.

I was going to ask about that.

That was another reason for looking, but which quite often impinged on what was seen as grazing [land] of the day. So our tensions were here, not so much between native forest and plantation, which was the case in New South Wales where there was large scale conversion of native forest to pines, but at this time in the ACT there was very little native forest being converted, not much at all. The last bit was up Gibraltar Creek valley back in about 1967 or something like that.

2 Cyril Cole. See General Introduction and Chronology.

The map you produced then added up to an area of about 40,000 acres for pine plantation, including areas that were already under cultivation.

Yes, it actually was more than that. The objective was to offer to the planners some alternatives and in fact that's what we did.

How much was under pine plantation?

About half. I think it was about 20,000, perhaps a little more, so it was the last half to a third. One of the interesting things was though it shifted emphasis from that piece in the south. As soon as you start looking at economics, that bit in the south didn't make as much sense as some of the stuff up here, which might well have been of a lower growth rate, but because of the reduced transport distance involved, in economic terms made a bit more sense.

So that's what saved the eucalypts in the southern part of the ACT.

I think it would be fair to say that there was already considerable resistance at that time to large-scale conversion and in the ACT it had probably gone further than it had in New South Wales or other places. South Australia, of course, never had a problem. They never had any native forest much that was available for conversion. Whatever forest they had had been cleared for agriculture years before, so it was just green fields as far as they were concerned.

Did the NCDC follow pretty closely your recommendations as produced in your map?

Pretty well.

There were no major departures?

No, you see we were working pretty closely with them as well and in particular it was interesting the way we interacted with the landscapers. There was a bloke up there called Dick Clough. He was, I think, their first landscape architect and Dick had some particular ideas about landscape which we were able to incorporate in our planning. We started to consciously plan our plantations with landscape implications in mind in the very early '70s. In 1971 the plantation at Kowen was quite carefully laid out with landscape values in mind.

Do you mean aesthetic values?

Yep, the way it would look. The way it would offer opportunities for other uses like recreational uses and how it fitted in with the scale of the country and so on. That was interesting for us.

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Was this all part of your work, your project work?

Not so much the broad definition of suitable land but certainly when we got to planning particular plantations it had a very, very big impact. It had an impact on the way we cultivated the land. We moved away from straight lines. If you look at the old plantations, they were laid out very much like orchards. It's easily seen from an air photo. If you look at the old road networks, the attempt was made to impose a rectangular road network – this is true for a lot of other things as well – but on country which really doesn't allow that. It's only when you have really dead flat country, like, say, around Kaingaroa in New Zealand where you can get a rectangular grid. Some of the South Australian ones worked quite well with rectangular grids. Try that here, you end up with a thirty degree slope in the middle of your road or something like that very quickly and it's just nonsense, but it took a long while for foresters to, I think, incorporate an appreciation of how countries should affect their planning into their business.

Where did the impetus for this come from? Was it through the public pressure or was it from the NCDC?

No, I think we were leading at the time, certainly locally. We actively sought the input from the landscapers as to how to do it and they were very happy to do it and we always had that good relation all the way through. The British Forestry Commission had employed Sylvia Crowe, I can't remember just when, but she was a famous landscape architect. I think it would be fair to say that foresters probably lost the plot a long time ago.

Sounds like a pun.

They were part of the scene at one stage of the game. At one stage of the game the early foresters had an appreciation of what a garden should like and what the whole thing should like, but when they started going for what we'll call 'industrial plantations' there was a little bit of unconcern about how they should look and it was simply a return to a kinder way of looking at the environment than we were doing. I don't think you could say it was new; it was simply a return to where we should have been. There was a period there where you went out and you planted pines; you put them in straight rows up hill, down dale; you pegged them all out and you paced them off, and all that sort of thing.

What do you think brought the change?

I think the teaching at the forestry school was certainly very forward looking. We had some very forward looking people. We were learning about the implications of what's called 'multiple use of forests' as a formal part of lectures back in the late 1950s and early 1960s. There was just no doubt at all that a forest was much more than a wood-producing factory, if it ever was, and we were being shown how to handle the various elements that go to make up all the productive potential that a forest has got. I think the staff at the forestry school and the tradition there should be ... It's a pretty proud one in that respect. There were other schools around that were doing it. Some of the North American schools were doing it but they certainly weren't lagging here.

Do you think the fact that Canberra and the ACT was the location, was a planned city, do you think that might have impacted or produced this forward outlook that ... ?

It certainly was the case at that time, in the late 1950s, early 1960s and particularly in the late 1960s. Certainly the planners were receptive to the notion that ... One of the problems was that people weren't ... landscape in those days meant a nice garden or something like that. The notion that a landscape could be thirty or forty thousand acres of mountainous country was a little bit foreign to a lot of people. We were in the position of being trained to think in those terms on that sort of scale, so on a few occasions, but only a few occasions, we were actually leading the landscapers a little bit in the way they were thinking about country – what was important and what wasn't; large scale things. We learnt heaps from them, but I think they learnt something from us and it was a very useful relationship because it led into all the other things: all the recreational use which is so absolutely fundamental and vital in the local plantations around here. I mean, they're a real hive of activity and at the time I joined ACT Forests they were physically closed and locked, trespassers were prosecuted, sort of thing. Well, they were certainly asked to leave, I don't know whether they were ever prosecuted.

But it wasn't until '67 that very tentatively and quietly they started to take the locks off at Stromlo Forest and put a picnic area – a picnic area in the middle of the forest! Our colleagues of the day thought we were nuts. They reckoned we'd lose the lot so quick it wouldn't be funny.

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Colleagues in other States, do you mean?

Yes, our professional colleagues.

From what you were saying just prior to that it almost seems to me as though the planners had lost sight of the fact that – that's Canberra planners – had lost sight of the fact that forests had something to contribute to the aesthetic quality of the city and its site and it seems like the foresters and the forestry school in particular rediscovered it.

I think the landscapers we were talking to, not necessarily the planners, but the landscapers certainly appreciated the impact that pine plantations have in the local landscape, and indeed all the other exotics and massed plantings even of natives, the impact that that can have. It was a little bit harder to get the notion across to some other parts of the planning complex and certainly it was not always easy to get it through the other parts of the department of the day – the Department of Interior and so forth. Some of the agricultural supporting groups around found it fairly difficult, not all of them but some individuals found it a bit hard to grasp that notion. That was an interesting sort of time. This was when environmental consciousness was starting to become widespread. It wasn't just a few academics or a few long-haired students any more, it was the whole community. So things like aesthetics and use of public land generally were being questioned and re-oriented and some foresters found it a bit hard to stay with that.

Who was responsible actually for opening up Stromlo and the other forests, do you know – and why?

Well, the why was not particularly strongly articulated, I don't think; the 'who' was certainly the forester in charge of the forest, with the support of the supervising forestry officer of the day, and that was Mark Edgerley. The who at Stromlo were, I guess, Jerry Cross and, I'm not sure, I think Tony Fearnside, yes, I think Tony Fearnside was out there as well at that time, so it was pretty forward looking. It sounds such a small thing now but in those days to ... For a start what it involved was pretty much a conscious decision to contravene the ordinance. We all ran on these blooming ordinances which were introduced pretty much *ad hoc* depending on ... When they got a problem with people parking their bicycles on the lawns outside Kingston Post Office, they introduced an ordinance to regulate it and that sort of stuff and the whole thing grew up like topsy.

Originally plantations were regarded as an immensely valuable thing and an immensely sensitive thing, so they put a fence around it and you had to have a permit to do anything and then when you couldn't get a permit anyway. And one of the things was that unless you had a permit and a good reason, you couldn't go in. You couldn't just wander in and enjoy it. So instead of changing the ordinances which would have been pretty much a revolution, we just sort of turned our back on them a bit. We never let legality get in the way of practicality and commonsense. So they were opened very quietly and much of the management of recreational use of public land generally until fairly recently has been of the same sort of doubtful legality.

Except in those few areas which were proclaimed as recreation areas, you really had very few rights in this community. Fortunately nobody worried too much about that and we went ahead anyway. But if you looked at the strict legalities, you could have tied all sorts of people in all sorts of knots. It would have become quickly apparent that changes needed to be made, but with the fragmented nature of the administration of the ACT, with every government department around the place seeking to get a bit of the action; this group had their little power base that was built around, say, health; and this other group had a little power base built around something else. It was pretty damned difficult. So, on-the-ground management tended to be practical, pragmatic, *ad hoc* rather than something that in places was rule-bound.

Yes. Well, not rule-bound necessarily but rule-enabled; they had enabling legislation. There was never any of that sort of stuff here. It was all restrictive, you couldn't do this, you couldn't do that. The Cotter valley, for instance, was in principle a prohibited area if you think about it for a good while – very strange.

Do you know how long the forests had been locked up? Was it virtually from the beginning?

Yes.

You just couldn't go in there.

No. I can imagine for the first few years that there weren't any ordinances around much at all but early on when they were starting to be established, they were mainly for the townscape. They were an attempt ... They resulted from an observation that certain parts of the ACT were already very poorly managed and particularly degraded. Mount Stromlo, for instance, was

rabbit infested and eroding. The surrounds of the Cotter Dam had been very unwisely cleared for grazing and were eroding as a result.

The plantations were originally planted as much for land rehabilitation as they were for production.

That's an important point.

So in a sense I suppose you could say the ACT plantations have always been multiple-use. They've always been multipurpose certainly, but they started to get tight with public access certainly in the post-war years and then after that from about 1967 onwards, it was starting to open up again. And for a while there we were certainly amongst the leaders in developing recreational use in production areas.

Why did they tighten up just after the war?

I don't know. I think there were probably more people around. I've no idea but it's certainly my impression that I don't think the war had anything to do with it. I just think that in the post-war period there were more people around and there was a perception too that there were plenty of other places for them to go; why the hell should they go in and make a mess of the forest? That changed though. That was a bit of an aberration, certainly in the long term from now. From the early '70s onwards any new plantation has had quite detailed planning for recreational use. Some of the later ones at Uriarra, for instance, had campgrounds planned as part of the original planning and access trails and tying in with other parts of the outdoor recreation opportunity that was available in the ACT. So you just wouldn't contemplate ... Certainly there's always been and still is, there'll always be the notion that you should discriminate against particular sorts of recreation that are likely to damage or can be demonstrated to damage the forest environment as a whole or impact unduly on other users. We've always had that at the back of the mind. So you can imagine the sort of thing. You wouldn't have tanks exercising through your young plantations; that's just crazy. Other forms of army activity, for instance – defence activity – yes, that's part of the routine. They have exercises but so long as their exercises don't impinge on the forest; they're like any other user, they can use it, no problem. But really when you get right down to it, there are very few things that you need to keep out of the forest that as a result of their direct impact on the forest itself. Usually the uses that you want to keep out of forest or any other environment for that

matter are uses which impact on other users. You can't have quiet picnicking with a car rally going through the middle of it. You can't have motorbike riding with horses around or runners; it's just crazy, it doesn't work. We found that out very quickly.

Ian, you were telling us about your work on working out plantation in the ACT. How long were you involved in this work? How many years did it take?

I guess it took about, off and on, it took about three years, I guess. It was a fair while.

This would have taken you up into the early '70s, I suppose.

No, I finished the final report in 1969, and that was about the last thing I did before I shifted out to Stromlo as Assistant Forester out at Stromlo. I shifted out there in 1969.

What were your duties out there?

They were Assistant Forester; so Tony Fearnside was the Forester at Stromlo. He was also the Chief Fire Control Officer for the ACT – Chief Bushfire Control Officer. That had been a tradition in that the Forester at Stromlo was also Chief Fire Control Officer. It was a convenient location, etc. So I had the job of, subject to Tony's direction, basically looking after the day to day and week to week running of Stromlo Forest, which was quite an interesting sort of place to be because it was the first place in the ACT where we'd consciously done anything about recreation. It also had the nursery. We were centralising our nursery operations at that stage into a central nursery. I also lived out there. We shifted out at that time.

Whereabouts?

I was in the house next to Maurice Franklin and Sam Richardson; in between those two. It was a new house. I'd actually Estapoled the floors before we moved in. We had some very happy times out there.

There must have been some interesting varieties of trees in the Stromlo Forest, too, dating from Weston's period, I guess.

Yes, there were. Unfortunately a lot of the early plantings got burnt in '52 with the big fire that came up from Murrumbidgee but there was a remnant. The *Pinus canariensis* up on top of Mount Stromlo – near the top of Mount Stromlo – Canary Islands Pine.

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Why was this type of pine originally grown, do you know?

Yes. It had been planted in 1915 and about a quarter of a hectare survived. It got burnt, but *Pinus canariensis* is a bit unusual in that it can survive considerable defoliation by fire, whereas most of the other pines just die, so that resprouted again. It sprouted again and we were able to keep that on the register and it's now on the register of significant trees and it's quite a feature.

Back then there was no wide experience with suiting particular trees to particular sites. There was a lot of intelligent guessing going on and some well-informed guessing going on. People would match climate and soil and aspect and so forth and suggest that species 'A' should do well on this particular spot because it's a bit like what it was already growing on. But really that's of limited value when you're starting to look at something where absolute growth is quite important. They planted a whole variety of stuff up on Mount Stromlo and elsewhere. We should mention the arboreta, incidentally. On Mount Stromlo there wasn't the variety surviving the fire; at least, there might well have been beforehand, but there wasn't the variety that had been developed in other places and while we've managed to hang on to some odds and sods of different species up there, basically Stromlo was a *radiata* block and that's about it.

Some of the other forest areas have quite significant arboreta – that's a collection of trees. The most notable one that is fairly heavily visited simply because people are interested is the one out at Coree; Blundell's Arboretum out ... That's a pretty nice place.

Were you involved in running this arboretum?

No, they were originally retained as an interest of what started off as the Forest Research Institute and became the Division of Forest Research at CSIRO, but with their contraction in activity and concentration on particular lines, direct management of things like arboreta were outside their interest at this stage; so ACT Forests took over management of those again.

When was that?

That was some years ago; probably effectively at least ten years ago, probably a bit more. In the late '70s basically they were starting to get out of it.

Just getting back to the Canary Islands pine, I'm quite intrigued that a pine that comes from the Canary Islands would be considered for planting in the ACT. You

imagine that the two climates are just so totally different that I can't see why they would be introduced here.

I would have to say I don't know what the climate in the Canary Islands is like. I suppose it would have to be semi-Mediterranean type of thing. It certainly does well. It doesn't grow as fast as *radiata* but it seems to adapt very well to the local conditions. Mount Stromlo is not the only place it's been grown. It's been grown around in town in Canberra. There are other places in Stromlo where it's grown and there are other Canary Island pines as driveway trees and what have you scattered over southern New South Wales; it's quite widely planted.

What do you know of the reasons for choosing radiata then? What do you know of where they come from?

Radiata comes from California basically. Mainly in California I think it has two occurrences, right on the coast and around Monterey; it's called Monterey Pine as an alternate name.

So quite small ...

Yes, very small, very isolated – and three islands off the coast. It's virtually a relict in North America; they certainly don't use it in any commercial sense.

That's interesting. What do the Americans use then?

For timber they use of whole variety of things: Douglas Fir, Western Yellow Pine, that's *Pinus ponderosa*; they use Spruce; they use the southern pines, loblolly and slash pine; they use the white pines, Eastern and Western White Pines; Sugar Pine; various other softwood species as well as their hardwood species which I suppose people tend to use more for cabinet work and the like.

I interrupted you ...

Yes, getting back to why *radiata* ...

Yes, if the Americans aren't using it, it's only a few relict populations, how come ... ?

It's not just Australia that's using it. New Zealand uses it. South Africa and East Africa have used it and South America have used it as well; all very successfully, so it's a very strange beast. Because it was just another tree basically that was available for use, it was planted in trial plots along with a whole lot of other species and it became apparent that over a wide variety of sites and quite considerable climatic variation – heavy rainfall variation – *radiata* pine just outperformed all the opposition. It's a very strange beast. It's got this very isolated occurrence and yet ...

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In its native habitat ...

In its native habitat and yet its potential is extraordinary. It grows well in Chile. It grows enormously well in New Zealand. There are huge trees there, much bigger than they grow in California.

It raises the question of why has the – this is a scientific question – why has apparently the range of this pine shrunk so much in its native North America and yet it flourishes everywhere else? What's happened to it do you think?

I don't know. That's a duck out, isn't it?

No, but it's an honest answer.

I don't know is the short answer. You can speculate on all sorts of mechanisms why this should happen. The interesting one is that why it's retained this enormous potential for adaptation to a wide variety of sites and yet the sites on which it's currently occurring are very, very specific and quite circumscribed. Whatever the reasons for what it is, we can be very grateful that we've got it, because, while Australia was reasonably well endowed with forests early on, most of them have gone under dairy farms and other sorts of farms and cities and that sort of stuff. But while it was reasonably well endowed, it was always very poorly endowed with the softwoods, and softwoods, in general, have a much wider utility than our native hardwoods. Our native hardwoods are good for what they're good for, but they don't have a wide variety of uses; they're not as easy to use.

And so the reason for planting softwoods at all was simply to make up the perceived deficiency in softwoods that this country had. We did have some native softwoods and some of them are still grown on a plantation basis in Queensland and northern New South Wales, but basically there weren't very many. So *radiata* just popped out of the hat and the same thing happened locally. We had a whole string of trial plots early on but, in particular, there are about a half a dozen surviving arboreta which are being maintained for their interest. And *radiata* is the equivalent of the best of the rest and quite often head and shoulders above the rest in all those things, right up to Piccadilly Arboretum which is right up – getting up pretty high where snow damage starts to be a bit of a problem. That's one thing that *radiata* doesn't handle particularly well is heavy snow. Some of the others handle it a lot better, so you get breakage and that sort of stuff.

Were any of the native softwoods trialled in this area, at all?

Not as far as I know. There are some examples of native softwoods that have been planted here. There's the Bunya Pine of some historical significance sitting in the top of Kings Avenue somewhere, I think – or is it Commonwealth Avenue? And there are one or two others around. I'm not sure about Hoop Pine. There are other native conifers which grow locally, like the podocarp up in the high country here in the ACT, but that's a sprawling vine rather than a tree. But no, they haven't been.

Do you think they'd flourish?

Oh, there's *callitris*, of course. *Callitris*, I forgot about that; that's the Cypress Pine. It grew naturally here on the rocky slopes and hillsides mainly associated with river valleys and the like or ridge tops here and there. They have been tried but they haven't done as well as the ...

This is the Cypress?

Well, it's not a Cypress really. I guess it's in that family or a related family, but it's *callitris*, [that's] its generic name. I have to be careful. The taxonomists keep on changing it. I call it '*callitris*'; it might not be its proper name now. That's useful elsewhere. It grows pretty slowly and it's not really a proposition. You need fast growth. If you're going into raising trees for wood production on an economic basis, you need fast growth pretty much regardless of the value of the end product, simply to beat the accumulated interest that it's involved in, paying off an initial debt that you incur in establishing a plantation. If you don't get fast growth, the sorts of ruling interest rates that you have to pay just make it not a proposition at all, which is why areas with existing forests have so much economic advantage. They're there, you can start exploiting them straightaway, and the profits from exploitation pay for the costs of establishment straight off and you're not slugged with this enormous interest bill.

There are other plantation species in Australia, there are other conifer species, but there's a lot of native hardwood plantation being established now the techniques are available, so in future I can imagine there'll be a lot more hardwood plantation being established. It's certainly the case at the moment; there's a certain amount.

Canberra's Foresters and Forestry Workers

Getting back to your own career, you moved to Stromlo. How long did you remain at Stromlo for as Assistant Forester?

I was trying to think about that the other day, actually; I'm lousy on dates. I went back into the head office again about 1973 or 1974 I guess, somewhere round about there.

What was that for?

I went back in to take over the assessment area which was basically the stocktaking area. You have to keep a track of how many, how much, how big, how fast, where are they – this sort of thing.

Who did you take over from?

Bob Cruttwell. So I stayed there for quite some time, quite a while. That was my last experience of direct field forestry – was out at Stromlo.

Was that something to regret that you were stuck in the central office and didn't really get out very much?

Yes, that was a problem although a bit of ingenuity got you out often enough so you still retained some knowledge of what went on. At that stage of the game we were interacting with a whole lot of other government groups and I started to do a certain amount of that. But also, in the mid-1970s ...

We had started off in the early 1970s a large industry here, Integrated Forest Products, as it was called then; what is now the Brown and Dureau Mill and we needed to ensure that we were able to supply their requirements and to be able to sustain their requirements by adding to the total estate.

The sale and the commitment to supply a certain amount of timber to Brown and Dureau, Integrated Forest Products, was predicated on completion of that 40,000 acre or 16,000 hectare target in a reasonable time. At that stage of the game we started to run into increasing difficulties in getting land made available for plantation establishment.

Where was the impediment or where were the obstacles?

It was a problem of not being able to get a decision effectively from some pretty cunning public servants, I think. We were fairly low down the totem pole and even though by the mid-1970s the NCDC had published their land use plan in which they, as part of their future plans, had designated certain areas for plantation forests, it was pretty damned hard to actually get your hands on it. The planning was done by the NCDC. The implementation, particularly,

at least the implementation in the rural, non-urban areas was done by the Department which was ...

Your department?

Yes, our department.

Which was?

The Department of Capital Territory at that stage of the game and that had a whole lot of elements in it which had no particular interest in plantation forestry. There was a very strong agriculture area. There was a whole bunch of other people who really had no particular interest in plantation forestry. We found it very difficult to be able to acquire land that had to be withdrawn from lease and it was difficult to withdraw ... Go back a bit. Because of the peculiar way that land was originally allocated in this district – this is pre-federation stuff – the old boundaries were rectangular and they ran up hill, down dale and they took no particular account of country. Our planning depended entirely on what the country was like: the terrain, the shape of it and so forth. Our boundaries tended to cut across tenure boundaries.

Didn't conform to those old boundaries?

No, they did not, so we might have decided that we wanted, say, five acres off the corner of this block here and there was the difficulty that that might have involved withdrawal of a whole big block because Fred Smith, grazier, could legitimately or sometimes illegitimately claim that he was going to go broke if he lost this little corner and it was all or nothing, so usually it was nothing. We ended up in that sort of argument quite a lot. We ended up trying to suggest that grazing be rationalised and in those days talking rationalisation for people who were basically free enterprise oriented was just not real good either; it didn't go down very well. So we got into the situation where we – I'm not sure whether they have now, still – completed the total. So in the mid-1970s the problem became one of trying to identify how much we had exactly, how good it was, how much there was and so forth, and to bring the whole thing into a condition where it was making optimal growth. You start off with a *radiata* plantation usually with a lot more trees than you really want and periodically you thin them out. If you're lucky, you can sell those thinnings and make some money out of them. If you're not lucky, you may have to put them on the ground. Unfortunately, in the 1960s, when we didn't have much of a market for small-size material, instead of cutting the

trees down and leaving them on the ground which was other problems – you create a huge fire hazard and so forth – they were left standing. So a large part of the plantation estate, the middle age stuff, was grossly overstocked by the mid-1970s and we had a real decision to make about what we did with those. So that was one of the problems we got involved with. The other thing that we had was massive wind damage in 1976, I think it was. We had something like 400 hectares of our ...

1974.

1974, there you are, thanks. 1976 was something else.

Actually when that happened we'd just completed laboriously an estimate of future availability of timber; I think about two weeks or three weeks – Graham McKenzie-Smith was involved with this – just before that wind-throw event and we took it and chucked it in the bin and started again as a result of that. It was just really quite demoralising.

Which forest areas did it affect?

Mainly Uriarra and Pierces Creek. They were old stands. It was stuff that was our highest value crop and, of course, we had to get in and cut it quickly to avoid deterioration. It took, actually, about two years to get it all out. That was really the bank of high quality material which we were going to just apportion over the coming years to keep the cream on top of the milk, so to speak, that the rest of the forest formed. That radically transformed the way we had to approach logging in the forest.

I suppose the people who were buying the logs would ...

They were perfectly happy.

They could see it all on the ground and they knew you had to get rid of it.

Yes. Well, we had to get it out in a hurry and it was pretty dangerous, certainly early on when they still hadn't accommodated to their new orientation, horizontal orientation. The interesting thing is that very few of them actually died. They were overturned. They weren't uprooted, if you understand what I mean. They still had roots in contact with the ground which were functioning and their crowns were still functioning. So for two years we were still harvesting quite sound material out of it, whereas if you'd have cut them down in the conventional way and left them for two years, they would have been totally useless. But early on, you could imagine a tree forty metres high,

quite a substantial tree, sometimes more, maybe seventy centimetres plus through at the butt with this huge plate of roots holding it up in the air, cutting that with a chainsaw with one end of the tree hanging up and this big plate of roots on the other end, that was pretty 'hairy' business because they used to spring all over the place because you couldn't tell which way the trees were tensioned. They didn't all fall exactly parallel, they were interlocked a bit. They were generally downwind, of course, but not everyone fell exactly parallel with the other ones, so there was a real mess. Fortunately nobody got killed.

But there were some injuries.

There were some injuries.

Bad ones?

Not that I can recall. I think there were some bad frights. When you get something like that whizzing past you at a rate of knots because you've just cut it what turned out to be the wrong way, and it misses you, I can imagine the poor people cutting those trees. I wasn't involved in cutting them fortunately. I didn't then and still don't have that skill. Gee whiz, those blokes!

Were these contractors who were cutting them?

Yes, they were contractors, all contractors.

Did you ever have any other major injuries or even fatalities in the time you worked in Forests?

We had injuries: cuts, bruises, sprains, that sort of stuff. There was nothing that ... We had on one occasion a chap who was in the fire tower had a burst artery in his head - he was only a young fellow - and that was notable for the fact that it was extremely difficult to get him out. He died later but it took hours to get him out because of the need to keep him horizontal and not to jar him around. To get him out of the fire tower was very difficult indeed. We were fortunate in that the ACT Fire Brigade had just, weeks before, taken delivery of one of their new ladder trucks and we were able to get that up to the tower and use it as a sort of a crane to get him out through one of the windows in the tower and then lower him gently down. All that was of no avail because he died; that was unfortunate. There have been some pretty nasty cuts with chainsaws early on, as you would expect. Issues of personal safety have been addressed long since and the attempt has been made to make the workplace as

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safe as it can be. Your last ditch is protective clothing but fundamentally what you try and do is to actually train people to operate in a safe and sensible way. The move away from chainsaw falling to mechanised harvesters was a big one in terms of improving safety.

Falling trees and cutting logs in the bush has always been a dangerous ...

When did this change occur?

That started about ten years ago and that made a lot of difference. Our own employees haven't been involved in direct logging for years, quite some time, and so they haven't been exposed to those particular hazards. There are still the hazards associated with fire fighting.

I was going to ask you whether you ever had any problems with fires in your period?

Yes, we have problems with fires; we've had burns. Just before I retired we had a fire actually in April which is pretty late for a damaging fire.

What year was this?

This was – I've got a rotten memory for dates – it was the one out at Pierces Creek. It would have been 1989, I suppose, 1988. I'll have to chase that up. It was just shortly before I retired, anyway. I can remember that it was a windy day but nothing particular nasty, but locally, out at Pierces Creek, the winds were absolute howling gale and a couple of days before we'd done a very carefully prepared and supervised burn, deliberate burn, to clear some debris for re-establishment and a day or two later this howling local wind came up and that damned fire got away and burnt all sorts of high value but young, non-salvageable plantation. We worked out that the replacement cost was going to be about a million dollars which was a lot to lose in a couple of hours.

How many hectares?

It took about close to 1,000 acres, that's about 400 hectares.

That's quite a burn.

Yes, it was the biggest one for a good many years in ACT forests.

And the biggest one you experienced in your time at ACT Forests.

Yes, the biggest one in plantation, yes.

You didn't have any other major disasters with fires or other trees or people?

No, we'd had others. We'd lost plantation earlier on; Majura Pines went back in the early 1980s. We lost nearly all of Boboyan plantation. They went, but the

total effect of those was not great. In the Majura Pines case they were pretty much mature and they were going to come down anyway very shortly, so we lost very little money on that. What we became conscious of with fires was the loss in nutrients off the site, which in our case is very important because what we are running are essentially degraded ex-grazing country and the loss of nutrients to the atmosphere in a big fire is quite significant and it really costs money to put them back in.

With fertilizers.

Yes, with fertilizers.

Apart from fires and high winds, what about other problems like rabbits, for example? Did you have much trouble with them?

Yes, we've had trouble with rabbits all the way through. They're just another factor in the environment. When people ask me what should they do if they're going to plant some trees, the first thing I say is get rid of the rabbits because they are sudden death. They really can cost you a huge amount of money because by the time you actually get a plant in the ground you've spent quite a considerable amount of money and, if that plant then gets eaten, you're right back where you started from. So, yes, we had trouble with rabbits.

How did you control them in your period with ACT Forests?

Originally you tried to fence areas out with rabbit-proof netting and then trap them; you had specialist trappers. More recently, utilising 'myxo'.³ You'd catch rabbits and inoculate them with myxo. More recently still we've been using a variety of methods: 1080 baiting in some areas; but probably the one that is most frequently used at the moment is to catch rabbits, get the fleas off them and introduce myxo via the fleas by putting the fleas in warrens and what have you. The method involves any way you can. It depends on the terrain. If you've got easy terrain – which mostly plantations established in the ACT hasn't been all that easy – it hasn't been all that difficult necessarily, but it's certainly not the flat country. The real flat country is either prime grazing and agricultural land or it's got houses on it, so you don't get that. But generally you can use a combination and keep them under control sufficiently to get your trees up and away and rabbits are open country animals, they're not real forest dwellers, so once you've got your forest established – it doesn't matter

3 *Myxoma* virus which produced the disease, myxomatosis.

whether it's a hardwood forest or a native forest or whatever – you don't get much in the way of rabbits in there. They might be around the edges but not actually in the forest.

Interestingly, they've never had a great deal of trouble with native animals here: wallabies and kangaroos and what have you. They can be a problem in other places, I gather, but we've never had a real problem with them here. Wombats periodically are a problem, not so much because they directly eat the plants but because they're like little bulldozers. They just keep on walking and if there's a fence in the way, well, bad luck, they go straight through it. And what's worse, they quite often don't come back the same way. That's usually only been a problem in those areas which are both rabbit-infested and right alongside native forest areas where there's the large wombat populations. In general we've been pretty lucky. Sheep have given us a lot more trouble, stray sheep. Stray cattle. Hares every now and again. Sheep can be a real hassle if you get a mob of them – a hundred sheep in through a break in a fence somewhere where you're up against grazing land – that can be a nuisance.

Yes, I've seen them wandering around Kowen fairly recently, too.

They're probably on agistment there; they're in by design because you can use them as lawnmowers as well and reduce the fire hazard, utilising sheep. One of the options for the future is to utilise grazing animals, not necessarily sheep but grazing animals as an additional source of income underneath the forest; sort of called agro-forestry. It's the sort of thing that a lot of private owners are doing, but locally here is run at a pretty low level, low intensity stuff, just grazing for the sake of getting rid of some of the competing vegetation, but mainly fire hazard – fine grass fuels which are particularly efficient in spreading fire.

That's been a feature of ACT Forests for many years. It was certainly well established when I got here. I think they were using it in the very early days. As soon as the trees are up about one and a half to two metres, you can put sheep back in and look after the grass and some of the shrubs, mainly grasses, very efficiently. It's quite useful.

With the losses from wind blows and fire and more particularly the obstruction you encountered from other departments in releasing land or allowing you to take land, were you able to keep up supplies of timber to the sawmill?

It's increasingly difficult. One of the hassles with supplying timber to the

mills was that you necessarily have to produce a certain amount of small and rough material which the major industry was originally designed or intended to take.

The major industry being?

Being the Integrated Forest Products that originally was designed to take the full range of produce from the forest. In fact they never did, and one of the difficulties was that the emphasis became very much on the medium to large size timber logs. As you would expect these are the most profitable ones to convert, easiest ones. They've got the broadest range of particular end uses and so on. So I think with the delays in getting the full estate established and the emphasis very much on the top end of the log market, I think that there are real difficulties in the long term in keeping what's been a traditional supply available. In total, I think, the total's not too bad but I think in the end ...

I don't know exactly what the current plans are but certainly I would expect to see a supply of something less than was originally envisaged as an interim measure at any rate, but I know that there are some pretty active attempts being made to recognise more widely the potential of the Canberra industry as a base for a wider district supply of logs. So as far as the industry is concerned a lot of the private plantations that were undertaken in the late '70s and early 1980s, some of which are coming on stream now, they'll be able to bring their logs for conversion into Canberra and that will alleviate the supply problems to the local industry. I think that ...

In this local area how much of the plantations are in private hands? How many hectares would you estimate?

In the ACT, of course, there's very little, almost nil. Outside, within reasonable range, the other player in the game is the New South Wales Forestry Commission. They've had plantations established at Tallaganda and a few other places, mainly Tallaganda, but I think there's about as much again in the district of which probably a good half would be in private hands. There's some large plantations down further towards the coast around Braidwood which were originally private and some of which had been bought by the New South Wales Forestry Commission some years back and there are some private ones still there. But there are other options for those. The other option is export, export as logs initially, possibly export in other forms later on, so that the local industry particularly for the better class logs will need to be able to compete

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in terms of price to the producers for those logs, otherwise they'll go to the highest price which is what you'd expect. So it's going to be quite interesting. One of the things that made a difference a bit locally was the closing down of the plywood plant here. That started up in 1971 and it finished about 1989 or thereabouts.

Why did it close down?

Too many other players in the game. When they started off in 1971, or thereabouts, I think there was only one other structural plywood producer in the country. There are now many others and, of course, New Zealand is a very strong competitor, so while initially they had a very good run, it got very tight competitively in recent years, and it's old plant, old technology, so I think it became uneconomic to keep it running.

What grade of timber was being provided to the plywood factory?

It tended to be the larger, better logs. They certainly weren't the top of the line logs that you can produce with very intensive culture which ACT Forests has never attempted to produce really seriously because of the very high input involved, but they had a minimum size of, I think, it was about 300 millimetres or something like that that they could peel economically. They could peel smaller than that but it's probably not an economic proposition. They had an upper end as well of about 700 millimetres, I think; that's about the biggest they could handle, and they need to be reasonably straight, reasonably small branched and so on.

What was the relationship between the plywood factory and the Integrated Timber converting plant?

There was a plywood factor and a sawmill and planing mill and kilns and everything all on the same site.

And this was a private concern?

Yes, that was the group came in and started up in 1971.

So they're still running but the plywood part of it has ceased?

The plywood part of it closed down. The sawn timber line is still going. The attempt was, as I explained before, to set up an integrated industry, meaning an industry that would be able to utilise in principle everything that the forest produced but, as I say, it didn't work out that way.

They wanted the better stuff because it was more money.

That's not surprising, is it?

Not at all. Getting back to you, anyway. You moved back into central office as Assessment Officer and how long were you Assessment Officer for?

I can't remember that. Isn't that terrible? Because I was never just that, I always doing other things, fronting for ACT Forests with the whole raft of different organisations.

There were land use planning organisations. There were groups set up to work on legislation. Everything you can think of. Contact with the planners, the formal planners, NCDC, that took up a bit of time.

What were relations like with the other parts of the department and with these other organisations?

Not bad, not bad at all. When you're working with other professionals you rarely had any great difficulties. The difficulties arose when people with particular fixed views or particular axes to grind. It's hard to point a finger at anything or certainly at anybody, but there were times when it was a bit frustrating because you could see which way things should go and they weren't going that way and the reason they weren't going that way was not of your own doing. It was outside your control. I guess that's one of the difficulties about working in a public service organisation is that at least from the middle you've got responsibilities down the line, but the great power that you need, the influence that you need to get it done is usually held onto pretty firmly further up the line. It's changing. It's changing heaps.

And not within ACT Forests.

No, up until very recently ACT Forests was subject to considerable control outside. There were attempts, for instance, just before I retired to set up a sort of quasi board of management. We had a review. We get reviewed regularly which is sometimes annoying, but it's not often a bad thing out and out. It can be fairly unproductive sometimes, but every now and again you get something useful out of it. We, like everybody else in the public service, you get reviewed; it's part of the deal. One of the recommendations of one of the more recent reviews was that we had a board of management if we were attempting to run like a business, which has been a stated aim and a hard-fought-for position ever since I joined the organisation.

It wasn't me that did it but the organisation had been fighting for this

literally for twenty years. We set up a board of management to which the organisation, the managing director equivalent being the Supervising Forestry Officer or the Chief Forestry Officer or whatever he happened to be called, the executive in charge of ACT Forests, would report at regular intervals in the same way that a managing director would report to the board of directors of a company. That was a useful exercise. It was, I guess, the last step in fitting the organisation as a truly businesslike entity, but it still didn't sit comfortably in a public service environment. In spite of all the noises about accountability and efficiency and effectiveness and so forth that people have made over the years, it's very difficult to get a policy area to operate along those lines. I don't know that it's necessarily the best way to do it anyway, but it suited ACT Forests.

In summary, how would you say ACT Forests managed in its negotiations with the Department or other parts of the public service or other organisations? Do you think that they generally succeeded? It might have taken some time but did the Forests eventually succeed in their aims or were they generally frustrated? How would you see it?

I'd say they've survived because they're still here and they're still doing it. I think that it's a fact of life that they are a pretty small gun in a big battery and we noticed the lack of powerful people on our team on some interesting occasions where you'd get rolled. Every now and again you'd have a win and it would be unexpected and that would make you feel real good because the odds were the other way. But basically, for an organisation that has been consistently reducing in size through improvement in efficiency over the years – that's in size of numbers – and which has been decreasingly dependent on new funding, it tends to get sidelined a bit. You're not a budget item on anybody else's area of concern, so they're not overly worried about that. We'd have been better if we'd big debtors and big spenders and a lot less efficient than we were; we'd have attracted a lot more attention I think. Maybe that's a bit cynical but you can see some cases around. I reckon they've done pretty well over the years.

Given a very tight availability of land, given the influence that purchasers of our material have had with successive governments and given for many years just a complete lack of understanding in other parts of the public service about what a business enterprise ought to be, I reckon the organisation has done pretty well.

On the subject of relations with other organisations, how did ACT Forests fare with environmental groups and, indeed, individuals?

We've had our critics but in general over the years ACT Forests has done remarkably well. It's had very little in the way of adverse criticism. It's had some. It's reacted to that.

What was the basis of the criticism?

Things like: we shouldn't have pine trees, we should be growing native trees, why aren't there any animals around? – that sort of level of criticism. Another level of criticism, which is probably more on the ball, criticising some of our practices. Some of the road work has not been particularly good. Some of it we've inherited from a previous age and it's a nuisance. It's not well located, not well sited, hard to maintain, contributes sediment to at least local [channels] within the forest stream – there's very little comes out; that sort of stuff. Those issues have been addressed. Fundamentally there really hasn't been a lot of criticism of a sustainable nature and that's been the result, I know, of a conscious attempt to, over many years now, involve people's opinions initially, dating back from the late 1960s to more recently, just people in general physically in planning and in some sorts of operational matters in the forests. The attempt was made to truly integrate the forests into the community and I reckon the attempt has been pretty successful.

You said just a few minutes ago that some of the environmentalists wanted you to grow native forests instead of pines. You don't see that as a viable proposition on economic grounds or on biological grounds or both?

On economic grounds. There's nothing wrong with it biologically, but it's question of the product that you produce and how much money you can make at it. Those are the two fundamental things.

So the basis of that criticism is that the people want these alien plants out and native species planted instead?

Yes, the same sort of criticism can be argued about wheat, oats, sugarcane, a whole lot of other crops around the place. Initially we suffered the same criticism as everybody else, the biological desert, monoculture and all that. That has not been really sustainable around here because we've never run our plantations as tight and as dark and as dank as some of them can be and they are really biological deserts – they're terrible. Fortunately very little of our stuff is like that.

Ian, what would you say were the major changes or the major change if there's only one in your whole period with ACT Forests? There weren't any?

Yes, just which were the major ones? I think a major change fairly early on was the capacity to present plantation forestry in the ACT in a rational, well planned way to other people who were trying to be rational about planning the ACT.

That was a change?

Yes, it was a change, certainly, but it was also a big step forward. That was quite something that I take considerable pride in because of my part in it. I guess other changes have been less dramatic and less of my own particular doing. The change from planting right to a particular acquisition boundary to planting to a planned boundary, I can take some credit for that one and that was a big change as well. In fact that was one that rang a few bells outside the ACT, as well, and I had considerable involvement in that. I guess forestry is not the sort of thing where you get revolutionary change, I don't think. You can get revolutionary type disasters. It generally evolves. It evolved from more or less an act of faith in the early days. There was no real conception, I think, that it ought to be or would be an economically sensible investment opportunity for public funds, but it evolved to something where it certainly is an economically viable revenue for investment of public money and private money and that's evidenced by the amount of private plantation that has gone on. The change from the old rule of thumb type approaches to inventory, with no particular concept of precision, to an inventory which is statistically based and with a precision that can be calculated and presented in a sound statistical way, that's a big step forward but that's more a result of evolution. Certainly what's evolved over the years has been a move away from walking to work to riding to work in a motor vehicle.

Changes from ninety-nine per cent of the work being done by full-time employees to having most of the work done by contracting, has been an ongoing change over the years. But at this stage of the game if you compared with present position with the original position there would be an enormous difference, a big change. I guess the other big change that I can think of is – two other changes of an administrative nature, really. The change from Forestry and Timber Bureau to the Department of Capital Territory administrative is a big change. Another change which was long overdue was the integration into one group of all the land managers in the ACT, managers

of public lands. That's City Parks, the reserves and major park-type people and forest people and those people looking after agriculture and grazing on leased land. At one stage we all ended up in one group and then, because only ACT Forests was a quasi-business, another change came about which involved splitting ACT Forests off again, out of those groups with which it is most like into, of all places, the City Services group, which was the last change that happened to us while I was there. That was made quite a pleasant change by the group of people that we found ourselves with. They knew nothing whatever about it but they were other professionals. They were engineers and good administrators and very quickly accommodated our peculiar quirks. We ended up with the library, too. The library was in that same group; a very disparate group and personally, from a personal point of view, in recent years they were the best couple of years of my career because they were very happy. Lots of things happened and I didn't expect to like this change particularly but, as it turned out, because of the people involved, it went very well.

Looking back over your career can you say enjoyed your career in forestry and you felt you achieved things?

Oh yes, there were times when it was deadly dull and boring and you felt like kicking the whole thing out, but every now and then something would happen and you'd find ... You'd think, oh well, I did something useful today, and that was good. One thing I can do is I can look around the ACT now and see my influence on the landscape, which is very satisfying.

Yes.

Just bits here and there, I can say, right, that's mine, that's mine, and likely to stay.

Yes, as you say, it must be very satisfying.

It is.

You have no regrets about retiring, though?

No, well, I'm still doing forestry. I'm in a group of eight people who have a 270-acre, 80-hectare, plantation out at the other side of Captains Flat and we're producing high value timber. We planted it and nurtured it and we're pruning it now for production of high quality timber, and that keeps me reasonably busy and active and involved. I'm building a boat out of wood, of course, and that's about three quarters finished and that's all I've got time for at the moment, plus a bit of skiing and so forth.

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You retired towards the end of the 1980s, did you?

Yes, 1991.

Did you remain Assessment Officer right up to the end there?

No, in the end I ended up, because of the administrative changes involved, the last twelve/eighteen months, I was acting in charge of the group for a while, which introduced me to another aspect of things entirely. I never saw the forest for weeks at time, but I was interacting with quite an interesting group. We had another major review and the mill had closed down, the ply mill had closed down. It was a bit of a traumatic time for Forests but not ... if you had a long view of things it was just another change along the way.

Just to finish off. What do you see as the future of ACT Forests?

I think that providing they can keep the plantations productive and well managed, there's no reason why they can't continue to be a useful part of the local environment.

I don't think that ... Privatisation has always been the first thing that people who come in to review ACT Forests think of, but I think it will never be reasonably a proposition for ACT Forests because of the multiplicity of values that they produce. It's not just timber, it's a whole lot of other things as well and they are very much in the public arena and I think they're likely to stay there.

They may have other aspects of their operations contracted or whatever, but in the end I think it's in the public interest to keep it in the public arena in a way that the garbage collection or the water supply is not. Land is a fundamental value, resource, that the community has got and I don't think in the end you can privatise that to the extent that they have in some other countries and still end up with a nice, happy, comfortable community. It's just too fundamental for that. The individual services, the individual aspects of it, yes, you can privatise them, that's no problem.

That's a very interesting thought and I think it's probably a very good one to finish on, too. It's quite a good insight there. Anyway, I'd like to thank you, Ian, very much for coming along and sharing your experience, your views and so on. It's been very interesting, indeed.

Thank you, Brendan, it's a pleasure.

Thank you.

Professor Lindsay Dixon Pryor, AO

Interview with Professor Lindsay Pryor recorded in the sound studio of the Australian War Memorial on 2 August 1994

Lindsay Pryor is well known for the major contribution he made to the greening of the Canberra's urban landscape. He was born in October 1915 at Moonta, South Australia, in part of what became known as Australia's Little Cornwall; the term was actually invented by his father Oswald who was an author and cartoonist. At the age of 12, Lindsay decided that he wanted to become a forester and, on leaving school, spent two years at the University of Adelaide before moving on to the Australian Forestry School in Canberra. He graduated a Bachelor of Science in 1935 and attained his Diploma in Forestry the following year. Later in that year, he was appointed Assistant Forester to Cyril Cole in the ACT. After Cole enlisted in the AIF in April 1940, Pryor was left to run forestry in the ACT by himself.

In 1944, he was chosen to succeed A.E. Bruce as Superintendent of Parks and Gardens in Canberra. Although this brought to an end his direct involvement in forestry in the ACT, he was responsible over the next fifteen years for planting trees and shrubs in the streets of many of Canberra's inner suburbs. In the same period, he also established the Australian National Botanical Gardens on the slopes of Black Mountain. In 1958, he was awarded the degree of the Doctor of Science from the University of Adelaide for his work on eucalypts and, in the same year, was appointed to the Foundation Chair of Botany at Canberra University College, later the Australian National University. He retired, at least in name, in 1976. However, he remained a Visiting Fellow, while continuing to research and publish and to work as a consultant.

Among many honours and awards that Lindsay Pryor received during his lifetime, he was made an Officer of the Order of Australia in 1983 for his contributions to botany. He died in October 1998.

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Lindsay Pryor at the age of 20 in 1935 when he was studying at the Australian Forestry School in Canberra. (G. Pryor)

I welcome Professor Pryor to the sound studio of the War Memorial.

Thank you, pleasure to be here.

That's good. I'm glad you could come. I'd like to start by looking at your background, and if I remember correctly you hail from Adelaide.

Yes, I'm one of the aggressive South Australians that left the State for its own good. I was born in South Australia and lived in Adelaide until I was eighteen and then came to the Forestry School in Canberra in 1934. So that established my connection with the ACT.

Why did you become involved in forestry? What was the attraction for you?

This has been put to me recently a number of times and I think it went like this. When I was about twelve, my father read an article by N.W. Jolly, Norman Jolly, in the South Australian newspaper which said forestry was a good field for boys – good profession for boys – and I was taken by this. The macho image appealed to me and so at the finish of primary school when the same question was put: what are you going to do, Lindsay? To every question I said, 'I'm going to become a forester.' From then on, I always answered the question that way and followed through to do the preliminary science course in Adelaide – part of the forestry course for the degree, given by Adelaide – to be followed by two years at the Forestry School in Canberra. So that's how it came about.

Your father had no connection with forestry or anything.

No, he'd been in mining. There is a bit more, perhaps you don't mind me adding. We lived, I as an infant, at Moonta in South Australia where the copper mines are, and the School of Mines in Moonta, an offshoot of the School of Mines in Adelaide, opened in the 1890s and my father was a pupil there – incidentally along with his father at the same time – education having come to Moonta then and attended the School of Mines. One of the teachers, I suppose, we'd call it, was Norman Jolly, a South Australian also, who was the first South Australian Rhodes scholar who had later graduated in forestry from Oxford; that was after the mines business. So my father knew Norman Jolly from having been in front of him – as a student in front of a teacher – and knew something, I think, of Norman Jolly's antecedents and family; nearly all South Australians knew one another. So when he'd written the article it was though he was reading something from somebody he knew and regarded as authoritative, so it had that kind of element.

There was no influence on you from your knowledge of the lack of timber resources in South Australia. I mean, this led to the establishment of a Forestry School in the university there, I know, but this had no real influence on your taking up forestry, you think?

No, except that by then the *radiata* pine plantation program in South Australia was significant. It wasn't very big, of course, but it was going and the plantations were there and some timber was being cut from plantations, particularly those in the north, as they called it, near Wirrabara and Jamestown, and so it was seen to be a coming industry. It had got far enough to be established at that stage.

And then you started your basic science courses at the University of Adelaide.

This was at the time when the Forestry School was being set up in Canberra and the Adelaide University school was shutting down. It was all a *fait accompli* because – if I've got it right now – the opening in Canberra was in 1927, I think, the school having been started in Adelaide in 1926 to replace the foregoing Department of Forestry at Adelaide University.

Sorry, that's what I was referring to.

Yes, and so it was '32 when I started the course. That had been, to me, it seemed a good while, but it had been established by then. The state universities, except Victoria, had all agreed to support the federal Australian Forestry School in

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Canberra, so that was the situation.

So how much forestry training did you actually do in Adelaide before you came to Canberra?

Very little in any academic sense. The course was the first two years of a science degree which was incorporated into forestry, but we had the opportunity to work on the plantations in South Australia during vacation which I did, so that in 1934, I know, the one that was most accessible to Adelaide was Kuitpo, up near Meadows in the Adelaide Hills. And so I spent a week, I suppose, or something of that kind first, and then at different intervals in simple tasks like weeding the nursery ...

Sounds exciting.

Came to be called 'sucker bashing'. I got there, of course, by riding a bicycle from home where I lived and we had a modest camp there and there were just a few of us. That's the way it was done in those days.

Can you just give me an idea of the subjects you studied in Adelaide before you came to Canberra?

There were some requirements in forestry – there were some flexibilities – so it was the basic things like Maths, Physics, Chem and Botany. And then I spread my wings a bit into the second year and I did Organic Chemistry and Botany and Geology and Zoology and then, lacking Surveying, which was a requirement for the course, I did that after doing the Forestry School course by private study and sat an examination in Perth in 1935 so that I had the qualifications behind me for the Adelaide degree when the time came – if and when it came.

So after two years in Adelaide you moved across to Canberra.

Yes.

What year was that?

That was in 1934 – the beginning. It might interest you, if I just digress for a second, to say that it was Depression times and students were required to get nomination of a State to attend the Forestry School and Julius, the Conservator,¹ in South Australia was unable, although he professed himself willing, to give me a nomination. A nomination, of course, carried a modest living allowance of two

¹ Edward Julius, Conservator of Forests, South Australia, 1923–35.

pounds a week and that was rather significant. So in 1933 I wasn't much good at Australian Rules but I thought I'd play some rugby which was just starting and that provided a trip to Sydney. There was method in these things. My colleague from South Australia, Bill Sharp, who unfortunately was killed in the war, and I reached Sydney with a rugby team and we both waited on Norman Jolly who was then Chief Commissioner of the Forestry Commission. I don't know whether Norman had a soft spot for South Australians but we finished up our interview with him; he said, 'I'll nominate you to Canberra.' So we went back to Adelaide with our nomination in our pocket and thumbing our noses at the South Australian Conservator, so that broke my ties with South Australia. When that was arranged, I came as a regular student like the others then with the promise of a living allowance to the Forestry School and I arrived in, as I've said on one other occasion, I think it was 3 March 1934, and the next morning walked up to the top of Black Mountain.

That was energetic. How many people were generally nominated from each State to the Forestry School?

They were quite variable. Sometimes it got as high as half a dozen but mostly it was two or three and there were two of us from South Australia, then. It was difficult, of course, because the Depression then and they weren't very free with nominations. There were occasions when there were four and five from the one State; a two-year course, of course, so that they would overlap so that the numbers might have been from one State six or seven, but they were all very small. In my year there were only four students.

From all around Australia?

Yes, plus the other year so that we had about ten in the school as the total student population – something like that.

So, two South Australians in your year and two from other parts of Australia.

Yes, one from Victoria and one from Western Australia.

So you arrived in Canberra in March 1934. How did you find the place when you first landed here?

Very easy to get around – open and nothing to impede movement by foot or bicycle, and less than 10,000 people and quarters at the old cubicles which had been used for construction in Canberra which were our living quarters out at Yarralumla in Solander Place. Altogether, rather pleasant.

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You were able to survive on two pounds a week.

Yes, we were paid fortnightly; we got four pounds less nine pence a week for unemployment relief, so we got three pounds eighteen and six a fortnight. Yes, it was quite enough.

You undertook the two-year course at the School of Forestry and who were your teachers at this stage?

The school had been set up and the course was one that independently gave a Diploma in Forestry; and that was incorporated into the system through Adelaide University for the degree, with one or two extras. C.E. Lane Poole was Acting Principal; he was Inspector-General of Forests – a reluctant principal. He regarded himself as being – I've learned subsequently – saddled with teaching, which he didn't want to do because a principal of the school had not been appointed and wasn't until quite a bit later. There was a modest staff: Lane Poole and then Charlie Carter from Victoria who had taken a Masters in Yale in Forestry, who taught dendrology, particularly the botanical aspects of forestry; and Hugh Richard Gray – Dick Gray, as he was known – had graduated in Forestry from Oxford who was teaching management and economics. We got lectures in engineering from – who was it now? – Max Jacobs who'd come back from overseas and he gave lectures in engineering aspects of forestry and processing of wood: drying, kiln drying, seasoning and sawing and that sort of thing. There were some special subjects given by guest lecturers from within Canberra, such as entomology by Fred Holroy [sic]² from CSIRO Division of Entomology and Colonel Goodwin – J.T.H. Goodwin – who gave lectures in surveying which were rather impressive. That was about it. There might have been one or two other special lecturers, too.

I can't quite figure why you had to go to Perth to do your surveying exam if you were being taught surveying by Colonel Goodwin as part of the forestry course in Canberra.

Yes, the university in Adelaide would not accept surveying done in another course. It had to be the Surveying I course as prescribed in Adelaide and you had to sit that exam and pass it. They wouldn't give you credit for work done, even if it were a similar standard. There wasn't all that much difference. It was a little less the school course, bit more specialised, but it wasn't all that big a

² Dr F.G. Holdaway.

Charles Edward Lane Poole in 1927, about the time he was appointed the Commonwealth's Inspector-General of Forests and Acting Principal of the Australian Forestry School. (National Archives of Australia, A3087, item 1)



jump to do the course at Adelaide, although it did involve doing some extra work such as what we used to call 'star ob' – star observations and so on to fix azimuth and latitude and things of that kind. I always rather enjoyed that because it always left with me a very considerable interest in the night sky. That was why it was necessary, and perhaps a little later I can tell you how it came to be in Western Australia.

You would have finished at the Forestry School towards the end of 1935.

Yes, and in 1935 they brought together the field camps and it was spent in Western Australia because Lane Poole wanted to attend the Commonwealth or what was the old name?

Imperial.

The British Commonwealth Forestry Conference³ in South Africa where he'd been much earlier and he had to go by ship from Perth, and so the school year was re-arranged so that the students were all over there working in the Jarrah bush for two camps, brought together in time. He did his stint for a while to kick things off and then departed and the rest of us stayed there with Max Jacobs running the camp as the major-domo. The examination had to be

3 At the time, this was actually the British Empire Forestry Conference.

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contemporary with the one in Adelaide in surveying so that I had to – I think it was about November probably – had to travel by train from Dwellingup to Perth to go to the University of Western Australia at Crawley to sit the exam there at the same time – two hours later – than they were doing it at Adelaide. But I wasn't good enough on telephones to do anything about it.

You obviously passed the forestry course and the surveying course and you ended up with a Diploma in Forestry and a degree from the University of Adelaide simultaneously.

The way it was designated, it was Bachelor of Science (Forestry); they tacked on the 'For' in the formal designation of it, but the diploma was not awarded until you had done one more year as a practising professional forester; so that followed in 1936. By 1937 I was cast out on an unsuspecting world.

When you finished at the School of Forestry towards the end of 1935, you basically had almost like a year of internship, I suppose, to use the medical analogy.

Very much – a very good analogy, indeed. Perhaps I should say what happened. I was a New South Wales student, you might recall, so I returned to New South Wales at the beginning of 1936 and was immediately sent with other students, including Bill Sharp and one or two others, to Queensland because New South Wales then there'd been a palace revolution. No, not palace, there'd been a real revolution and Jolly had gone and he wasn't reappointed. It was done that way. It was a term appointment – the Commissioner – and E.H.F. Swain who had been Commissioner in Queensland became Commissioner in New South Wales, and Swain considered that the only good forestry was done in Queensland and all the young fellows should do is go up there and learn. So in January 1936 I was on the train to Brisbane and then into a camp a bit beyond Bundaberg on forest survey and then, after three months there, another three months in a place called Widgee, which is just out of Gympie, on rainforest surveying with Neil Cromer who later became Director-General of Forests here in Canberra. I was the field party and he was the one on the booking end of the chain and I was on the front end of it, pulling it. That took me to mid-1936 and a position was advertised in Canberra for Assistant Forester and I applied for it. We were working under the bonding system which was in force as it had been for teachers.

Lindsay Pryor

I was going to ask how you could apply for this job if you still had six months of your year of formal training to go.

Yes, and also I had a five year service period with a bond. Nevertheless I applied for the job and I was offered it. Then, of course, I had to negotiate the financial matter of the bond. People think differently. Bill Sharp was in the same position, he did the same thing. Bill didn't pay them back a penny. I had rather cold feet and thought I'd better pay it back, so I did and elected to pay what they wanted. The federal government helped me with half, so I got the equivalent of one year at the Forestry School instead of two, so I had to pay back one year which was approximately a hundred and fifty-three pounds, sixteen and twopence. I elected to do that as soon as I could, so I paid the maximum and I think I paid it off within the two years because I was doing field work in ACT anyway and out of town and camping and so on.

When you started with ACT Forests, was Max Jacobs the head of...?

No, Max had by then left and was working federally and was overseas in fact. He returned during the time. No, Cyril Cole – no, I'm sorry, that was a bit earlier at the school. Cyril Cole, C.R. Cole, was in charge of forestry in the ACT. The old school tie was working and Cyril had been Forester or Arborer in South Australia, so there was a real mafia of South Australians about.

Why did you apply for a job in ACT – just because it came up or was there some particular attraction about the ACT?

I can't really tell you that except it would have to be completely in confidence. You see, I had a girlfriend here. That can be put as 'see footnote' in a page which may be consulted upon application.

No, I'll put it at the head of the chapter, I think.

So indeed, I had what I think for people of my age then, I was about twenty/ twenty-one, you could say it was a rather compelling reason. In fact we were married later.

Congratulations. The same year or ...

No, fair go.

After you paid off the ...

You remember when that was; that was three years later.

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When you started working for Cyril Cole what were your initial duties as Assistant Forester?

Cyril was like me, on a learning curve, so he really hadn't thought out the way he might integrate a professional assistant into the job because he was the only professional forester. It was at the end of the period where people were very conscious of the ranking and the control, so there was no early move to provide all the trappings of authority and so on. History, as a matter of fact, changed this dramatically, but in fact the first things that I did there were to be out in the bush and places like Uriarra and Kowen were out in the bush because you couldn't travel every day; bicycle was the main method I used for a start. I used to go out and camp for the week, sometimes for the fortnight, depending on where I was. So I was involved in a number of different kinds of survey, a good slab of which was defining the areas for the oncoming planting.

Of pines, mainly.

Yes, pine planting, but also quite a slab of work really on the Brindabella Range in the Lees Creek and adjoining areas, Bushrangers Creek in which there was some hardwood logging going on. It was rather a pleasant mixture from the point of view of the person doing it and in the latter one I camped at Bulls Head and then I certainly only came in once a fortnight because that was really well out of the way.

That went on for a year or two and Cyril Cole must have complained to his senior officer, who was J.C. Brackenreg, in charge of the section of agriculture and forestry, about being a bit overworked and not having enough help. Brackenreg told him he better use his assistant more effectively, I believe - I'm reading between the lines. It did make a change and that probably was not until about three years because then after I was married I lived in a house in Canberra, in Griffith, and I was provided with a motor cycle to get to work, an AJS three and a half, and I was still young enough to want to ride a motor cycle so that was no hardship.

Where did you live before you got married and moved into the house in Griffith?

I stuck at the Forestry School mess out at Yarralumla so for those three years, '36 to '38, I was in touch with the student body more or less, acting and behaving a bit like a student, I suppose.



The Director of the Forestry and Timber Bureau, Geoffrey Rodger (centre), with (left to right) Allen Fairhall, Australian Minister for the Interior, W.A. McLaren, Secretary, Department of the Interior, the Governor-General, Sir William Slim, and Sir Arthur Gosling, Director-General, United Kingdom Forestry Commission, after the official opening of the British Commonwealth Forestry Conference in Canberra in 1957.

(National Archives of Australia, A1200, item L23894)

When you first got into ACT Forests what was the extent of pine planting that had been carried out to that point?

The South Australian influence had been strong. At the conclusion of Weston's time with the Afforestation Branch, as it was called, which covered forestry and city parks – he finished in 1926 – the Forestry Section, as it was then, of the Department of the Interior, Property and Survey Branch, was set up and an appointment was made to be the Forester, and that was G.J. Rodger. He spent a year, maybe a bit of 1926 and some of 1927, planting at the initial plantations in the Cotter – that is, Uriarra and Pierces Creek – and Kowen.

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Stromlo already had the 500 acres at the top of the hill established by Weston. In 1928 Jacobs succeeded Rodger, who moved, I think, to New South Wales, and he had the quaint title of Forest Assessor, and he was in charge of the unit for all of the planting year of 1928 and he put in plantations in the same three localities and Stromlo; so there were four localities 1928 plantation was established.

He moved on to his overseas work and Cyril Cole was appointed Forester in 1929 and he started planting and some of the *laricio* pines still standing at Pierces Creek – for example, the Corsican pine – were planted in Cyril Cole's day and one or two little patches over at Kowen are still there in the preserved area. So then he continued and it became Depression, I suppose, in '29, so that in the years '30/'31 and on to '34, and by '34 when I arrived in Canberra, forestry was rather big business in terms of number of men because there was relief work and pine planting was quite a substantial activity so that the plantations – and this had got going by '32 – the plantations of 1932/3 onwards were rather large, particularly in Pierces Creek and Uriarra. And that was the situation when I saw it in '34 and then it had gone a few steps more by '36.

Mentioning the relief workers, I was going to ask you how many people were working in the forests when you started?– if you can give a rough estimate.

I've got to be careful here. I find that having to do this I sometimes blur the records with numbers. The section had Cyril Cole and myself as professionals and then there were people in charge of each of the plantations as foremen.

There was Jim Bradley at Uriarra, there was Harold Tuson at Pierces Creek, Tom Southwell at Stromlo and Arnie McInnes at Kowen.⁴ I suppose at times there would have been ten to twenty men under the Uriarra/Pierces Creek group; smaller numbers at Stromlo. It was a time when married men were getting alternate weeks work and single men getting one in three, so the numbers – well, they may have been relatively constant ... but I can't remember exactly what they were, but the gangs were of significant size. I'd say gangs of about twenty, so there could have been about forty or fifty people working at the labouring level at that time.

They would have been able to plant a lot of pines.

The planting rate was, and more or less still is, about 1200 a day, and 680 to

4 William Arnold McInnes (1896–1953).

the acre at eight by eight feet was the figure; doubled that would be two acres a day. They were fairly large blocks. The Pierces Creek, Hardy's block and the areas at Uriarra were several hundred acres. I expect they were 500 acres each; a thousand acres, I think, would have gone in. That must be recorded and I must say: check those figures. They're something of that order.

You mentioned the South Australian influence – the South Australian mafia, in fact. Were Rodger, Jacobs and Cole all from South Australia?

Of course.

Simply because they'd been trained in the era when there was only the Forestry Department ...

Rodger was the 'old school', Jacobs was the last student of the Adelaide University school, and Cole, like Rodger, had graduated at the early part of the first war and then enlisted and was in Europe, in France. Rodger I know less about in that way, but he also had graduated, too – at least, he was Adelaide 'old school'.

Can I ask you if and how the Adelaide influence affected forestry in the ACT – the way forestry was done in the ACT?

Just like a photocopier. I think Cole's appointment was because Stromlo plantations from Weston's days in 1915 had reached the stage at which some sawmilling was going to start or had started, and Cole had been at Wirrabara forest – which I visited last year, as a matter of fact – where there had been a sawmill running from somewhere around the turn of the century from plantings done by Walter Gill and the other well-known-after-that forester whose name will come back to me soon, so that they were about 1880s; and so they were being milled and a small amount of timber produced. Cole was running this little sawmill at Wirrabara which is still a little sawmill at Wirrabara; it was last year. So he was deemed to – this is to some extent supposition on my part but it fits in – as experienced in sawmilling of *radiata* pine. Indeed, during his time the sawmill at Kingston controlled by the Controller of Stores, who was Charlie Francis in those days, was a going concern and things like, therefore, the way in which contracts were let for the harvesting of the trees and the recording of the wood taken and the computation of the accounts and that sort of thing was a repeat of South Australia.

What about the hardwood mill up in the Brindabellas from about 1930?

That was a less, in some circumstances one would say, sophisticated, but it's not quite right here; it was a very simple little mill and it was much easier to handle that. The logs were coming to Kingston and the system was not as intensely managed as the pines were. However, that had no paradigm in South Australia; this was based really on New South Wales practice with hardwood forestry. The sawmiller there whose name I do know but can't recall for the moment had come in from somewhere nearby.

How did Rodger's successors, Jacobs and Cole, how did their South Australian training affect the management of forestry in the ACT?

Some of the standards which were used, that is, things like spacing, number of tree species which was all *radiata*, of course, and thinning and pruning and methods of fire control, of course, was always a very substantial activity – these were all based on South Australian experience from each of them. The northern forest in South Australia, up around Jamestown-Wirrabara, of course, there's a pretty hot summer and fires were very seriously taken notice of there, so Cyril Cole certainly would be recreating some of the arrangements more or less for involvement of local landholders and so on. There was another South Australian who was the Secretary, I think he was called, of the Forestry and Timber Bureau, under Lane Poole – Roy Kappler – who had come here. He, of course, was well up on the legislation dealing with lighting of fires and fireplaces and all that sort of aspect, too, so that was South Australian in general basis.

You yourself were a fire control officer or Chief Fire Control Officer at one period.

Things moved on and by 1939 with the outbreak of Second World War, Cyril Cole was absolutely intent on serving in the Forestry Company; so was Lane Poole. Lane Poole, however, was rejected. He was selected for the commission and the Forestry Company, but this was vetoed by the Minister of the day who was Street perhaps – whichever one it was, anyway – and he didn't take it very well; he didn't like it. Cyril Cole then was next in line and he was commissioned to be Commanding Officer of the Forestry Company and spent the next three or four years away in Europe, mainly cutting pines in Scotland, but that was the way it went. One of the conditions of Cyril Cole's accepting or being offered the commission and accepting it, was that I remained as Acting Forester. So in 1939 or I think it must have been, yes, the end of 1939,

Cyril Cole went and I became Acting Forester and continued in that post for the next four years. One of the concurrent appointments was as Chief Fire Control Officer in the ACT, so I had that post for four years; that's how they came about.

I noticed you'd done some work on burn scars on Snow Gums during the '30s and you produced some very interesting results on bushfires, back to about 1860 in Canberra. Can you ... ?

Yes, not in Canberra so much, in the ACT. That was weekend work. I was camped up at Bulls Head and I was interested in that sort of thing. In fact, I did most of the fieldwork that led to a Masters degree while I was up there, too, on the plant ecology of the ACT. The periodicity of fires and the evidence you can get from burn scars was a very potent source of information because there aren't many eucalypts, of course, that have got decent growth rings, but the cold country ones, above about 3,000 feet altitude, are very good and the Snow Gums especially so. So I chopped into the scars and the overgrowth tissue and counted the rings and made that little note which apparently got into circulation in a big way after the '39 fires.

Yes, I was coming to that. Were you Chief Fire Control Officer when the '39 fires broke out or was that ... ?

No, it was the end of that year. Cyril Cole was still Chief Fire Control Officer because it was Friday, January 13, 1939. The ANZAAS science meeting was on and there was a garden party at Government House that afternoon and I was at that, but by nightfall that evening I was out at Uriarra with an undisciplined horde of men going to attempt to stem the flames. I finally was able to return home by about ten o'clock the next morning, after being there all night. Very fortunately there were no serious injuries. The people that I was concerned with were split on either side of the fire when it crossed the Brindabella Road in the plantations. It burnt about three and a half thousand acres which, of course, was a terrible blow to Cole, but fortunately the wind was very high and the fire was rather narrow and it didn't spread very much to the sides. I had my motorcycle there and finished up on the Uriarra side and then, as it subsided a bit early the next morning around dawn, I rode up the road through it, testing the fire as I went, but it had burnt down enough not to be dangerous, and rode through to the other side and contacted, with much relief, the group of a dozen or so who were there. By Sunday it was one of those days with cloud

at about four or five thousand feet and things were all subsided and I rode up along the Brindabella Road as far as I could get along the range to see what had happened and there was enough break in the weather for everything to subside fortunately. So that was a good introduction to fire. I know at one stage – I only learnt this in retrospect – they were looking for me and I think they were wondering whether the next thing would be a memorial, but it didn't happen.

How did the gangs fight the fire?

It was pretty primitive. After that event there were a lot of adjustments made, but the idea was that it was largely hand work, there were no machines; you had rakes, and the usual thing was to make some sort of a trail that you could burn back from. So the idea was to plan some trail which would be a back burning trail and then light up. It depended very much on the weather. Actual putting out of fire directly was simply mostly by rakes and beaters, so you could imagine how much could be done. It was almost futile, really. Of course, you could stop things building up if the weather would let you. After that there were several innovations, so the Commonwealth leased a wide strip of land along the western boundary of the ACT and I think may still have that lease so that there could be control over the fuel hazard reduction burning which was one of the causes of the trouble. Radios which were still pretty crude then and heavy, they were introduced so that we had radio communication which was lacking before. There was a development then also, particularly after the war years I suppose or even partly during, of much more sophisticated pumps and so on and some modest types of fire tanker with water, so that the move was in the direction that is now, of course, unrecognisable in relation to the starting point but the principles were then set up, really stimulated by the 1939 fire.

Yes, I was going to say you really get the impression from the literature of that period that the fire was an enormous shock, but it produced a lot of good in the long run or even in the short run.

I learnt one thing on that of a slightly different kind. After the fire had gone through and at Uriarra that following morning, Cyril Cole was still there – he'd come out there, I suppose, he'd been on the telephone somewhere I expect and he was greeted by two more South Australians, one of whom was visiting from Western Australia, called T.N. Stoat, and he'd probably been a fellow student of Cole, and as he got out of the car, out there at Uriarra, he came up

to Cole and he said, 'Our profound sympathy, Cole', and I learnt something from that.

How did the fire get going in the first place?

There were several starting points, but the main one that went through Uriarra started, with hindsight, from a roadside billy fire over on the Wee Jasper-Tumut road which is in the north-west direction from Coree. It had been burning for a couple of days. At the garden party at Government House there were scorched leaves falling down onto the lawn there, so it was really burning very heavily at that stage at, say, three o'clock in the afternoon of January 13.

Fanned by westerlies?

Well, north-westerlies. That's the prime wind direction for bad fires in the ACT, except that if you get a change then as sometimes happens, it will turn to south-west, but they were north-westers bringing it over.

You said it burnt out about three and a half thousand acres at Uriarra.

Three and half thousand acres of plantation, mainly Uriarra. The main age classes were a little bit of '27s, '28s. There weren't much of 1929 or 1930 or 1931 for that matter – yes, that went too, and then some substantial areas of 1932 and 1933 plantation. It burnt not very much in Pierces Creek. They were spot fires at Pierces Creek and the main plantations near the dam, a good deal of that survived, anyway. I'm a bit hazy about the exact boundary there, but it went more or less in a straight line. Yes, it must have burnt some of the 1928s at Pierces Creek.

What proportion of deep plantations did it burn out? – I mean of the total pine plantation.

I have a recollection it was about a third.

A third! That must have had a major economic impact.

It begins to raise feelings that the whole policy of planting might be in danger and so on and it's a big knock, but the first decision you need in those circumstances is one of intent to continue forestry work and that comes up every so often when these really bad fires occur. For some reason, and I don't know, it must have been because there was a substantial planting program intended for 1939, there was other planting stock on hand, so a great deal of it was replanted in 1939.

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Very quickly.

Yes, I think we got a couple of thousand acres in, maybe even a bit more. It was there already to go and the weather turned the right way in the winter of 1939.

And so where did you get the staff from to do all the planting – this heavy planting program in 1939?

We were still Depression times.

There were still relief workers.

Yes, it perhaps was more stable then. There was better funding and it may not have been relief work so much, but it was still a fairly big labour program.

You said that the 1939 fire burnt out about a third of the total plantation area. That means that there were about 10,000 acres under plantation then. Can you give me an idea of what the increase had been from the time you first started with ACT Forests up until the 1939 big fire?

Yes, I think the nominal planting program was something approaching 1,000 acres a year. Maybe the total area in 1939 ... see, from 1932 to 1939, seven years, 7,000 acres, that's right. Yes, it may have been a bit less than 10,000 the total. There would be perhaps 7,000 in the Cotter; and then Stromlo and Kowen would have made it up to about ten, but that should be checked. I must say that I've made some errors with this kind of recollection, so when figures are ... please verify.

Was it exclusively radiata pine that you were planting?

No, but the large majority, the major portion of area, of course, was, but there were some *ponderosa* in the bullock paddock at Uriarra and probably a little bit of *laricio*, Corsican pine, but otherwise just a few experimental plots.

The ponderosa and the Sicilian pine, were they successful?

If I could just call it the 'Corsican'. Sicilian is quite correct because it's natural also in Calabria where I've seen it. It is, I would say, a really quite successful species, but it's slow growing compared with *Pinus radiata*; really much slower, like half the rate of growth. *Ponderosa* has been a great disappointment for more than one reason and, although it was still being planted as a result of what I think is a very good policy to diversify, better not have all your eggs in the one basket and have some differences of genetic background and so on. *Ponderosa* has shown up as giving poor timber in terms of sawing at relatively young ages of thirty or forty years. It needs to go to more like eighty or a

hundred years and also it tends to get a fungal disease, *Diplodia*, rather badly and those two things make it a very considerable disappointment. It's only now that some of the timber is being used and that's been more or less – if I can use the word – being junked; it's not got any good commercial value. It might be different if there were a pulp wood outlet which there isn't yet in the ACT, but nobody, I think, now would plant *ponderosa* pine.

For things like poles and high quality – somebody told me recently that Corsican pine peels very well, gives a good veneer; one of those places producing veneer, and I would be inclined to look at Corsican pine still again. There's some nice stands over near Batlow at Laurel Hill, but they tend to be around sixty years old, so in this market-driven economy we're in, people don't like to go to that too much; it makes the books look poor. So, however, I believe it's still important to look at diversification and one of the possibilities that's showing up a bit is *Pinus muricata* – I've forgotten what the common name of that is – from northern California – the blue *muricata* which will stand colder conditions and higher levels than *radiata* pine and also endure more snow and also is relatively resistant to the fungal disease, *Dothistroma*, so that's the one that I would like to see tried now a bit more. There are a couple of nice plots out at Reid's Pinch on the Brindabella Road which suggests that it could be used.

Who planted those?

That was part of the research program from FRI, Forest Research Institute.

How long ago did that take place?

Around thirty years old. There are localities. *Muricata* comes in two forms and it was panned earlier because the green form has many defects, more like *ponderosa*, but the blue form from northern California, places like Fort Bragg and so on near the Oregon boundary, are a different kettle of fish.

So these small plots have been growing quite successfully for about thirty years.

Yes.

Haven't been milled at all, I suppose, or anything like that.

No, there may have been a little bit of cutting but not these at Reid's Pinch. They're nicely grown, but they do show the difference between having the improvement work that's gone into *Pinus radiata* missing, so that the average quality of the stems is not as good as *radiata*, but there are some which are as

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good. It grows nearly as fast. I wouldn't say it grows as fast but it's comparable anyway.

How much radiata was being cut at the time you first joined ACT Forests? It wasn't known as that then, but at the time you first became involved in ACT forestry and then up until, say, the beginning of World War II.

It increased, of course, during the war years. It must have been a very small quantity and I can't remember exactly the figure. I have a feeling that it might have been 5,000 cubic feet a year, something like that. That in terms of cubic metres would be – divide by fourteen – that's about three to four hundred cubic metres. That seems too little, but it wasn't much because it was coming only from Stromlo at that stage.

What was it being used for?

It was going into the housing in Canberra.

Only in Canberra though?

Yes. It must have been more than that, but nevertheless it wasn't very large.

Only from Stromlo.

Well, initially, and then there was a bit from Kowen later and then still later, of course, Uriarra and Pierces Creek. When I started in 1936 it was only Stromlo.

What about the hardwoods? What were they being used for?

The same thing: housing in Canberra, because *Eucalyptus delegatensis* which was the main species, Alpine Ash, produces a very nice timber. Mountain Ash, that may be [*Eucalyptus*] *regnans*, but it's that quality; you can see the gum veins in it.

The hardwood milling stopped about 1937, I think. Why did it close down?

No, it surely ran later than that. Because it was in Bushrangers Creek, and Ray Margules was supervising some of the logging there – I mean at the overall control level – after I'd left. There's a little bit I'm vague on here. No, I think it went on much later than that, but Lees Creek finished about '37.

That must be what I'm thinking of, yes.

Then there was the next valley, Bushrangers Creek. The logs were being – they weren't milled out there. The mill ceased, that's right, and it was right on the stream. The logging from Bushrangers Creek continued through the war years and I think into the '40s. I think it continued into late '40s, nearly into the '50s,

and then it stopped. Well then, there was a major change if we were go on to [inaudible] and the research diminishing anyway.

Is that why the Lees Creek operation was shut down, because the timber was being cut out or had been cut out?

Yes, I think so and then it was a very ramshackle mill and it was deemed better to bring the logs into a central mill which was established at Kingston beside the softwood mill; and then with that change of arrangements the original mill, there was no point in keeping that going, it just couldn't cope with what was wanted. I think there was a big stimulus to production during the war and the years immediately after, 1945-6.

We were talking about the period just before World War II and at the outbreak of the war or soon after the outbreak the then head of ACT Forests, Cyril Cole, joined the 2nd AIF and departed for Scotland and you became head of ACT or Forests and Forestry in the ACT.

It was called Forestry Section of the Property and Survey Branch of the Department of the Interior and I was Acting Forester.

You were fairly young when you took over. This must have been some honour for you.

Yes, I would have been twenty-four. I was born in 1915. Does that add up? Have I got the right dates? Yes.

It must have been quite a leap forward for you and a career jump and all that sort of thing.

Yes. It was indeed, of course, a major change and going back thinking about life, there have been two or three like that and this was, of course, the first one because it was. Yes, it was moving rather quickly to a position which would have taken a good many more years if things had just gone along normally.

I suppose inevitably with your elevation to the position your duties would have expanded and the number of hours you put into the job gone up as well.

I don't think I'm being too immodest when I say that once, when the Public Service Inspector was asking about jobs, I said I work[ed] about fifty to sixty hours a week. Of course, I did take the fire business very seriously and so a great cricketering career was cut short because I had to remain on tap at a telephone at home or somewhere on the weekends because it was necessary to keep in touch with what was going on in the fire business. Communication

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was much less efficient than it was later, so that was demanding and, of course, that hadn't been my job really previously. I was not Chief Fire Control Officer and then, with depleted numbers of people and so on, that became quite demanding.

Were you still living in Griffith at this juncture?

Yes, I stayed there right through; 32 La Perouse Street.

And I could look out to the east at the hills behind Queanbeyan, Bungendore Hill, and on one occasion when the diesel train was starting fires when the funnel became level with the cutting, we got into the groove after a while and knew that every time the damn train went out, there was going to be a fire and, where I was in La Perouse Street, I could look across to the hills and see it start. We did have people out there after a while.

Was this a very common event?

No, we had a terrible battle with the New South Wales Railways who refused to believe or to admit that their trains were starting the fires. On one occasion, as things had progressed, they had a couple of railway officers from Sydney following the train on a trolley and when we got there they were busily trying to beat out the fire with their hats or something.

Did the trains start any major fires in Canberra?

No, it was all there on those cuttings as you go over the scarp to Bungendore and they were roughly in the same place and fortunately there wasn't an outbreak on a very bad day; and after a while there was so much burning and the obvious places were mostly burnt over anyway so, no, it didn't lead to any disaster, but it could have.

With the outbreak of the war and your taking over the Forestry Section, what was the immediate effect of the war on forestry in the ACT or was there any particular effect straight off?

Yes, in particular I suppose the most significant one was the placing of free aliens, as they were called, in work and this request came through from, I think it was called the Manpower Organisation – I've forgotten the exact title – but they were concerned with allocating people for various jobs and one of the groups they had was the so-called 'free aliens' who were mainly Italian, but a few other nationalities like Austrian and, here and there, a German who for one reason or another were not considered security risks and were allowed

the restriction imposed by being directed to do particular work. So they were doing forestry work in the ACT. We set up two camps, one at Blue Range and one at Pierces Creek, called Laurel Camp, just up the road a bit.

What period were they set up in – I mean, what year?

It must have been in the early '40s. They were a good time; it took a while to get going so I expect it was about '41. This is where I'm ... I can't be sure of the date. But they continued after the end of the war for a while. They [had] leave to go – they nearly all came from Sydney – and so they were given leave and I suppose a rail ticket return to Sydney to be able to go home. Many of them were married and they got to their families and then back again. So they'd leave on Friday and back on Monday morning and resume camp life for a fortnight. Every fortnight they got leave.

How did they take to the work?

Pretty well, I think, really. There were one or two things, I suppose, that were relevant. I took that business seriously and felt that I had an obligation to make sure that it went well if I possibly could, so I spent a lot of time with them, especially when they first arrived – the first six months. I visited the camps very frequently and I got to know them all by name and by sight. There were two interesting aspects. The camps were different in the content and the way they developed; there were certain subtleties. The one at Blue Range was more Italian than the other, but I remember there was one man called Paulo Senino with whom I had some long conversations because he was, I would say, a broad-minded person, well educated, and he was anxious to always or liked to discuss the merits and demerits of the history and the possibilities for the future, so we had a lot of talks. And there were some others in the camp there like that at that particular camp. The other one at Laurel Camp at Pierces Creek, there were more German-speaking people, not many but more, and one of them had an interest in language and I was studying German at that stage. I'd enrolled in night lectures at the University College because I regarded that for botanical forestry work as a language that one should acquire if possible. I'm no linguist but I did keep going. There was a man there called Gunther Schintler who was – Schindler perhaps,⁵ what is the ark?

5 Probably Gunther Martin Schindler.

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Schindler's Ark.

It may have been the same name; very close anyway, who was very good at language and he was up on both the grammar and vocabulary and literature; so he used to prepare some notes for me to improve my understanding of German literature and language, and so we developed a kind of exchange where, after I'd done the necessary business, I would sit down for half an hour with him and have a go at my new lesson and take it away and read it. That established a kind of ... They're the two aspects I remember. There were others. There weren't exclusively those people, but I got to know them well because of that sort of thing – with those two little anecdotes illustrating the kind of contact. There were others that I don't remember as well, of course, because they weren't quite so prominently impressed in my mind. They worked pretty well and we required them to do a fair day's work without pushing them too hard because many of them hadn't come from a manual work and so on, but we got enough. And, of course, there were funds provided to be spent on their wages and so on; so we expected to get some reasonable return for the money spent, and we did.

How much were they paid?

That I can't remember. It was adequate, I would say, but it wasn't a bonanza but I think it was the basic wage, but that would need to be verified. Whether there were allowances for family or what, I'm not sure, but it wasn't too bad. It was probably a bit down but it wasn't a bad ... The idea was it wouldn't be a way of taking an unfair advantage of the ordinary workforce by undercutting the standard basic wage, so that's roughly the setting, but what the actual figures were I don't recall now.

Did you encounter any resentment amongst any of them at all at their situation?

No, not really. They were stressed by being separated from their families, but that didn't express itself as resentment of our part in having to supervise the camp. It was pretty free and easy going. They arranged their own mess and bought their own supplies and a cook was provided so that they had pretty comfortable messes, really. There were no barbed wire, of course, and they were able to move. There was no supervision of them going to Sydney and back. They honoured that. We very, very seldom had any default in return and there was never any worry about that. Now and then one of them would get sick and we'd have to take them into a doctor or dentist. I remember doing

that myself on a number of occasions. We used to pay them in cash so that I had to go out with one of the local policemen, Len Powley mostly, to take the cash out with somebody from the Paymaster's Section; so they were handed out cash in an envelope on the spot and that was another thing that was done.

How many of them were there approximately?

About thirty in each camp, I would say.

That's not a great number. I thought there might have been more.

No, there may have been a bit larger at some stage, but about thirty.

You mentioned that many of them hadn't had any background in manual work.

How then were they chosen for this?

I think they had to be well enough, of course, and not too old and so on but they were doing things like in shops. One of them, I remember, an Austrian-Italian called Frakheysen [?] who later became a head waiter at one of the swank restaurants in Sydney like Pruniers or something of that kind – I saw him once afterwards. I saw several of them in Sydney at different occasions. Schintler was in some kind of business with a business partner. They were that sort of thing. There were the Maggiotto brothers who were Italian who were fruiterers. Again, I can't give a precise rundown, but they weren't doing navying work so that to use the hands with tools, it takes a while – a week or two – to run in.

What sort of work were they involved in?

The regular seasonal work so that in the dry season it would be pruning pines, the winter would be planting, and those were to be the two main manual operations. I remember some excitement when we did our burn from heaped material from the original clearing for planting at Blue Range, and a certain amount of anxiety about whether we might lose one or two of them, but that was all right. I remember we put in a road there, a track, which became known amongst all of them as the Burma Road.

I like their sense of humour.

Who was the great Russian general at one stage; I thought I would remember this forever? He was called Tesoriero, so he became known locally in the camp as Timoshenko.

These camps operated throughout the war.

Yes, and I believe – I, of course, ceased to be concerned with them in about

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1944 when for a short time I was both Superintendent of Parks and Gardens and Acting Forester, pending Cyril Cole's return, which I think was in '45. I lost touch then with the camps, but I know they continued in some form for perhaps a year longer. I think they may not have closed completely until even '47; that's a matter of record but I just don't recall.

What I'm interested in though is even though the camps operated for a relatively long period were the same men there for all that period or did they stay for a year and then ... ?

The first batch was there for pretty well most of the time.

I think it began to be some cyclic changes after about 1944 or 1945, after Armistice I think there were changes, but most of them were there most of the time up till then.

Did these men constitute the major part of the Forestry Section's workforce in this war period?

Very much so, very much so, and that allowed the planting to keep going through the war years and keeping up the program of x acres a year, so the plantations were substantial. The areas established during those years were quite substantial.

Was there, because of the demand for timber during the war period, an increase in the areas planted or the area planted?

There'd been some decision, I think not at a very elaborate planning meeting, that the planting program ought to be whatever the figure was, let's say, 800 acres a year. That was the target. It was funded on that basis and so the work kept going. It was argued that there needed to be a fairly substantial area to support industry of significant standard and size when it came into full production, so that was generating the continued planting, really, to get up to whatever the figure is now - sixteen or seventeen thousand acres.

Was there increased cutting?

Cutting was being pushed along to the maximum that the forests could allow.

Because of the war demands.

Yes, war demand, because I think ACT got by with its own - no, they must have imported some still. Any production that could come from the ACT was a significant plus for supplies of timber during the war and then, with the expansion after the war of housing and so on, I think then it became highly

significant, too. I can't really speak about that in the way that I think you ought to be able to get if you cast the net a little more widely, but that basically was the situation.

So the Forestry Section had about nine to ten thousand acres under plantation at the start of the war and then planting at the rate of about 800 acres a year roughly. I think those were the figures. A figure I remember fairly recently was, at the last review, around 16,000 acres as the plantation area. Of course, some of that would have been replanted by then – quite a bit of it. There's about a forty year rotation, so that the 1932–35 plantation would have been replanted in, what's that? – 1979. So present day, you've got to be careful and adjust that. I'm sorry, I can't be more precise about those figures.

No, it's quite a while back, so I'm not concerned. We can always check the files. I just don't recall them exactly now and I could easily be making a mistake there, but I'll think about this after we've finished.

Were you affected by war stringencies?

Yes, frankly I had a certain amount of emotional problems, of course, because I was what was called reserved occupation which has got its downs from one point of view. I and people like me took the VDC seriously, Volunteer Defence Corps, so we used to turn out at least once a week and sometimes in the evenings and once on the weekend during those years from '41 onwards. We went through really a very good training exercise because we had Duntroon, of course, being detailed to give us all that. I've spoken to one or two people who were much later and asked which they preferred: the Bren gun or – what's the other one called?

The Vickers.

Yes, and also the Tommy gun, I've forgotten the name of that now – and mortars and so on.

Owen gun.

Owen gun, that's right. We went through the jazz on the ordinary Lewis gun, too, with fault numbers one, two and three or whatever they were and so forth, and live ammo. There was nothing to pussyfoot about it. So that was all unexpected experience and not without some benefits in spite of the downside of that sort of thing.

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What was it like living in Canberra during the war years?

Things I suppose were pretty stringent if you looked back. I know I had a couple of four-gallon cans of petrol and an old Chev car that pretty well fell to pieces in the weather because the motorbike shed was all I had to put it in. So transport was restricted, food was rationed. That sounds hard, but in terms of survival and good living, it wasn't all that bad at all, and it carried over, of course, in my experience to visiting ... I went to [the] UK in 1947 and there was still rationing there, so that certain things like butter and meat and so on were in – you just couldn't go down and buy what you felt like buying, but you could get enough to comfortably get by.

Did you have a family by this stage?

Yes, they were all young; born in 1942, 1944 and so on, or 1939 and those other dates. But they were largely pre-school.

During the period after you became head of the Forestry Section, what were your major tasks in that period during these war years? What would you describe them as?

It was managing the forestry estate which involved the established areas through the labour force we'd acquired then, according to what was regarded as the standard prescription of pruning and thinning and planting and protection, fire control – without an assistant because I was the assistant who was left behind – doing all of that myself. I regarded that as an obligation in the code in that situation. I remember, since this is not going to be published, during that occasion I had to get the little hand-sewing machine for seed to Uriarra and there just wasn't any way of doing it, so I put it on my shoulder and on the bicycle and got it out that way. I had to stop a few times.

How much did it weigh?

It wasn't all that heavy but it was like a good pack. It was a little Planner Junior – two handles and little container for the seed and just a couple of small tines to open up the trench, and a front wheel. You could do it.

Were there any major policy changes in the period?

No, very much not. It was a matter of hold things as they were and try and prevent disability and loss and so forth. And we were lucky not to have any more fires, and the fire protection system had greatly improved so that the combination of things, improvement and lack of a critical year again, meant that we came through that pretty well unscathed.

You were the lone qualified forester during this period.

Yes.

How did the fire warning system improve?

Even though it was war years we got the lookout towers functioning. We got one at Stromlo and we had a bit of a tussle with the authorities because on the radio we were broadcasting some of the weather, such as wind direction and so on. What the heck they thought that would do to undermine the security of the country, I don't know, especially as it only had about a twenty mile range. Yes, we got that sited at central station at Stromlo and then we had these subsidiary portables which had to be operated to some extent from fixed aerials as you got out a bit. We had one set that could go on a pack horse, so that we reckoned we could keep illegal fire burning or uncontrolled fire burning on the western side of the Brindabella Range in control if we made a show of appearing there. So I did a fair bit of – with Jack and Doug Maxwell – packhorse work; perhaps two or three times a year to go in there, meet the people there, talk about what our aims were and at least give them the idea that it wasn't out of sight, out of mind, if they started doing some burning when they shouldn't. That worked pretty well.

Did you have some officers engaged in this work fulltime in the summer months or was it always a part-time thing, carried out in combination with other forest duties?

Very much the latter. There were no bodies specifically set aside for fire control work. That just had to be taken as part of the job, taken in your stride. We had, for example, on the radio, central station at Stromlo, a couple of women over the different years who were doing that part. No, the rest was very much ... well, it had always been part of the forester's activity and the Forestry Section so that was just taken as a matter of course.

The whole period that you worked in Forests, apart from the 1939 fire, were there any other major fires or indeed other catastrophes that affected the ... ?

There weren't any catastrophes. There were some fairly serious fires in which we had to get a number of men out, but fortunately the war years themselves were, in spite of the dry year of 1942 which was very dry, we didn't have any really major blow-up fires and we didn't lose any plantation. It wasn't until 1953 that there was a significant fire which burnt Stromlo.⁶ Oh yes, I think one

6 It actually occurred in 1952.

must acknowledge there was a bit of luck in this, but that's the way it went. It depends who you're speaking to.

Luck and good management. During this period, since it was basically a period of keeping things going, I assume that there was very little in the way of experimentation going on.

It's funny, you can always get a little bit of trialling in. In forestry that's almost part of the system and, if you want something laid out elaborately with the opportunity for correct statistical analysis, well, that's another matter, but I got a number of little trials in of one kind and another. I remember on Greenhills planting which was done about these years; that's the area on the right bank of the Molonglo just by Scrivener Dam, running from Stromlo back to the Cork Oak plantation. There was a new ... planting in grassland hadn't been done much because most of the planting was done on eucalypt forest which had been cleared for the purpose, but that was a different thing and there were some conditions there that were different and so I did some simple trials and experiments to see which was the best way to go there. They provided information. Also, of course, we had trials with cuttings that really was foreshadowing the work that is now associated with clonal planting of *Pinus radiata*. Some of that work of Max Jacobs and then Jack Fielding in the 1930s and early '40s was provided with field facilities for putting those trials out which were really very significant trials in Blue Range and in the 1940 plantation on Stromlo on the deviation of the Cotter Road at the Coppins Crossing turn-off; and some of those first clonal plantings on which later experiment and development was based to lead to the situation now, which is pretty highly advanced, in the use of cuttings as the planting stock was underway, so we kept that going very effectively, really.

That's quite good, I'm surprised about that.

In many ways, if you had a planting program going, it only meant just having enough energy to get up and do the extra in ensuring that the stuff went in where you wanted it to and it was recorded. But Andy Wood who remained with the Forest Research Institute was really the one who put a lot of the recording work into that. He was available through the war years and he was very good at it.

What about the rabbit menace when you first came into forests and during your period, had it been largely controlled or eradicated?

It was done the hard way. I had gone up to fairly large blocks, like 5,000 acres, all netted and extermination inside the netted area with usual methods of getting at the burrows, ripping up the burrows and cyano gas into the burrows and then maintaining the fence by regular patrol by a ranger and repairing any gaps. And then if any rabbits did get in, getting rid of them. The cost of a netting fence was pretty high. The cost of regular patrols was significant, anyway. One man would look after 5,000 acres, so there might have been three or four rabbit rangers. But that had to be kept going. This was well before myxomatosis.

And this was all through the Depression period and into the war years.

Yes, and that had been started by the arrival of J.C. Brackenreg in Canberra in about – I think it was in about 19 ... during the First World War, I think. He came in as an expert in rabbit control and extermination and became Lands Officer. He controlled both the lands and forestry. He was in charge of that, so I knew him pretty well. That's how that came about. He introduced the methods that had been developed up somewhere – Condobolin, Narrabri, somewhere in that part of New South Wales.

How successful would you rate these methods during the years that you were in ACT forests?

Very good indeed, costly but excellent. If you did the job properly, you got rid of the rabbits. And in fact if we hadn't done it, we wouldn't have plantations; and the stocking in the plantations was quite good, so the answer was, yes, very successful but, of course, with the trend in costs of labour and so on it became out of step as time went on.

On the same subject of potential disasters or nuisances, high winds have also affected ACT forests at some times.

Yes, there were, and we had, of course, plantations that were old enough to be susceptible to that sort of damage. There was a notable occasion in Stromlo, I think it must have been in the 1940s in which a few acres were blown down flat on the main east facing slope of Stromlo near the top. I looked at that with some considerable interest because it was the first time that there'd been something like that available to look at, and I was able to prepare a paper on what seemed to be some of the significant things to minimise and reduce the

chance of that sort of damage as a result of what I could see there. Then there were later ... but that was during the war years. That was never published, actually – it was too long. That's my version.

Tell us briefly what were the conclusions that came out in your recommendations?

The popular misconception was, expressed in the words 'the wind had got into the plantation' and that 'the trees were blown down like dominoes', that 'the one upwind went first and knocked over the downwind leeward ones'. But a bit of an examination of the stuff on the ground and looking at the way the branches were pulled back by the trees that would have been in touch with them [showed] that was quite wrong. There generally needed to be a starting area – that is, trees blown over – and that would usually be associated with some extra wet spot or some, perhaps, excessive thinning or something of that kind that gave a bit of a hole in the plantation; and then the trees fell into it because their support on the leeward had been removed and it wasn't the domino effect, it was the hole into which the trees fell and that hole progressively opened up to the windward and not to the leeward. The idea was that the domino went downwind and kept extending to the lee but it did not, it extended to the upwind side. Now, when you make an assessment of a situation and conventional wisdom is one thing, it takes a while to come round to the thinking that is the result of the evidence on the ground; so I found that a bit fascinating.

How would you overcome the problem?

You must be careful not to delay thinning or, if it is delayed, you must be careful then not to thin too heavily. So it's a matter of stand manipulation. Once you know of the risk ... The current wisdom is that you must be very careful of the *radiata* pine plantation after the eighteenth year and if you have delayed thinning then you must go cautiously. If you open up too heavily, then you get a bit of wind you're likely to run into trouble. Everybody knows that now, of course.

What about accidents to humans in the forests? Did you have any ...?

By and large our record was very good, I think. There was one that I found distressing. The clearing for planting was done by little contracts and the contractors who were doing – usually just two or three men – did the felling with an axe and hard work. On the Blue Range area which had plantations in the 1940, 1941, 1942, perhaps 1943 – I think it would be in the plantation

coming up for 1942, so it was the 1941 clearing – a man called Hamilton, Cletus Hamilton, who was the son of the road maintenance man at Uriarra, Roley Hamilton – the family was partly Chinese – he was one of the two contractors working on the Blue Range in this area. Jim Bradley who was the foreman out there told me what happened – because he was killed there. He was working too close to his neighbour and he got a call when the tree was going in his direction and he looked up and it hit him fair in the face and killed him on the spot.⁷

Terrible.

Terrible, unnecessary, too, that's the thing. The free aliens and Paulo Senino in particular, I remember, were there knowing that this had occurred; whether they were there when it did, I'm not quite sure, although I think they were. Then they wanted to follow, and I think did, the Italian custom of putting a little cairn with a cross on it.

I think that was done at their initiative. It wasn't an Australian custom to do that. So that was one thing I remember particularly. I think that was the only thing I can recall as a fatality, and I don't remember any really significant injuries occurring during the time. There were minor ones, of course, for various reasons. Once you get numbers of people like that getting into the fifties, sixties, you more or less get them. It's reduced with time, I fancy. But I don't think we were regarded as a high risk place.

You mentioned there that you were using contractors for, I think, thinning and some planting, too. Was this before World War II?

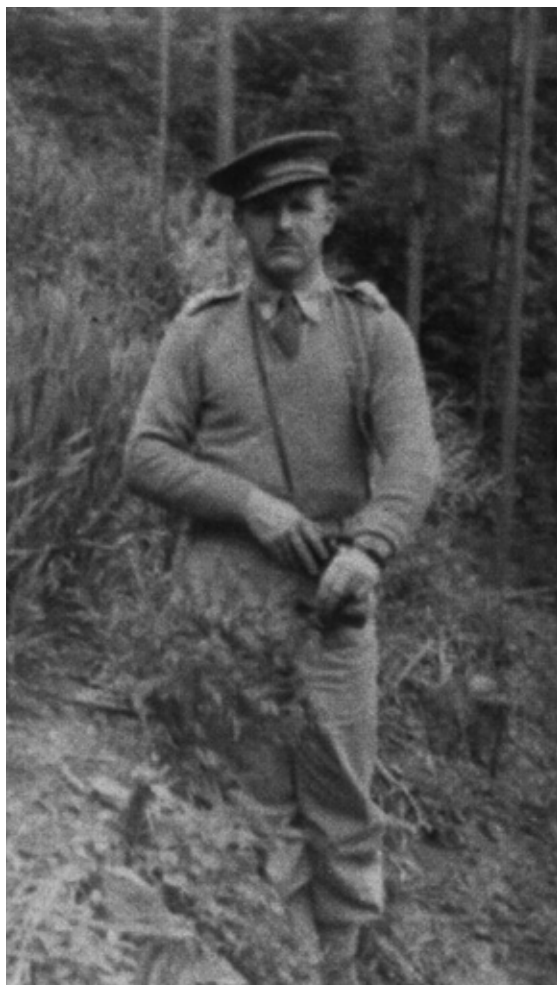
Both before and during. The logging at Stromlo, following, I guess, the pattern of South Australia, up there at Wirrabara, with Cyril Cole, had been to let small contracts and that carried on through the war. The small contracts at Stromlo during my time, which continued into the war years, that was one of the jobs I had to do in the war years was to advertise, select and let contracts and supervise them.

They were tiny contracts; two or three people. There were just a few names. The best contractors were of Italian origin so that Tranquillo Corsini, for example, was one and he employed Vic Res,⁸ who's still about I think. There

7 Cletus Charles Hamilton, son of Roland Augustus and Lucy Harriet Hamilton, was killed by a falling tree on 12 February 1944 (*Canberra Times*, 14 February 1944, p3).

8 Victor Res.

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Lindsay Pryor in the uniform
of the Volunteer Defence
Corps in World War 2.
(G. Pryor)

were one or two others and then also Glyn Cavanagh was running a little sawmill at Kingston, he did some. Bill Ginn did some. Cavanagh was also bringing in logs from Lees Creek and probably continued later until that group of log carters whose name I can't recall for the moment – it was well known; I do know it but I can't recall it for the moment ...

Not the Rosin Brothers?

No, it was well before then. But they're still about. Their name is still about on trucks. These contracts were ... the Stromlo ones were very interesting because

they were very personal. The forester marked the trees; you didn't leave that to any sub-professional. I used to dream in bed of a remote-controlled buggy, like a moon buggy, which would go in and you would give it instructions and there would be a visual transmission and you'd mark them that way – very vivid. It became reality, you see. Anyway, these contracts were let and particularly Corsini and Res, they were really muscle men, but very good – lifting heavy logs, not very big logs, but they were heavy for one man – and they worked out a beautiful system for doing it to avoid injury and so on and to handle logs; balancing them and so on. They'd snig with a horse then frequently.

Just one horse to pull logs in with?

They had just two or three logs together and they just had a bit of a shoe and pulled them, usually a bit down slope, and then loaded them onto the truck with this, often hand-loading.

I think it probably won't be unfair to mention one thing. There was unease with the AWU and the union organiser about letting contracts and particularly when it seemed that what they regarded as non-Australian; of course, they were citizens and this was, of course ... I didn't share the view that anybody who was a citizen could not be an Australian, so I had to be on the other side of the fence. Because it seemed ... because of the historical sequence led to a preponderance of people of Italian origin being the contractors, Bert Gardner who was the AWU organiser waited on me more than once.

I remember one somewhat heated interview in which he said, 'You're awarding contracts to black men.' I was a bit naive and I think with hindsight he meant men who had been declared black by the union. I took it at the time as being racist and that rather ran counter to what I believed, and so I said we were awarding it to people who were the lowest, good, sensible tenderers. And I said, 'Are you saying that Vic Res and Tranquillo Corsini are black men?' And Res, of course, was of Austrian-Italian origin – the most beautiful blue eyes you could imagine. I was a bit at fault then because Bert, I don't think, meant what I interpreted it to be, but it raised my hackles as being in the days when it wasn't too fashionable to be anti-racist. I'm no paragon of virtue, let me just say, but this was in the system and it was just one of those things. I learnt, too, of course. But they were good contractors and very good workers and they abided by their contract and they gave their prices and they kept to what they had to do. So that was the basis of the logging operation in 1939 which had been going from 1935 – or before 1935 – to 1939 and into the '40s.

Were the contractors only taking thinnings from the forests?

Yes, there was no clear felling. No, we didn't get to clear felling up till 1946 to my time. I don't think the first clear felling would have been done until forty to fifty years on top of 1917 planting or '15 planting. So let's say forty-five plus fifteen is 1960, isn't it? You see, that was much later. It's only now that the second clear felling is coming of age and the plantation age has probably declined a bit, but there were many light thinnings. Every two or three years we'd do another thinning in the old plantations and ease it out, just as was done at Wirrabara and Bundaleer.⁹

That's very important, though, this South Australian connection; the precedents that were set there.

And there was just this little bit, only 500 acres or so, this older plantation that Weston had planted between 1915 and 1925 – 500 acres. It was a classical forester/grower/sawmiller relationship. Fronting up to Charlie Francis down at the sawmill was one of the trials for a young forester. He was in danger of having a stroke or apoplexy so that when he would start off by saying, 'I want better logs; they're no good, rubbish!' And of course we hadn't got better logs anywhere. We weren't going to give him only the cream and leave the rest because we had better logs but not that we wanted to sell. As his face would change from bright scarlet to pale purple, I decided I better ease up a bit and be more soothing in tone. Then after that, of course, it was Les Willis and that was an easier situation. I think we had more timber then, too.

Just getting back to the contractors for a moment and particularly the union's objections to them. I assume that the main objection of Gardner was that he would have been claiming that they were effectively undercutting what union labour would have been getting for the same job.

Yes, probably that and also that there would be two elements: that; and also people of Australian ethnic origin were being excluded, and that the contractors were putting in prices that were too low to provide a reasonable income for people doing that sort of work. Yes, he certainly would have been wanting to oppose contract system and ways of doing work that way, but not to the extent of taking industrial action to stop it. My relationship, I think, was one of respect for each other and I didn't regard myself as on bad terms

⁹ Bundaleer near Jamestown, South Australia, was the site of the first plantation forest in Australia, in 1876.

with him. He came in to see me in the forestry office which was at Acton, now under the lake, I think, whenever he wanted to. He used to do that every three or four weeks. I rather liked Bert Gardner, as a matter of fact.

It raises the other question of why the Forestry Section went in the way of letting contracts instead of going the way of using union labour. Was this another South Australian inspired move?

In the vernacular, you bet, I think. And, of course, it was the kind of thing that if you do logging by day labour there are so many little intricacies of coordinating things and so on that it's very difficult to organise that on a day labour basis. Some things you want to do by day labour with employees, but not that kind of operation; and, of course, now this has become very much the accepted way of going.

So it was a matter of keeping things simple, let the contactors do it and keep doing it.

They were small contracts; they were very small contracts, but during the early war years like '41 and 1942, I was then dealing with a man from Queanbeyan, the family is still about, called Vic Sacagio, but he was called 'Vic Sacaccio' always and he accepted that as the way his name would be pronounced. Vic Sacagio was running a little sawmill somewhere – Queanbeyan, I suppose, was it, or would it be Kingston, perhaps? He was cutting case timber. He was buying timber. Was he logging? I'm not quite sure. He may have had some contractors, too, later. But it was the price that he would pay for the wood – the royalty, as it was called – and the market was there, the demand was keen and I reckon that the timber was worth more than three and sixpence a hundred super feet that was being paid, and in two or three successive contracts for purchase with Vic, we agreed to up the price and we got it up to five and six or six shillings a hundred super. And blow me down, when 'Coley'¹⁰ came back and got into the saddle again in 1946 he reduced it to where it was. I was flabbergasted. But prices are somewhere near the mark – I'm not quite sure.

How did the Italians get into the forestry work and the contract work – Tranquillo Corsini and so on?

I suspect because they'd had some exposure to it before they came here. I

¹⁰ C.R. (Cyril) Cole.

don't know that for sure. They were both from the part of Italy which had been Austrian before the First World War, called Treviso, north of Trieste, north of Venice. I think Treviso is the province. There is forest in that area, so I suspect that they'd had at least some exposure to that kind of activity there. And it was the kind of thing – manual work – that they seemed to look out for. They would also do, some of them, felling contractors, clearing and that sort of thing. Firewood was the common one that they went for. It was the kind of activity that suited ... It must have gone back to some experience. I didn't explore that ever, I should have but I didn't.

Was Corsini the first to get into the contracting area?

There were others. When I started in 1936 he was in it, but there may have been others. There was a bloke called Joe Pozzolo¹¹ who, I think, was employed by Corsini – another name I remember. Those three – Corsini, Res and Pozzolo – were three that I remember particularly, but there were others, too. I think Sacagio also, but he would have been employing people. He must have had some contractors, too. Bill Ginn usually priced himself out. Bill died a year or two ago. He got a job every so often, but he tended to be more involved in the carting because he always ran trucks. Every so often Bill would come down to a price which would allow the award of a contract. I knew Bill very well latterly. He could never quite ... His price would go up and then he'd miss out and then he'd come in again.

When did the system of contracts first start? Do you know that?

I think it must have been before 1934, so I would say as soon as there were logs big enough. It was the setting up of the sawmill at Kingston, so whatever date that was – at the Controller of Stores area at Kingston – that would have been the starting time of the contracts. That must have been the early '30s, but I haven't got a precise date.

I've interviewed a couple of people. One in particular, an Italian who worked in the 1950s, and the Italian influence is extremely strong.

Yes, it still is, as you say, with Nino Rosin at this stage. That family, of course, is well and truly in it, yes.

¹¹ Guiseppe Dal Pozzolo, born Vicenza, Italy, 1900.

Lindsay Pryor

What would you say was your biggest achievement in the whole time that you spent in ACT Forests, or in the Forestry Section? Or were there so many?

Oh yes, it's very hard to pick (laughs). I always got satisfaction out of doing the job. I suppose I was a bit stick-in-the-mud and single-minded and didn't go beyond my earlier decision to become a forester in time, although I did a lot of work that was not conventional forestry – in botanical – which was personal research, really which I continued into Parks and Gardens. Achievements in forestry – I had the satisfaction of keeping the place rolling and I think making progress, like the little financial return which wasn't a very big part of it, but keeping that up to where it might have been and keeping things running efficiently. I think labour relationships were always adequate; I would say good, really. I think that depended on a good deal of personal input because it didn't come about just automatically. So keeping the program going and up to date and within the prescriptions that were seen to be the ones to use was that, and not being burnt again. As I say, there was luck in that.

You were important, though.

Harold William Tuson

Interview with Harold Tuson recorded in the sound studio of the Australian War Memorial on 13 May 1994



Harold Tuson as a young man in the 1920s dressed in his Sunday best. (E. Campbell)

Harold Tuson was born at Macquarie Fields northwest of Hobart in August 1898, the first child of Thomas and Edith Tuson. As he was growing up, the family moved around Tasmania, mainly the west and northwest where his father worked at a variety of jobs. After a disrupted schooling, Harold left school early and worked at various manual occupations, becoming a skilled axeman in the process. He first left Tasmania for the mainland at the age of seventeen in 1915 and, over the next eight years, travelled back and forth across Bass Strait as he worked at jobs in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. He was often accompanied by his brother, Thomas Charles ('Lance') Tuson. After stints of shearing, laying railway tracks, cane-cutting, mining and building, Harold ended up with a job in Cootamundra about 1922.

Harold Tuson

Briefly returning to Tasmania, he married Margaret Emily Davies at Staverton in January 1923. He promptly went back to Cootamundra, his wife joining him there soon afterwards. By his own account, he moved to Canberra in late 1926 to take up a position as an overseer with the Forestry Branch. He was overseer at Pierces Creek for a short time before transferring to Kowen. He and his brother Lance cleared land and planted the first radiata pine at Kowen in 1926–27. Sadly, Lance Tuson died at Queanbeyan Hospital in July 1928 aged only 24.

Harold spent the rest of his working life in the ACT's forests. He recounts his work and other experiences in the forests in the following interview. One thing he does not mention in the interview, however, is the invaluable practical guidance he gave during this time to forestry students and new graduates. Similarly, he fails to mention that during World War 2 he supervised a labour force in the forests that was made up of members of the Civil Aliens Corps; these were internees or refugees from enemy countries who were deemed not to pose any threat.¹

After 34 years of work in the forests, Harold retired in 1960, he and his wife Margaret moving into a house they bought in Reid. In the intervening years, they had raised a family of five, comprising four daughters and a son. Margaret died in June 1975. Harold then moved to Griffith where he lived for the rest of his life. He died on 1 September 1995 aged 99.

The interview with Harold was recorded on 13 May 1994 when he was 95 years old. Notwithstanding his years, his memory and mental acuity were sharp. Interestingly, he spoke in an old bushman's manner which no doubt reflected the oral rather than bookish tradition he grew up with, but which by the same token can occasionally make it hard to follow him. Nevertheless, the interview is a unique memoir of the tough life of a forestry worker and his wife and children in ACT forests from the 1920s to the end of the 1950s. It also reveals a hard-working, 'straight from the shoulder', feisty character who was forthright in expressing his views, especially if he thought something was not right.

¹ In his interview, Lindsay Pryor spoke about the members of the Civil Aliens Corps working in the forests.

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Harold was a forestry worker from way back but you don't need me to tell his story; he can tell his own story, I think. So, I'd like to start by asking him first of all where were you born, Harold?

Macquarie Plains in Tasmania on 20/9/1898.

Macquarie Plains, Tasmania. Why did you come to Canberra? Or did your parents come to Canberra?

This is some story. I was living in Cootamundra, working on the Municipal Council.

Yeah, keep going.

And worked for the Municipal Council in Cootamundra. By way of a change I went and worked on a mine. Some distance out there's a place called Cunnengah [?].² There I met a chappy who had worked with B.J. Bond. I suppose you've got some records of him.

B.J. ... ?

B.J. Bond.³

Bond. No, I don't know B.J. Bond. Tell me about ...

And the mine closed down and I went back to work on the Council and 'Bondy' came down here to Canberra just at a time when the sewer was about cut out and registered, stating that he was a married man, returned soldier and a miner, but he wanted to register as a miner. Came back in a couple of days' time and they told him, yes, there was a job as a miner, but it wasn't going to last long. There was a chappy looking for men to start on commercial forestry and that chappy was G.J. Rodger.

Oh, right. When was this, Harry?

That was - I couldn't say the month but I think it would be about April 1926.⁴

Oh, right, yeah.

The first planting, as far as I know, at Stromlo for commercial purposes. By the way, I was reading the book that was launched here last Saturday and

2 This is probably Cullinga, to the east of Cootamundra.

3 Bonnor J. Bond was recruited in 1926 by G.J. Rodger as Overseer at Uriarra. He was promoted the following year to Foreman, with overseers under him at each forest (GMCK-S).

4 Harold Tuson gave inconsistent dates for when he started forestry work in the Capital Territory. One specific date that he said that he started was 15 October 1926, but he is also reported to have indicated that he started in 1927. Records indicate that Harold Tuson was initially appointed to Pierces Creek in 1927 before starting at Kowen later that year (GMCK-S).

she mentioned that she used the words 'planting for cash'; the same thing, I suppose.

That's Ann Gugler's book, is it?

Mm-hmm. At the same time they started planting on the catchment area at Uriarra.

Could I just go back? What brought you from Tasmania to New South Wales in the first place?

Well, I don't know, about the same, I suppose, that brings most Tasmanians from a small place like that. I'll go back to that, will I?

Oh no. Did you enlist in the war or anything like that?

No, I was fourteen when the war broke out but that doesn't make any difference; I was nineteen when it finished, but they didn't like this [presumably holding up his hand with missing fingers].

I see.

and therefore I ...

How did you lose your fingers?

Just fooling around and another kid accidentally cut them off. I put my hand on a stump and looks away and he grabs the axe in without looking either and severed them that way. That happened at Queenstown in Tasmania.

Was your father a miner down there?

He wasn't a miner at Queenstown, he was a smelter hand. But later in life he managed a couple of small prospecting mines around about the Cradle Mountains in Tasmania. Have you been to the Cradles?

Yes, I have.

I reckon you would be. Just in passing, we were the closest family living to Dove Lake in a house, but not on the road that you would take when you went there on the Forth River. As a matter of fact, you know where the post office stump [is]? I'm not that good with it. The coaches would pull up and show you that's where they used to deliver letters a hundred years ago. I thought you might remember that.

5 Ann Gugler, *The Builders of Canberra 1909 - 1929*, Canberra, 1994.

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No, I don't remember that.

That's where the road from where I lived met the one that you would go on [inaudible]. I don't know where I suppose you went over the dam at Cethana, I suppose. Of course, being in Tasmania is one thing and going to the lake is another – going there is another.

Yeah, so anyway, you grew up in Tasmania ... go on.

Until the age of seventeen. Getting back to my growing up I can claim to be about the youngest navvy in Tasmania. At thirteen and a half I went on the pay [inaudible] at two thirds of an adult wage which at that time was five shillings. Three and a half years later I left, getting the adult wage which was then eight shillings. It had risen sixpence in three years.

Who were you working for, Harry?

The ganger, a chap named Alex Loane.

And what was the company you were working for?

It was the government. So then I'd just turned seventeen when I came to New South Wales. Worked on the railway in New South Wales for some time. Went back to work around mines and slag ground, next five years, and married and come back to Cootamundra where I'd lived before and settled down. So that brings me up to there.

Rodger started in 1926 and planted a hundred acres or so at Stromlo and something like that out on the catchment area. Bond went with him. When he went to the bureau,⁶ Rodger had been in and wanted some fellows, and the chap pointed this out to Bond. So Bond took it on and was working at Stromlo. Rodger then offered him the ganger's job at Uriarra. When he finished that, he said he was starting another place which was Kowen and he would like a married couple to live there. So Bond came up to Cootamundra to visit some friends and I came back on 4 November 1926 to see Rodger about that job and a fortnight later I started.⁷

Right, in November 1926. What did your wife think about this?

Well, she didn't mind. I can only repeat what I said to her. Come down and had a look at it and everything like that and explained it to her just to ask her what she thought of it. She said, 'If it suits you, it suits me.'

⁶ The Commonwealth Forestry Bureau.

⁷ This may actually have been October or November 1927.

Harold Tuson



Members of the McInnes family at their homestead at Kowen in the early 1900s.
The homestead was occupied by Harold Tuson and his family in the late 1920s.
(G. Costello)

That's very good of her. When did you get married?

9 January 1923.

*Right, so you'd been married about three and a half years when you started ...
And living in Cootamundra about three and a half years.*

Yeah, okay. When you got the job in Kowen, where did you live?

Where did I live?

Yeah.

McInnes homestead. They had moved out seven years before I lived in it. I don't know whether any families had ever ... People had certainly batched in it. McInnes moved from the house, but remained as the lessee of the ground; so it was that way.

What kind of house was it?

A pisé house with fifteen inch walls and, looking at from the outside, that's it.

Yes. Wow, what a beautiful photograph. We might get the ACT Forests people to copy a few of these for their own records, I think, if you don't mind. That would be great. That's a very solid, nice looking house you've got there. I thought things might have been quite a bit rougher for you when you first went out.

That's coming.

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Your wife like this house, did she?

She wasn't the complaining sort, so you never knew much that way. That's another view of it.

Yes, that's a good picture, too. That would be one, I think, the ACT fellows would like to copy.

And then – Rodger was the forester – shortly after he had a trip in Tasmania, just on loan, I think, like that. Came back and then went to New South Wales. Max Jacobs then took over; all of which you know. And then Cole took over.

About that time they decided to stop Kowen,⁸ they didn't like the look of ... As it was progressing the trees didn't look good at all. Apart from that they wanted to concentrate on the catchment area and country like that.

What was Kowen like when you first got there, Harry?

The property?

The area that was to be forested, what was it like at that time?

Native forest. All those hills that are now planted were eucalypts. Some of them had been grazing properties before the resumption by the government and it was overgrown and nobody happened any more to graze on it or anything like.

Kowen property itself was overgrown with green wattle trees.

That was the reason I understood why they permitted forestry to go there because the lessee, McInnes, wouldn't tend to the wattle and that sort of thing. So they took 500 acres over for a start and now it might be 10,000, I suppose, I don't know.

I think currently there's about 1,100 acres in Kowen at the moment.

When I said 10,000 I'm thinking of the overall total, I think. The last I heard I think it was about that. The last I heard anything like that was ... Ten years ago I was up there with Mick Arthur and somebody else who has since died.⁹

What was your job in Kowen then, what did you have to do?

Well, in Rodger's words, I started as an overseer. Just previous to me coming down they decided there would be overseers. Previous to that, Southwell,¹⁰

⁸ This was in 1930.

⁹ This was probably Ian McArthur and Mark Edgerley (GMCK-S).

¹⁰ Tom Southwell (1888–1957).

the first man employed by Rodger, was employed, as he told me himself, as a ranger. And then followed Bond So they decided somewhere about September '26 roughly that there would be overseers. So I started there at six pound a week as an overseer on my own.

An overseer with nobody to oversee. You had no staff.

No and that was okay. I liked being on my own, too. But the thing was about 116 acres. They cut it out, everything. Rodger was very good that way [inaudible]. Fall the green, fall the dry, fall the wattle, put a half chain break all around it, chip a three-foot break around the centre, and I done all that on my own. Then he said do about twenty chain all around the dry. That was dry timber. That was to protect [?] the forest that was to be. While this was going on they started, I understand, a new nursery at Yarralumla. It didn't produce as many plants as they expected. It was very dry up there. I was the last in. In '27 I got only 10,000 plants and that was known as the 'twenty-seven' on part of this 116 acres, if I remember rightly, but the remainder was done in 1928 of that block.

But getting back to what I done. It often amuses me now. When Rodger said it's not important how much work I actually done, [I] took an interest in the place. An interest in the place was, if somebody was cutting the wood on the Sutton Road or pinching the wood, I'd go down there and patrol that and pitch them off. Listen to all the lies that they liked to tell me: 'Oh, I didn't know this was the ACT,' and on and on you went. The next hour, the week, whatever it might be, I'd see a smoke and I'd have to mount the horse and go and look for this smoke. And get a ring, say, from one of the graziers, somebody's broken into his gate and took some wood or left the gate open; so I'd have to stick the axe in the tree and go after that. There's a lot of people doing those jobs now; they were all mine.

Right, so you had everything to do yourself. It sounds like a lot of hard work. This pinching of wood that was going on was this only during the Depression period or was it all the time?

Oh yes, it was all the time. From time to time, I used to when [?] invited and Coley¹¹ says, 'Come in.' Have a shave [?]. 'What's happened in Kowen?' – because Kowen was dormant for about five years, I think it was. Down the hill

¹¹ C.R. Cole, Forestry Officer.

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comes the chap with a dray and a load of wood. Coley pulled up and asked him had he got a licence. No, he didn't know you had to have a licence. And Coley said, 'Yes, you have to have a licence.' So it went on and he would send one out.

He'd send the money in and we'd get a licence. Coley says, 'I don't know why it is they have to tell all those lies and all that story because ...' Then that fellow would go away – same with me – and tell people, 'I put it over Tuson.' What can you do? Only sit there and you're not going to tell him he's a liar and you're not going to arrest him, you're not going to take his horse and dray or [inaudible].

You said a minute ago you used to get a ring from some of the surrounding properties if they saw smoke or something. Did you have a telephone at the Kowen house?

Yes, at McInnes', they put the phone in themselves, one of those single wire ones from tree to tree; that had been there for years, joining up down on somewhere about the Sutton Road onto the PMG stuff.

That puts you in contact with the outside world. I thought you'd be fairly remote up there.

We were too because, for instance, we knew no-one so we weren't getting social rings or anything like that. We never got many rings on the telephone even at Pierces Creek because we never knew many people until the family grew up; then we got plenty of rings.

Yeah, I could believe that. I know what it's like. How long did you stay at Kowen for, you and your family?

How long did I live at Kowen?

Yeah.

Three and a half years.

Just three and a half years and what happened after that?

They closed it down and I done a stint then with Bradley at Uriarra,¹² the beginning of 1930 – January 1930. While they were arranging that, I was to go to Black Mountain on the wood. Rodger was very keen those days – it come to nothing now – about wood for the ACT in future years.

¹² Jack Bradley had replaced Bonnor Bond as Overseer at Uriarra in 1927.

Wood for what – firewood?

Firewood, yes. And he was going to set out there and cut out and rotation regrowth; a system like that. So I was waiting on that. In the meantime the Pierces Creek job came and so I went there and I started there on 9 November 1930 – just in passing – and finished on 1 April 1960.

Thirty years, that's a good record.

Just a few months short, wouldn't it be?

Yeah.

That sort of thing.

Where did you live when you went to Pierces Creek?

I lived for about seven months at Westlake, the old Westlake. I've got a refresher on that, perhaps you wouldn't be interested. There was a book launched last Saturday by Ann Gugler. Gugler, yes. Have you read it?

I've got it. I haven't read it all but I've read some of it. It's quite interesting, yeah.

I got a bit of a refresher on living at Westlake. We came there in 1930 and she came there in 1940. A big turnover then – between them [i.e., between 1930 and 1940] – because most of those people that lived there in my time, tradesmen, they had an offer for houses that were built – like semi-detached – around Manuka and those places and most of them moved out then.

So you were at Westlake for eight months?

Yes, it would be April – it was Easter. I know I shifted out over the Easter holidays to Westlake and shifted out of Westlake on 9 November.

Where did you shift out to?

To Pierces Creek and that's what I shifted into. We get back into that.

This is a bit of a come-down from the pisé house at Kowen. How did you like living in that, Harry?

I'd done a lot of camping and that sort of thing and my wife was reared on a farm. It wasn't a farm, I don't know what you'd call it. They had a farm, they kept the post office in Stafford in Tasmania for seventy years – not her, but in the family – together with a little shop, so she had a mix of everything. She didn't complain. Luckily she wasn't a complaining type.

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Harold Tuson's daughter, Ella Campbell (right), at the front gate of one of the houses that the family occupied at Pierces Creek, November 1994. (E. Campbell)

In the house at Pierces Creek did you have electricity or telephones or anything like that?

There was a telephone, a single wire telephone, because that was essential. There was nothing there, only what you see. There wasn't even a copper. So I said to Coley that there was no copper. He never spent anything on anything. He thought there was one standing in the paddock in the year that they'd used the previous year for planting. It was at Stromlo. I'd seen it there [inaudible]. 'Well, yes, if it's still there, Tuson,' he said. 'You can have it. If it's not there, there's no copper.' Lo and behold it was there. It came out [that] it had no flue and it had no grate. That's what we had there.

Your wife must have been pleased to get it, anyway.

I don't know whether she was pleased or not because there's nothing much you could do about it. Cole wouldn't spend anything on the place or on anything. Anything he could scrounge around, say, hutments from old camps in here – there was a few of them around then – and pulling down some old stuff at Duntroon when they was changing over, and getting second-hand material like that. I remember once he got several ton of cement. We used it and it was no good; it was too old, it was dead. So it was a dead loss.

What sort of work did you start doing at Pierces Creek?

Because it was November we'd chip breaks. When I went there one man, a chap named Skerry,¹³ living in there in some cubicles with his family. I was chipping breaks. And then on it was – have you been out around Pierces Creek?

Yes.

I suppose they still carry on the same. There was about 900 acres cut off and all were known as sugarloaf plantation. We ploughed that and started planting in 1932, no '31s there. So from then on it was clearing and fencing and had to get the rabbits out.

What were you planting at that time?

The year we started there it was all *radiata*, and all *radiata* for one or two years later; and then we put a lot of *ponderosa* in. There was one compartment, compartment 50, what was known as the 'Hardy block', it had quite a number of stuff in it: *torreyana*, *laricio*, *jeffreyi*, *ponderosa*, *coulteri*. I think that's the cleaned the nursery out. I think Coley got something for nothing – that was good for him. It was only cut out three or four years ago. I haven't touched much but, I think, within the last twelve months. My daughter finished up at the Forestry School when we were working about. So she told me that the last fifty had been cut out. It had everything in it. That's only just sort of a show block. Many of them didn't do much good at all. Got back on to *radiata*, but far too many *ponderosa* – I notice in many cases they've gone. I don't know where they went. Do you notice the *ponderosa*? They're behind the kiosk at the Cotter. I think they've had a couple of go's to ... of course, they mightn't want to take them there, right at there because it covered up a hillside. But to sum up there, they couldn't sell them. Nobody wanted them.

Why not?

I don't know. I remember the chappy telling me, he said, 'These *ponderosa* are as good as oregon as a timber,' but they didn't want it.

How did the ponderosa grow? Did it grow very well around this area?

Well, they're not very big now, they're twelve by twelves. They've given them a fair chance and they were planted in 1930 and they're nothing now. The shape is all right but the size is not there by any means.

¹³ Thomas Skerry.

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So the radiata was probably a better bet?

Even now – and there was no talk about curing at that time then – I remember asking Rodger if there was anything in these pines for the country. He quoted how much was going out of the country for timber and I think it still continues to go out. The country will get the timber and we'll retain the money, but it was only supposed to be for cases, for case-making.

For fruit and things like that?

And I remember trying to get it on the market a few years later. A chappy went to Coley, he'd used a few, he said, 'I want to know whether there's any more available.' He tried the stuff before I started cutting them at Stromlo and those places. He said, 'I made some garage doors out of it and they're good.' Coley said, 'I wouldn't have let you have it had I known you were going to make garage doors.' He didn't want the timber to get a bad name. It's unsuitable for it; might be now, I don't know, because there was no ... it was just straight out of the paddock and make a door of it. There's the house out at Murrumbidgee, never seen anything like it. They'd shrunk about that much end on.

Yeah, gee, that's quite a shrinkage, a couple of inches.

In the weatherboard. Terrific. I was surprised I didn't know anything about timber. I can understand with shrinking this way. I don't know why I wouldn't think that they would shrink end on. Overlap was all right, you could allow for that, but you couldn't allow much for where you butt them on here because in three years' time they was like that.

A big gap between the planks of wood.

The house is still there at the pump house¹⁴ if ever you want to have a look at that. They've puttied up about that wide.

Right. Towards the end of the 1930s there were major bushfires in the Canberra area in the forests. Were you involved in fighting the bushfires in 1939?

Yes. I've forgotten now how much was burnt out at Pierces Creek, but there was two fires: one come through from Coree, down over the Cotter and into ... burnt out the first plantation; on the catchment area burnt out and then along to where this recent fire started – the big one, just recent – and there was about four compartments burnt out there. That one started from a lightning strike.

¹⁴ The Cotter pumping station.

The other one came through from, I think, Brindabella. Come through Uriarra, burnt out Mount McDonald and quite a lot of that. So we had a bit of fire going there.

Was the Pierce's Creek plantation affected very much by the fire in 1939?

1939. Well, that's ... Lost the 500 acres there. I suppose we lost about ... I think about 150 acres at Paddy's River, off the catchment. So that was the loss there. There's been one or two afterwards – burnt out and burnt a few fires out.

You must have felt fairly lucky, I guess, all through the 1930s or from the outbreak of the Great Depression up till the mid-1930s to have a job all that time.

Yes, to come here in 1930 and actually there's a question of [inaudible] start here in 1928. Maybe, listening to it on the air, people that were put off in the different States and here it happened, it came in right after the 1927 opening of Parliament House because when I came here there were men everywhere. Like everything else, they were the government, they made a date, one, two or three years, I don't know ahead, when we'd open Parliament. And then, of course, when it came to the last twelve months we find we'll have to wriggle our hips to make this work, so there were. This was actually in 1927 ... men everywhere doing this, that and the other. But soon after that they cut down so that it was well and truly on its way in '28 and started to bite in 1930; so I was lucky.

I don't know how I finished with the job on the Municipal Council, whether it was respected much in Cootamundra, I don't know but I'd be amongst the first three or the last three if it had come to reductions which it had to. I could say this, I had no regrets about that I ever came when I came and I've got no regrets when I left.

That's good. Right through the 1930s did you live in the house at Pierces Creek that you showed me in the photograph?

The cubicles?

Yes.

Yes, we put in there until 1932, about a month before Christmas 1932 and we then went into another one.

Just in passing, Coley came out one day because it was direct between ... It was only half a dozen [employees]. I think I was the fifth on the job and there was only a few of us, apart from the planting season and things like that. So he used to come out and have a ride around. He came out this day: 'Is that all you

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have to show me, Tuson?' I said, 'Yes,' I said, 'otherwise [Inaudible].' He said, 'There's a man from the Age or the Argus been pressuring me for a day or two, wanting to have a talk on forestry and I've now had time. I can get back early now if that's all you've got to show me.' And I said, 'You should wait; the wife's just going to get the camera and you could show the type of overseer's house in forestry.' 'Many people, Tuson, would be very pleased to live in a house like that.' I said, 'They'd have a lot to account for their family for.' We never argued. We only had argument in the thirty years as how we worked together, Coley, so we had a lot of regard for one another.

That's good.

We could have a go, the same as Lin Pryor. I reckon I got on terrific with Lin Pryor, but when we had a row it was a blistering one. You ask Lin.

I will.

Only the one and no ill feeling now or then afterwards.

That's the way to do it. Get it all on the table.

In the end, the worst Coley said to me, he said, 'You can be difficult.' And I never asked him why, in what way.

If you only ever had one argument, you couldn't have been that difficult.

Those days everybody did a lot that they never got paid for and you had to draw the line somewhere. Coley expected the wife to be in the house whenever he rung up and all that sort of thing; any fires in the districts – her just to hang around the phone and answer messages and all that sort of thing, and it was all for nothing. So there came a time when all that sort of thing has altered, but there came a time when you get a bit sick of it.

Yes, so your wife was doing a bit of work for the Forestry people unpaid.

Yes, all the wives. There were three of them: Mrs Southwell, Mrs Bradley and my wife. Mrs Bradley was always threatening she was going to bill them, charge them.

Where were we then?

We were talking about just the 1930s and where you were living and after you moved out of the ...

That's our second house that we went to in '32.

And this is at Pierces Creek, too?

Yes.

Right.

You'll find mention of those houses. They were cubicles from the brickyards. Four cubicles, separate, four doors into the paddock and that sort of thing. And so they brought one out after I was telling Cole about the overseer's house. And they landed it in the paddock, just there like that, and I wouldn't go into it. That's the sort of thing I was difficult on. So then spent a hundred and twenty pound on it, to it, [inaudible] and I spent the other I think I hung a tent fly up in front of it.

You spent 120 of your own money?

No, got a contractor to come in and do it again up. It's got a very tall chicken wire fence around it.

What's the purpose of that?

That was to keep the snakes away from my five kids.

You had five kids at this time, in 1932. Where did they go to school?

Telopea and Canberra High and St Christopher's – a mixture.

How did they get to school from Pierce's Creek each day?

They walked down a track through the pines which is now the existing road as you go from the kiosk up to the depot. Used to go round the old road when I went there and all the schooling went there. And they walked until the last twelve months or so, I think. One or two of them got a ride when the bus came up after that road was put in.

So they walked all the way into Canberra, too?

No, only to the kiosk.

Where they got picked up.

Yes, government bus there. Long before we went there – my earliest recollection – there was the bus coming out along the Cotter Road. And when it started – I did know but I've forgotten, but before we came there – but they had to walk to the kiosk.

Right.

It's a building there now. Just a bus shelter next to the caretaker's house. Well, that was the bus shed for the school bus.

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Right. As we all know at the end of the 1930s the Second World War broke out and I'm just wondering how that affected you and your family and the forest work at that time.

No, I think they just went on as usual.

No cut backs in funds or anything for you.

I've got a bit of a black out on ...

I just thought with the outbreak of the war that you might have been restricted with the amount of money that was available for forestry and also the amount of staff that was available.

No, I don't think so because they had a bit of money over each year and I can remember [that] rather than let it go back you'd buy some material.

Was this Rodger who was buying the material or Cole? I'm sorry, who was buying the material?

No, Cole was just the opposite. I think he delighted in letting money go back previously, like right through the Depression. When Coley [went] into the army and Pryor took over, Pryor had a more sensible approach because, I don't know, most cases [inaudible] if you don't spend one lot you're likely to get it cut for the next year.

That's exactly right.

They bought up fencing materials and things like that and a few things.

So you kept going right through the war without any real problems, at all.

Yeah.

Right.

They just hung onto their men, as a rule, kept them out of the army. Not me, age used to keep me out.

Right, so that they deliberately tried to keep them out of the army.

We had a few out there in 1940, quite a few, and I said to Lin [Pryor], talking about different ones, I said, 'That chappy, he would like to stay.' 'Yes,' he said, he'd keep him out of the army. Well, of course, wood production was very important for the war effort and they might have wanted as many men as possible to stay on to keep wood production going or to even build it up.

Never cut any wood at Pierces Creek, there, to an extent?

A little bit perhaps with cleaning up just to appease. There was always

somebody, 'Look, you're cutting down good trees and they're burning good wood' and everything like that. So that you might cut down 500 trees [inaudible] wood or anything like that, but stack twenty ton. We'd say, 'Oh, we'd produce ...' It's not being burnt, it's being sent in to the hostels or somewhere like that. But they did cut a lot of wood at Uriarra, but not at Pierces Creek.

How did the plantations at Pierces Creek go when you were there? Did they grow well when you were there?

With the exception of 1941 [inaudible] ... sorry, what?

I think it was exception of 1941, 1942 and there was a drought. And I remember I always claimed, and not very popular for it, anyone that couldn't grow a radiata tree couldn't wheel a wheelbarrow. There was a woman that came here; she was from the university, several years ago. She said, 'What do you mean by that?' She pointed out about 1942 and it was nearly all almost a wipe-out - or 1941 it was, they were. I didn't bother carrying on with it. But we had twelve inches of rain and we'd re-sown the burnt-out stuff from 1939. I can remember we didn't have much. We read a bit about forestry in one of the States of America. They were quite happy because they'd grown good pines on eighteen inches of rain and they put that down because there was a lot of fogs in this district and things like that. I didn't point out to her that there was a lot of difference between eighteen inches of rain and twelve inches of rain; you don't grow many pines on twelve inches of rain. And as Rodger said to me this is a very dry district, dry winds, and that sort of thing, so that they were no good. Other years fared well enough.

After the war there was another major fire in 1952 which you would remember. How did that affect you and the Pierces Creek area, if at all?

Yes, we lost a bit up there. I can remember the day quite well because it was one of those days when there's a number of lightning strikes. There was the one that caused all the damage down around Stromlo and one at Pierces Creek up under Black Spring Mountain which we went into and we was there when the other was going on. But we never lost much on that. It never got away. After the 1939 fire, I think, there'd been a bit of a program to build up fire trails and to set up a warning system for fires.

Did you find that helped at all in the '52 fire?

Well, in the 1939 [fire], Pryor went after these things, but of course it, too,

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Harold Tuson at Pierces Creek about 1938, with a house and plantations in the background. (E. Campbell)

Coley might have done the same thing for all I know had he been here; but, of course, he went into the army about the same time. But up on the Tidbinbilla block, he had an outside break at the time and continued on afterwards, it had a half chain break. He said, 'Well, make it a chain.' Otherwise there wasn't much to it. Gradually the roads took shape and then when you did get a vehicle come along they could get into it, but previous to that there'd be no roads made and it wasn't accessible on many occasions for a vehicle.

So it would make fire-fighting very difficult indeed.

Yes, Rodger, [inaudible], in the first instance we were make these – these are fire breaks – and always keep to the ridges which is natural enough, of course, to combat a fire and we'll make the roads afterwards. And there'd been no roads made until Lin Pryor come on the job. And these other places, of course there's stumps and everything like that. It might have been all right in here where they'd been planting on what had been grazing ground, but some of the heavily timbered [country] you couldn't get through; you might have to cut a stump or two out of your way and that sort of thing.

What were the living conditions like in the houses you lived in at Pierces Creek in the 1940s and early '50s?

The houses?

Yeah.

Well, there was the cubicles we started off in and the other one was just a four compartment cubicle, all open the [inaudible] side of the country and knock one petition out and make one long room – that was [inaudible]. Out of that room there were two bedrooms and they've got two cubicles and a dunny and a veranda, something like that. They built the first two houses – you would have seen them. I've got them out there. Contract – they're still there – 1936. I thought that was so little improvement on what I was in I wouldn't go in till they built this other one. You wouldn't believe it, I suppose, now: that they built a house in 1939 when the fire was on, just about building it then for Bond. He was going ahead, he'd become a foreman. A little bit better. Coley said for a house for me, something between that what was built for the forests workers, we'll say – I was one but I was designated as overseer – and the house that Bond had who was the foreman. That's a demarcation that. I think the house would still be at Uriarra but it would be up [inaudible]. Bond wanted to get away on his own. He didn't want no people knowing how often he went out.

How many men did you have working under you, say, by the late '30s and thereafter?

At any one time or overall?

You started off, you didn't have any staff at all under you. When we actually went there was one man and that was in 1930 and then – how authentic this is I wouldn't know – but the Depression was biting and they wanted reef work. And Bondy was camped in some camps around the old Acton job and the ranger bloke there, he was a leading light in the AWU, and therefore it

was court and talk about getting some work going and they came up with getting some extra money for forestry for relief work; that was in 1932. Well, then gangs came along and there'd be hundreds and hundreds of different fellows, there might be thirty or forty at one time. And when they'd let all the contracts for holing, for instance – there was contract holing then – and a chappy would tender for that and he'd bring three or four others with him so there'd fifty or sixty blokes, but they're all their mates and a lot of them not registered because you had to be registered here in the ACT and that sort of thing. So how many was around like that. It was just the same as when it came to extracting the timber. There was dozens and dozens of fellows then, many of them Italians. I never even knew their name because they were brought in by the chappy who contracted to do the timbers and mill it.

Right, and he would get all these people as subcontractors in. He'd get the contract and they'd all work for him on the contract then. That was the idea, was it?

A couple of his mates. A chappy would put in a tender. At first they didn't know what to put in – dimensions. I think the first lot in was about twenty-one inches by twelve inches deep. Well, you can't dig a hole like that without taking the dirt out. Once you take the dirt out you wouldn't dig many in a day. But they finished up digging them about eighteen inches wide and about three inches deep and that's the way they went. They got going and they kept on cutting one another. So it got down to about five and six a hundred.

A hundred holes?

A hundred holes, yes, but Pierces Creek was particularly good because it's a type of granite loam sand and it wasn't like Kowen for instance. We dig out there in 1927 and I think there was ninety-one frosts. And the earlier stuff was on pipe clay. It was hard. Jacobs was getting around there as a cadet then and take him up and 'Have a go at that and then you'll know what you're talking about.' Not that he had much ... He was only twenty-two years; he turned twenty-two years. He, by the way, when he first came here, came up and lived with us at Kowen for a while till he got settled. They used to [send] them out then to survey. I opened my big mouth out at Coley and so Jacobs said go out and then somebody else would go out a couple of years later. Jacobs was the big one [?]. He had three men and a horse and something like that and he went all over the place. They were going over the same ground, compass work. Believe you me – and I was stupid enough to compare the compartments and

there was a vast difference in them. I remember saying to Coley, 'Who will you accept?' 'Oh, I think I would accept Jacobs' goals.' Well, it depends ... It's only compass work in the first place and the chaps you've got with you.

The first block that we did out at Kowen, Rodger came up – and he was a very fast walker and a very heavy drinker, too, and a very fast walker – 'We'll measure a block off.' So went up and I'm tailing. I think I must have been walk about two.

He'd stick a mark in and tape. Blimey, it's fifteen yards over and I'd take a run and jump on the thing and he wanted to tie down the other end and it didn't tie in. He looked at me. So he went back to the other end and tied it like that. But he knew what had happened. And so I tell that story because that could quite happen to the boys when they went out for the scratch gang; you're depending on others a lot.

Yeah. And you were in charge of these gangs during the Depression years, were you? And after the Depression they all, I suppose, disappeared and were you back to just yourself or did you have a few staff members to work for you?

No, there was always, even after the war ... they got plenty of money and there was planning on and just about planted out as far as Pierces Creek was concerned. They've scrounged a little bit more since. Just after I went out they went up around where the koalas are and those type of things out in Tidbinbilla and they cut out there. A chap named Hughes, Minister for Territories at the time,¹⁵ he hung up off for a long time; he wouldn't even let them burn it.

No more to be cut up there so you'd only nigger a bit out since. So it didn't expand. But after the war there was any amount of men and we had trucks then and tractors.

Otherwise one of the big jobs ... had many more breaks than what they have now because they've been replaced by roads in some cases. All over those hills, around every compartment, used to chip a six-foot break. And that was gangs come there and so a month before Christmas as many as you could jam in. We had beds or tents for the casual labour. That was money made available for Christmas hamper for the people on relief work. And the same thing would

¹⁵ This is probably a reference to Wilfrid Kent Hughes who was Minister for the Interior, 1951–56. The Department of Territories was created on 11 May 1951, but Hughes was never Minister of this department.

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happen before the end of the financial year [inaudible].

So there were a lot of big gangs then. That's when, with the contractors in the winter time on the holes and the full-time that they gave the chappies who'd be married men, one on and one off. Earlier when it first started, single men they made available one week in five; but they improved on that after, but the married men would want one ... other than this Christmas box and ...

This, we're still talking about the 1930s here.

Yeah and right up to '38 it was still. [Inaudible] when, say, three or four weeks before Christmas, you might get six weeks but we were still back. But at the same time there were always [inaudible] and gangs of half a dozen – something like half a dozen permanents, so we got those.

So after the war in the time of post-war reconstruction, did you have a lot of gangs in that period, too?

After the war?

Yes.

Oh yes.

With maybe new immigrants to Australia making up the gangs?

I'll start again. I think mine is a nerve deafness and it seems to tire and when I keep asking a person it's not as a rule ... and they don't know, I suppose, and they go back and would repeat the sentence, but it's only that one key word that has got me in many cases.

Don't worry about it.

If you can't get that word you can't get the gist of the sentence.

No, I was just asking what happened after the war with the work gangs. Did you still have plenty of workers to fill the work gangs or were there cutbacks or did you have a lot of...?

No, they seemed to have plenty of money all down the line and more equipment.

During the 1950s your family must have been growing up and maybe getting on to leaving school.

Yes, when I went there was only one had been going to school for a short time and, when I left, of course, they'd all finished.

When you left, you mean in 1960.

Yeah, Anne would have left school then, but [inaudible] dwindled on. And our contribution to the army was the eldest one was an AAWA.¹⁶ So that in the war years she was twenty or so. They nearly all came in to work in offices. One did forty-odd years nursing. Started here at the age of seventeen and finished at the age of sixty-five.

That's quite a record, too.

Of course, it wasn't unbroken. She was married and together her husband was posted overseas on two occasions for two-year stints and that sort of thing. But as I said, it was a pretty good record as far as that goes – too good as a matter of fact. By the time redundancies and them sort of things were coming in she was too close to sixty-five; they didn't offer her a redundancy. She said some of the others had six or seven years to go and that sort of thing [and] they got good redundancies – too much of a good thing.

You retired yourself in 1960 at the age of ...

Sixty-one.

Sixty-one. How did you feel about retiring?

As I said, I had no regrets but that doesn't cover everything. I liked the work but there was a number of people that I worked under and I didn't like them; and there was a greater number of people that worked under me and I didn't like them. But I did leave when it suited me. I had an argument with [unknown], was he?

Did you meet Edgerley before your ... ?

Who was that? – sorry.

Edgerley.

No, I don't know him.¹⁷

He died a few years ago. He became Forestry Officer in the end.

I didn't know him, hadn't talked to him but went out, looking around Kowen one time, him and MacArthur and two or three of us, and he wanted to have a hit at me and he said, 'I believe you left because you was dissatisfied with the establishment.' That wasn't so. I left because it suited me, and the

¹⁶ He might actually be referring to the Australian Women's Land Army.

¹⁷ Edgerley had only just started when Harold retired (GMCK-S).

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establishment wasn't going to make any impression on me one way and another. I put it up to him different when I got annoyed [?]. Some of them there would have liked to have got rid of me earlier, but they didn't have anything on me and they didn't have enough to try and hang anything on me.

Yes. So who were the people you worked for at various stages? You mentioned a few of them. You started off under Rodger, wasn't it? And how did you find him as a person?

I liked Rodger well. When I interviewed him or he interviewed me when I came down on Eight Hour Day¹⁸ ... I was due to go back the same night. I was supposed to go on the jury the next day at Cootamundra but he'd gone to Sydney on Eight Hour Day, and bought a new Buick car and he didn't land back until Tuesday; so I had to explain when I got home about why I was late. Bond and I – Bond took me up to him – and he said, 'Oh, yes,' and he went on and explained the job and things like that. He told me he was pretty straight and said what he thought and what he meant. And I told him [inaudible], so we got on well.

Now, Rodger only stayed there for a couple of years, didn't he?

Yes, then he went to Sydney. In the meantime he must have put eight or ten months over in Tasmania on loan in an advisory capacity. I don't think they'd started forestry commercially over there then, I'm not sure about that. But when he came back he had this other job lined up and Jacobs took over and I thought I got on all right with Jacobs. Mind you, I might only be thinking in some cases I got on all right with them, but I thought I got on all right.

So Jacobs was okay, too. He was quite young, you said, when he started. He was only twenty-two and lived with you at Kowen for a while.

Yes, not for long. When we came to Kowen, Rodger, I think, got him lined up to go out in the mountains and see how much eucalypts were out there – this, that and the other. I know that he and I went out ... I shouldn't have mentioned that, it's how good things were then. East, west, going back here quarter of a mile and then again, and check out the volume of timber is on this firewood. And this was going – over at Kowen's, it was – right from the Sutton Road over to the Bungendore Road. I had the job of ... He was walking and, for so many feet out, you might have done this lot; it's the sort of thing, I don't

¹⁸ This would have been 1 October.

know what. I could see so many stringybarks and so many Scribbly Gums and Yellow Box or melliodora or whatever they had to call it, or Juliana [?] and that sort of thing; and he booked [?] them all down and made them up. He got a lot going and he was out in the bush and they were about to finish it out; and Rodger went away and he took over. And Rodger came back and Max was all set [?] up then to go back into the Forestry School. So Rodger for a short time, and then along came Coley in the mid-winter 1929. He stuck around for a long time. He said he was quite satisfied in the job. I don't think he ever said he was looking up the jobs vacant, I don't think, every week to see if he could better himself. I think he was quite happy where he was, which was okay.

You got on quite well with him, too. He was a bit of a scrounger but you got on quite well.

Oh yes, there's no doubt about that. It was funny. When I [inaudible] his pack was out. I got six snaps – they're still here somewhere – that he sent me from England because we were both cricket mad and football and they were showing the test match at Lords and things like that. And then I picked up another card when he was in the army. We sent him over a cake or two. The first one went over and he thought it was great and he said, 'Thanks to [Harold's] good soldering it was good [inaudible].' I used to solder it in the tin. And he said, 'Wonders of the world, it hadn't been opened,' – pinched. So evidently there was a lot – I suppose there would be for any old reason, I suppose – there must have been a lot of ships go down with a lot of presents on. But he mentioned that they hadn't been stolen. And he sent me these snaps over there like that. And when he came back and he was talking and he complained – I felt a bit it wasn't my fault in this case – and 'Nobody sent me a paper with the football finals in,' he said. He was Manuka president of the football club. Well, I had suggested to a chappy that I'll do that, I'll send Coley some papers. 'Don't worry, Norman Taylor's going to do it.' Norman Taylor had never done it.

When Cole joined the army, Lindsay Pryor took over?

Yes.

And you found Lindsay quite good, too, didn't you?

Oh yes, I think it was legitimate ... The only really arguments we had – I thought it was a legitimate one. They sent out war bonds. You bought them for sixteen shillings something and they become a pound in so many years

or something like that. They were circulated around the jobs and you signed up for what you would take. So I signed up for what I took and actually more than ... It left me pulling on some of my savings, like, with these bonds which was quite a few in those days – chicken feed now. Every now and again these bonds would come along in a bundle and Shoobridge¹⁹ was handling them and fetch them out and things like that. This time Pryor brought them out. I had it on my chest and out it come: I'd heard from a chappy working at Uriarra how much I was paying for bonds and I didn't think it was right then and I don't think it's right now, because if he was handling those things it should come from him how much I was paying. That was my business, I thought. I might be wrong. I might be expecting too much from human nature. We finished up he was standing in for Shoobridge. I thought I had to stick up for him. And of course, once you start to stick up for him, I don't know, my hackles started to rise but I still think I was in the right.

Lindsay Pryor was there for quite a while, too.

As a forester?

Yeah.

Yes, I don't know. Coley went in quite early and he was out before the end of the war after coming back from Scotland where they put most of their time in, to New Guinea and then – I suppose it suited everybody – he came out before the war ended because the Parks and Gardens job became available and Lin wanted to go into that. And I suppose he found some way or other to stay there until Coley came back. So Coley came back a bit earlier before the war [ended]. But at that time he was in New Guinea with sawmilling business.

So when Cole came back from the war he took over again, he resumed his old post. How long did he stay there then?

I just couldn't say what year – until he was sixty-five. He was seven years older than me so that doesn't bring you much either. But he'd only been gone two or three, several years, I suppose, before I left.

Who took over from Cole?

Must have been Green, I suppose.²⁰ I know Green did take over. I think Green was the next.

¹⁹ David Shoobridge who joined the Forestry Branch as Assistant Forestry Officer in 1940 (GMCK-S).

²⁰ Ron Green.

How did you get along with him?

Oh, I don't know. We had plenty of arguments. Green came here with the intentions of ... and I think he might have got a bit of a prod from someone that was here to straighten me out and it wasn't a very easy job. It didn't come easy.

Who would have told him that, do you think?

I reckon it would be Shoobridge and them fellows in there. It's a bit different [inaudible]. Shoobridge told me once, he said, 'Over in South Australia I had men who'd do what I wanted them to do.' I said, 'Yes, every one of the six of them,' because he'd been only in a very small place whatever it was over there. But he didn't get on well with Cole, and Cole was the fellow that got him there and stuck by him and things like that, and he wasn't even loyal to Cole.

What about the other people you worked with? Did you generally like the people that you were working with all those years?

Oh, with few exceptions. There had to be exceptions in hundreds and hundreds; there could have been a thousand that went through.

But generally they were pretty good people?

Oh yes, I got on fairly well with them or I thought I did but you can't get on ... No matter what walk of life you don't click with everybody.

That's right.

Just had a sneaking idea that some of them thought I liked a little bit too much work done. Well, that didn't endear you to anybody.

What were the working hours at the time you were there? What hours did you work?

Oh no, some of the other fellows were easier than what I was – say, millers and things like that ... any little thing.

Let's say, Coley would say we'll cut the pines down six inches. You go to another place and you'll find that they're cutting off eighteen inches. Well, that didn't like that as me. I remember a chap, was Lattin, he came here as a supervisor.²¹ I went away and I came back and the same blokes that I'd been keeping it down to six inches, which was what Coley asked, and they were cutting them up to eighteen inches high; and [I] didn't get on too well there.

²¹ Pat Lattin was appointed Forestry Supervisor in 1944, replacing Bonner Bond (GMCK-S).

Canberra's Foresters and Forestry Workers

You certainly have to make your presence [felt].

That's something that would crop up all the time because the chappy would be cutting down and the next thing you'd find he'd come up. You just had to tell him to keep down.

It was easier to cut it further up, was it?

It's easier to cut them up, yes. Coley reckoned that was eighteen inches loss of wood. And I think it's the done thing anyhow. That's just one thing that I claimed. I was talking to Coley about working. I said, 'Well, what do you think? Some people think you should do what's right. Or what you do, you know to be right or what's wrong. I think you should do what's right or what you're told.' And he said, 'I think you should do what's right.' 'Well,' I said, 'I'll do what I'm told providing the other fellow takes responsibility for it.'

That's a very interesting thing for him to say to you.

They used to have a locked gate for years, going down into the top of the dam for fisherman and like that. The Lattin man came out and said, 'Take it off and take one off to [inaudible].' I said, 'I'll take the one off up there because it was on when I came and that's one of the advantages of the new road. I got it from Lin Pryor to put a lock on the gate and keep it on it and you write and tell me to take it off and I will. That one I'll take off now.'

Next thing, all the complaints are all over the catchment area, fishing and camping, put it in the police's hands. Lattin would do that, I suppose. Police go out and he said, 'There used to be a lock on the gate. Why is it not there now?' I said, 'Because I was told to take it off.' 'Well,' he said, 'I'll go back and advise it be put back on.' It was the only sensible thing if you didn't want them to go down on the catchment area. It was only a fire protection as far as I know; as far as Forestry was concerned, didn't want them down there. I suppose it was the drinking water then [as] there were no other dams upstream. This was the main water. Coley would say that he thought you should do what was right.

That's interesting that your boss would say that to you. It's almost inviting you to do what you feel like rather than what he tells you.

There was plenty of that with Coley. Another time, I asked him about something and he said, 'If you think that's right, you do it. This is your little job.' That was Pierces Creek. Well, of course, afterwards ... that was for years and years when it was only Coley and me direct. And then they come in and they got either six apprentices or assistant foresters. I understood at the time

and we'll have no more overseers, but the overseers remained and the six assistants remained. And then, of course, when they come on, to give them anything to do at all, it had to be something that I'd been doing all the time – not only me but Bradley and Southwell, because we'd been doing it for years.

Although another thing, Lin had been going around ... he was assistant but Coley never gave him much to do. So he came over to Pierces Creek and I didn't think it was very tactful on his part because Coley and Lin both together and he was going to do a stint there and he said, 'You needn't bother with Tuson; he knows what to do, let him go ahead.' And this was in the front of me and in front of Lin; it wasn't very tactful. I don't think Lin would have liked [it] I don't think I would have done [it] either. So that's the way he treated [Lin].

He must have trusted you a lot.

Not only that, we were putting in plantations and in those days it would cost four pounds ten to, say, an acre for [inaudible] if it was Pierces Creek. It had crept up to seven pounds an acre over at Uriarra. I never went anywhere much [inaudible] and I done a hell of a lot of work and Coley had enough sense to know when you're on a good thing, stick to it. And so I told him later when they wanted to find some workers: you're killing the goose that laid the golden egg.

What were your hours per day when you were working?

I think it was, when I came out, I think it was forty-four.

We finished up on forty. That was the recognised working times.

No Saturday work?

That's another thing that Coley came in [and] got away with it, too. The Cotters forestry and everything like that in the Depression times ... you see, the unions didn't have too much swing and he stuck out for years to work Saturday morning; so we were working six days a week. Those things wouldn't worry me because if I didn't want to go out there if it's Saturday or do anything Saturday morning, there was nothing to do. But the other blokes had to work up and that made it six days a week. Then he tried to work it, keep people on plantations because no motors or anything like that on account of fire. Keep a couple of men out to work on Saturday and Sunday and give them Monday and Tuesday off, and he got away with that for about a fortnight. And the unions wouldn't have that because it was penalty rates for Saturday and Sunday. [He] tried everything; he wouldn't get a hearing now.

What time in the morning did you start work?

Start work? That was another stupid thing of mine. I used to walk to work in my own time – allow twenty minutes.

That was the award. You'd walk the first twenty minutes in your own time; so that was the way it was. I stuck to that over the years and had the truck driver was paid to start at seven o'clock. The first load would go out at seven. We never did, of course, it was closer to eight or anything like that. Otherwise it would be closer to nine, but most of us had between quarter to and twenty to eight, something like that.

That's not too bad.

The things, you know ... Truck drivers you see them sitting around, two men. I've seen one man coming up in a truck, and the truck driver sit there and watch him do all day on different jobs and things like that. We got our first truck and the driver would work away the same all day and drive home. This chap named Sid Command [?],²² he was an easy-going bloke, would be planting and drive them out and this was going on for some time, doing quite well and getting the work done. You know what? Pryor and Shoobridge come out there: 'We'll pay him truck driver's wages for the first half hour in the morning and at night when he's driving the men home.'

So he was being paid less then because he was doing this other work during the rest of the day. They were going to pay him less for the rest of the day?

Yes, and the other bloke who sat in the truck, he would be getting truck driver's wages all day. It was funny. They got going on that and [inaudible] works a lot of time and getting seven days a week travelling, camping. When they said, those that come out from here got seven days camp – three shillings a day. But he's not camping, he comes from home – great distinction – and we only pay him five days a week. So they done that: knocked him off the ... and then later we had a bit of a go up and he came up and I gave him the books to go through see how long he'd been working with them; and he claimed the six shillings a week back for a couple of years because he'd been on stand-by. It's stupid when you're on a good thing to go and ...

That's right.

And Command [?], if you take him out anywhere like that, he'd come out if

22 Perhaps Sydney Cabban, labourer, Cotter River, 1943.

you were measuring or doing something like with the truck and he'd take the place of the other man. But I've seen fellows come out to work [inaudible]. On one occasion one man with a truck and the other man sat there and watched him work all day, and [then] come back into Canberra.

I've seen that, too, from council workers.

Yes, well, I was a council worker, too.

Maybe we won't talk about that.

It reminded me of a story. I thought it was good. Silly little stories make me grin and others are so subtle I can't see through them. This was a gang of council men. They went three or four mile out from the depot and found they had no shovels so couldn't do much. The foreman went away to the nearest property, rung up, told them he had no shovels. They said, 'Okay, we'll send some shovels out. In the meantime tell them to lean on one another.'

Yes. I like that one. You retired in 1960. Have you lived in Canberra ever since your retirement? No thought of ever moving away from Canberra?

No, there was no reason because we had five children. They're all married and they all live in Canberra.

Well, that's a good reason.

It's easy enough.

Looking back, you enjoyed your time with Forestry?

Oh yes. As I said, I had no regrets, simply because I like the work, but I don't say that I was ever cut out for a ganger. I was a ganger on a job in Victoria before I came here. I was only twenty-two. Batched for a while at Yallourn. Ever been to Yallourn?

Yes, very briefly.

In the early days [inaudible] they were making the brickworks or something. When it all boils down I never mind working. I look upon it as ... I done quite a lot of personal work, myself, at Pierces Creek. Wanted to do something and wanted to do it my way, I'd take a man with me. That man was never very favourably disposed towards me, either. I'd take him away and we'd do a job for a day or a week and he seemed to get the idea that he was doing more with me than if he'd been in the gang. But it boils me down, mostly I'd rather do the work myself than be bothered telling somebody else to do it.

Canberra's Foresters and Forestry Workers

And you feel that all the work you did in those years was worthwhile?

That's another thing, too, that I had the feeling and expressed it, too, that I was producing something and I thought a hell of a lot of other jobs, they're non-productive.

And I like that idea. Producing wood for houses and for other uses, is that what you mean? You mean, you felt it was valuable because you were producing ...

Yes, you'd be producing timber and you're doing something worthwhile.

I think we're nearly at the end but I'm just wondering if there's anything else you think you'd like to tell me you think is important about your work or your times.

In some ways you're just a few years too late. I'm not that bright now that I can remember much ...

You're doing pretty well.

And things that ... I'd like to hear it afterwards.

I always thought if you were clearing the rabbits out of a paddock, if you were making a road, you were doing something worthwhile. But that was an argument over wages and conditions some time or other. They would tell you then you're not paid for what you do to work, it's your skills.

No skills in my work, I was just a glorified navy.

That's interesting because the one thing I thought I should have asked you was what skills you thought you had to get the job in the first place.

Purely and simply on Bond's say so. Rodger asked him did he know anybody. And Bond had seen me doing a bit of chopping.

Where had he seen you doing that?

Just when we were at the mine, at Cannongale [?]²³ out from Cootamundra – just chopping a bit of firewood. It's nothing but if a man picks up an axe and started cutting there, I could tell in two minutes whether he'd done any axe work or hammer work. And not only that, I always claimed that if I put a man over there and never come back for two days to do a certain job on navvying or something like that, if I was away for a week, I knew when I come back whether he worked or whether he didn't or to what extent he'd worked because I'd done it all.

23 Probably Cullinga. See note 1.

In other words, it was ...

Axe work and the fact that Bond had recommended, Rodger was new here, too, and he wanted somebody and he wanted a younger person to go to Kowen and somebody who would take an interest. In other words, Bondy – well, I like Bondy, too – Bondy was one of the very, very few who ever seemed to take a liking to me.

I can't believe that. I don't believe that one.

So he recommended me.

So it was your background of bush skills you learned as a boy and as a young fellow in Tasmania that helped you get the job. So you learned how to cut trees properly.

We had this place called [inaudible],²⁴ the latest place on the Forth River, down opposite the Cradle Mountains. There was about 2,000 acres of good ground there and ten mile either side of [inaudible]. It was an isolated place. Come in there, no school at ten years of age. That's why I'm illiterate. There were other kids in there my age and there is a lot of regrowth round about where we were living.

There'd been an old mining settlement and so I just got an axe and I just cut trees down from when I was ten years of age. Spoiled the landscape. I think now what a mess I made of that. I used to chop these trees down and I done that from ten to thirteen and then got a job on the roads.

You're not illiterate, are you? You were reading the paper when I came in.

Well, we say semi-illiterate.²⁵

I think you're all right. Obviously you didn't have a lot of time for schooling in Tasmania.

I often think whether in fact it would have made any impression on me. You see, I'm a guy ... I was backward when I was born and I've steadily lost ground ever since.

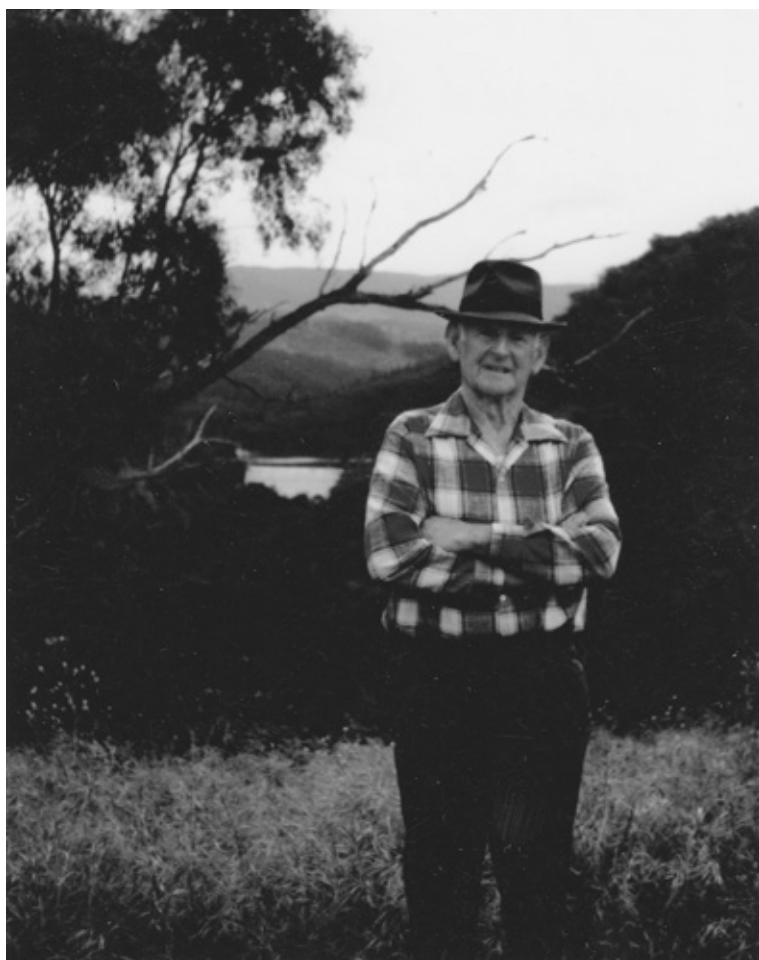
Yeah, that's right. I think you're selling yourself short.

As I said to Lattin – you've heard of Lattin [inaudible] – 'No difference in it.' I said, 'You're a fool and I'm a fool, but I have the advantage of you because I know I'm a fool and you don't know.'

²⁴ Probably Lorrina where the family had a property of 2,000 acres.

²⁵ Despite his claims that he was illiterate or semi-literate, his family later described him as a quiet man who liked to read books and the newspaper.

Canberra's Foresters and Forestry Workers



Harold Tuson aged 87 at the Cotter Reservoir in February 1986, more than 25 years after he retired. (E. Campbell)

How did he take that?

He had a way of stiffening his jaw but that's all. He'd have to take it.

Harry, I'm going to finish up there. I'm going to say I've enjoyed very much talking to you. It's been great and I hope the tape turns out well.

I hope you don't show it to anybody that knows me.

I think it will be all right. Thanks again.

Thomas William ('Bill') Bates

Interview with Bill Bates recorded in the sound studio of the Australian War Memorial on 30 May 1995



Bill Bates in April 2017. (B. O'Keefe)

Bill Bates was born at Dalgety in the southeastern corner of NSW in September 1932. He came to the Canberra area in September 1947 when his father Jack got a job as a general forestry at Uriarra. Bill followed his father into forestry work a couple of years later. Apart from two years working in Canberra, he spent the rest of his working life in ACT forests. Owing to the extensive experience and knowledge he had gained, he was appointed overseer at Uriarra in 1963 and retained the position for several decades.

In November 1954, Bill had married Valerie May Bennett at St John's Church in Reid. He and his wife were to have a family of three children. Bill eventually retired after well over 40 years' service in the ACT's forests, a far longer period than anyone else.

Canberra's Foresters and Forestry Workers

Well, I'd like to welcome Bill Bates to the sound studio, to the interview and start off just by asking you, Bill, how did you become involved in ACT Forests in the first place?

I'd actually worked at the Uriarra Forest and I started there as fairly young doing normal forest work.

What time was this – or what year was this?

I actually started work in about 1949 and put in about eighteen months or two years mainly working at Uriarra and then I left for probably a two year period.

What attracted you into forestry work?

[I] just mainly liked outdoor work.

Did you have any background in it, or the family have any background in it?

No, none whatsoever till my Dad, [my] father, started there and I think he started in '47.

How did he become involved in it?

A friend got him a job there, just as a normal forest worker and then he went on to become – the term was a ganger, then.

Was he just back from the war or something?

No, we moved off a station up at Bredbo. He was working for a farmer. We just moved on.

The family decided to move to Canberra?

Yes. We actually moved to Uriarra. He retired, I think, in about 1958.

Did your family have anything to do with forest or timber or anything at all at Bredbo?

No; purely just came off working on the stations and things like that. It was a complete change of work.

What was Uriarra like when you moved there in '47?

Very quiet little village.

I'll bet.

There was only four forestry houses and one that used to be called the Maintenance, Roads and Bridges house. No water, no pressure water, only tank water. No electricity, and no sewerage, of course.



A horse dragging or snigging a log in the forest in the 1950s. (L. and N. Rosin)

Who were the people that lived in the village at that period?

The Roads and Bridges bloke was a bloke by the name of Reg Hamilton and then there was the Forestry Overseer was Jim Bradley. The people who were living there was Aubrey Syphes, Tom Bateup and Dan McKenzie and a bloke by the name of Ernie Baguley.

They had their families with them?

Yes.

How was life for the families at the settlement?

Pretty rugged. They used to have to make the school bus at the Cotter – had to drive their kids and make it to the ... that was the high school children. They had a school in the village there for the primary school.

A village school in Uriarra, yes. And the high school children had to go into Canberra.

Telopea Park was the high school in those days.

When you moved to Canberra or Uriarra had you already left school?

Yes.

Canberra's Foresters and Forestry Workers

When you started at Uriarra what sort of work were you involved in?

Just general forest maintenance work. We used to cut pines for the government sawmill which used to be down at the Causeway in them days. The timber was snigged by horse. I used to use the horse for snigging the logs out to the roadside.

How did you cut the trees?

Cut the trees with a cross-cut saw and cross-cutted them the right length.

It must have been pretty hard work.

Yes, much different to today's standards.

It would make you fit though, I'd imagine.

Yes.

How long were you involved in this kind of work at Uriarra?

I stayed there for eighteen months or two years and then there was a sort of industrial dispute because in them days I wasn't eighteen. You weren't supposed to be employed till you was eighteen and they was paying us adult wages and so we had to go off.

So what did you do?

I worked for A.V. Jennings for a couple of years and then I came back.

You were building houses.

Yes, I started off as a brickie's labourer there and then I got a job of crane driver.

How come you could work for them if you ...?

There was no regulations on the private ... as long as you could do the work you was right.

So you worked for them for a couple of years and then what happened after that?

A.V. Jennings was sort of winding down a bit. I think there was a bit of a slump in the building market and then I got a job back with the Forestry Section on a construction gang.

Whereabouts was that?

That was a sort of mobile thing that used to go around the four forests and do all the road work and break work and things like that.

Fire break work?

Yes, fire break work.

How many were in the gang?

There was about eight of us and we had bulldozers and graders and trucks. I worked on that for a while, just went on operating the compressor and jackhammer and that and then I got on to truck driving for a year or so, or two or three years.

When you working in the gang it must have been around the time of the big fire in '52?

It was.

And the wind blow in that year, too. Can you tell me your experiences of that period – what you did and so on?

The fire in '52, that covered Stromlo and was a pretty frightening experience. We also had fires back out in the north-west of the ACT in '52.

You were involved in controlling the fires and building the fire breaks for all this.

Yes.

Did you spend a lot of days in the field?

Yes, sometimes three or four days straight.

Just fighting the fires.

Yes.

What about the wind blow? Do you remember that very well?

Yes, that was in July 1974.

I'm talking about the early one, in 1952. There was another one later in that year after the fire, apparently.

Wind blow?

Yes. Not an extensive one, I think, not like the one in 1974.

So you worked on the road gang for a year or two and then ...

I came back ... That phased out that job and ...

How come?

Different policies on the work system and it phased out and each forest used to do their own after that – look after their own roads and there was more machinery bought and each forest used to look after their own roads.

Canberra's Foresters and Forestry Workers

That's interesting because I would have thought that they'd try to keep costs down by having just one set of machinery. Do you know why they decided to do that?

I think that was a decision where they couldn't agree on the policy, I think, of one gang going around doing all the roads. They wanted to work independent.

So the overseer at each forest just took over their little area?

Yes.

Hopefully somebody was coordinating all this up above. Just one thing, you mentioned before about the horses in the forest. I meant to ask you about that. Can you just tell me – you were in charge of the horse teams?

At Uriarra we were the gang cutting pine for the government sawmill and you used to have to go and get your horse in the morning and feed it and take it out to where you were working, and then bring it back of an afternoon and feed it.

How did you like working with the horses?

That was all right. I was really used to horses. I'd done a lot of horse work in the early days.

On the farm.

Yes, I was familiar with horses.

How long did the horses remain working in the forests?

Up until about '54 or so or '55 and then they started to bring in tractors then for snigging.

Were some of the contractors still using horses after that?

Yes. Probably not too much after that. Probably up till about '58 they were still – some of the contractors was still using horses.

Getting back to after you left the gang you were with and you went into truck driving, where were you based?

I was based at Uriarra.

Were you just working on the maintenance in that area?

Yes. In about '58, I changed from truck driving to a ganger.

Who were you working for at Uriarra, by the way?

The forester then was Ron Slinn.



Uriarra School in 1964– children leaving school on ponies and bicycles at the end of the school day. (National Archives of Australia, A1200, item L46823)

How did you get on with him?

I got on well with Ron.

Were there many other people working ...?

By that time there was lots of people there. They'd built more houses and we had heaps of immigrants come from over. There was probably sixty-five people working there by that time. We had camps at Blue Range, Lees Creek, Condor. There was probably fifteen to twenty blokes camped all over. There was huge gangs in them days.

How long did the blokes stay out in the camps?

They stopped there from one to two years and they gradually moved off as they learnt to talk English ...

So they were mainly immigrants?

Yes, but we also had a fairly large crew at the settlement itself. There are about thirty houses there now.

Canberra's Foresters and Forestry Workers

What about the facilities? Did they upgrade the facilities with water and ...?

Yes. In '54 they laid the water on and in about '52, I think, they got the power on; it was upgraded.

Made things a bit more comfortable there.

Yes.

And the school continued?

Yes. But the older kids, I guess, still had to go into Telopea Park or somewhere [inaudible].

Yes. They built a new school in about 1968, I think, at Uriarra, but that still only goes up to sixth grade.

What was life like for the fellows who were living out in the camps at Lees Creek and Condor and so on?

Pretty bad because we used to send the truck out and pick them up and take them to town one Saturday in a month.

Only one Saturday a month?

Yes, but we used to run what we used to call a ration truck twice a week to pick [up] their supplies for them; but we used to run a truck in and that became very messy in the end because they'd all go to the pub and get drunk and start fighting and going on ...

Yes, I'm not sure I would blame them. So they were provisioned a couple of times a week with the truck, but other than that they just stayed there and worked at cutting or planting.

Yes. There was lots of tree pruning and general work.

Did these fellows resent being in the camps?

Some of them did, I think. Blokes that were married and that, they just settled into it and made the best of it and saved their money. A lot them was learning to speak [English] and things like that and getting themselves established, and then they'd move out.

Did any of these fellows, to your knowledge, 'stay with ACT Forests or stay in the Forestry Section anyway after they ...?

One bloke Attilio Padovan, yes, he stopped on and retired.

You're now driving a truck and this is about the late '50s?

Yes, about '57 or '58, I think. Then I went off that and then I went on to a

ganger. Ron Slinn took me off the truck and asked me to do this ganger's job.

Can you tell me what, first of all, your job involved when you were driving the truck and then what it involved when you became the ganger?

When I was driving the truck I used to cart pipes, fuel, gravel and mainly for roading and construction, and sometimes I'd take blokes out on the back of the truck to where they was working and drop them off and then pick them up again of an afternoon and things like that.

Sounds a bit easier than being a member of the road gangs. Anyway, so Ron Slinn appointed you as the ganger and what happened with that job?

When he appointed me a ganger we used to do all the clearing for preparation for planting. He put me in charge of two bulldozers and we had to do the clearing ahead for the planting season. So that went on for a couple of years and ...

You must have been clearing new areas, not areas that had been filled because there wouldn't have been any product.

New eucalypt areas and all that through Lees Creek. So I was on that for a couple of years.

So you basically bulldozed the trees down and then ...

Yes, I pulled them down with a cable.

Sounds like it could be a bit dangerous at times.

Yes, it was. Where I'd done was only myself and another chap looking after them and I went through, I think, about six offsiders.

What happened to them?

A bit too rugged for them.

Too hard. Did you have any major accidents when you were out there?

No, rolled over a couple of 'dozers and things like that, but no personnel got hurt, not from machines or anything. A couple of the young blokes, the offsiders, they strained their backs; it was just too heavy for them.

How many people were in the gang? I mean, you had an offsider; did you have any others?

Just two blokes driving the two machines, and myself and another bloke used to hook the rope up and that, and pull the rope back.

Canberra's Foresters and Forestry Workers

You would have been out by yourself a fair bit or just with the gang.

Out by ...

Ron Slinn would have come around every now and then to see what was going on. He used to come around, couple of days or so.

Did you camp out?

No, always lived at home.

Were you married or anything by this stage?

No – yes, I was.

I hope your wife doesn't hear this. Your wife was living at Uriarra?

Yes.

How did she feel about that?

For the first few years she was fairly lonely and that.

Was this in the early '50s?

Yes.

When it was a pretty small place.

Yes. Once we started a family, in '62, I think – my son was born in '62 – and that kept her busy.

After you pulled the trees down, did you just stack them up and burn them?

No, we just pulled them down and then in the Autumn we used to just put through a running fire, just leave the trees lying on the ground and light it and have a running fire. That was the system [in] them days; now we don't burn at all.

After the fire went through, did you leave it a while before you planted?

Usually that same year we planted it and started probably burning about in April or March or something, and then start planting in June/July.

As early as that? I thought you'd wait a bit longer.

No, usually get into it. See, once you put a fire through it, it cleans it all out and you get no rubbish on the ground then.

Why, pardon my ignorance, but did you plant at the beginning of the Winter?

That's the dormant time for the seedlings. Usually wait till you get about three or four good frosts on them to kill the seedlings – to stop them growing – and then you lift them and plant them out.

This was a highly successful operation?

Yes, we used to run our own nurseries in them days at Uriarra and Stromlo and Kowen.

The trees you were planting were Pinus radiata, I suppose.

Yes, all *Pinus radiata*.

What sort of distances or spaces were you planting?

Mainly 2.4m or eight feet apart, on the rows in them days.

What other work were you involved in when you were a ganger?

Mainly special jobs. I used to get all the special jobs and any experimental jobs and things like that, I used to do all them.

Experimental with new types of pine?

Yes, pine and any sort of specialised jobs – we used to always do them.

Do any of these stand out in your memory as being particularly interesting or a good result or a bad result?

Yes, one really stands out that I used to ... I done a lot of months, I went off on a construction gang – I was the ganger and then they put me in charge of the hardwood logging at Bulls Head; marking trees and looking after the hardwood logging. I went through on that till about '62, I think

That was a full-time job for a while?

Yes, mainly a summertime job, and wintertime it used to get too wet, so Collis Brothers was cutting the hardwood and carting it to Canberra to the government sawmill down at the Causeway.

Collis Brothers? I don't think anybody has ever mentioned them before. Were they long term contractors in the forest?

Yes, they actually went through from about '48 to '62, Collis Brothers, on cutting the hardwood. They were long term haulers.

Obviously with a name like that they're not Italian immigrants or anything?

No, they come from Victoria.

Did they have other contracts in New South Wales and Victoria?

No, they had contracts in Victoria for logging and they come up here and the weather used to determine how long they could go up there. If they got an early winter or a late winter, that determined the logging time they was logging.

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Were they using horses?

No, all bulldozers. They used to snig with the 'dozer and lay it on to the ... they had five jinkers running sometimes there a day, carting logs in.

Why did they stop in '62?

Ran out of timber and the Soil Conservation people was starting to look into the catchment area logging.

So there's a lot of run-off from areas that they cut. They were cutting up Bulls Head, you said.

Yes, Bulls Head and right through to Mount Franklin.

So you were up in the Bulls Head area in the early '60s. What was the next move?

Next move was, I think, '63 or '64. They made me forestry overseer then.

Good. Whereabouts was that?

At Uriarra.

So you were in charge of the whole forest operation?

Yes.

How many people did you have under you then?

Probably about forty, I think.

Can you just give me a rundown on what sort of responsibilities you had when you became an overseer?

There were about three gangers, two leading hands, a carpenter. Used to have to organise them every day and allocate work out each morning. And, of course, we had fire duty as well – fire watch and fire crews to organise every day.

What was the division of responsibility between you as an overseer and the forester who was responsible for Uriarra?

Ron Murray was there then. Ron Slinn had left and Ron Murray was there. Ron was living there at the time and then he went off to America, I think, in '65. I was there on my own then for a good part of the time.

Nobody to tell you what to do.

No. I had casual blokes come in and things like that; they'd stop for two or three months and ...

Casual foresters?

Yes.

While first Ron Slinn was there and then Ron Murray, did they work out what needed to be done that day?

Yes, it just became routine most of the time. There were times when there was something else needs to be done and they usually get the job and then just pass it on to you.

So when Ron Murray went off to the United States, obviously you must have known the job backwards by this stage?

Yes.

So they could leave you in charge. And the relief foresters that came out, they were a bit young and inexperienced.

They was only just straight out of school mainly.

Did you have much problem with these young foresters who were straight out of ...?

No, some of them got a bit funny and that.

What was funny about them?

The way they wanted to do things and the way that I wanted to do them. I used to just about end up winning most of the time.

Maybe they learnt a little bit of something practical, yes?

Some of them were really good blokes and didn't ... And then you got the bloke that came out and thought he knew everything, but they've gone them days.

Were you still living at Uriarra, you and your family?

Yes, I'm still living there.

And all your family grew up there?

Yes.

How many children did you and your wife end up having?

We've got three children.

How did they find living at Uriarra?

They liked it all right.

They didn't mind travelling into school each day when they got a bit older?

That was a bit of a bind, especially when they started to go college because with college they have these semesters and they have the free periods. And if

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they have the free periods and they finish at one o'clock or something and they had to wait till four for the bus and that, that was a bit of a nuisance.

How long did the bus trip take in and out?

It was only about three-quarters of an hour. They all ended up going to Stirling College because of the school allocation and that.

What sort of recreation activities were there?

The boys played football and tennis.

At Uriarra itself though?

No, we used to have to take them into town.

So you were running a ferry service. What about the adults who were living out at Uriarra, especially in the '50s? Did you make your own entertainment out there?

Yes, we used to have dances. We had a recreation hall and we used to have dances and that there. We had tennis courts and that there. That was pretty good.

Did people go into Canberra on weekends?

Yes, one of the people opened a shop back in the '50s – had a small shop running there, but they couldn't compete with the big shops in town. They used to have to go and pick up their stores and that.

That's the first time anybody has ever mentioned that. Who ran the shop?

Tony Franklin and Jean [?].

And they were going into Canberra and buying the stuff and bringing it out? They didn't have wholesalers bringing the stuff out.

No, they used to have to go and pick up their own supplies.

So they'd have to add on the price which wouldn't make them popular.

No.

How long did that last, do you remember?

Probably about twelve months.

Is that all?

Yes, that was back in the mid '50s.

How did the Forestry Section feel about that? Did they frown on or did they think it was a good idea?

I don't think they worried about it too much. They just added a small shed in

their backyard and it was probably highly illegal, I suppose ... They used to sell a bit of beer and things.

In the mid-'60s you found yourself as the overseer at Uriarra with no real boss, I suppose, or a succession of temporary ones, so you got on quite well there. Somebody must have come in ... Another forester must have come in permanently then to run ... Did Ron Murray come back there when he ...?

He came back for a short period but he was only there for, I think, three months or something, and he moved to town and then another bloke by the name of Bob Cruttwell then for a while, and then a bloke, Bob Williams.

What were the major things that were going on in the forests at Uriarra at this time, while you were the overseer?

Mainly, from the mid-'60s through till the '80s, mainly replanting, second rotation planting. We started clear falling in '72 and so that got onto the second rotation work.

When did that start?

It started in '73.

So immediately after the clear falling.

Yes.

What was happening before that? – you were thinning?

Yes, just did general forestry work – pruning and road maintenance and road construction and just normal forestry maintenance.

What about the fire control measures, were you heavily involved in that, too?

Yes. In the bad weather, summer period, they used to have two lookouts going and two large tankers and three small units.

All under your control? Where were the lookouts placed, Ron?

One on Mount McDonald and one on Mount Coree.

How did they communicate with ...?

By two-way radio.

In those peak times of fire danger, was there somebody always standing by ready to receive any signals or messages from them?

Yes, they put through an hourly weather report through to the base station in town. That's on bad days, they go up about ten o'clock and finish about seven in the night.

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And each hour they just report on the fire situation or ... ?

Yes, or give a weather report and that report every hour and then report any smoke seen.

Did you have any major outbreaks in this period during the '60s and early '70s?

Yes, we had a lot of minor ones but '72, I think it was, we had a fair one up at Bulls Head there; burnt out probably a couple hundred hectares of bush.

Did you have much trouble controlling this fire?

Yes, it was a bad one – very rough country.

What did you have to do to try and control it?

We put in bulldozer trails and had heaps of small ones. At that stage we was looking after the whole of the catchment area going right back through to the head of the Cotter. We had a lot up through there – lightning strikes and things. [Inaudible] ... about 1958 or so, about 1958 or it might have been early '60, we had some out at the head of the Cotter there. I spent a week there straight fighting, and then in '82 we had the big fires in the Gudgenby area. I spent six weeks out there, I think, on that.

Did you get to see much of your family in that period?

Not too much, no.

During the period of the '60s and early '70s who were the contractors who were taking the logs out at this time?

That's the normal pine logging? Rosin Logging, they was there, and who else now? – Belovic. There was Rosin, Belovic, I can't think of the others now.

About how many were there all up?

About five lots of contractors.

Were you directly responsible for supervising them?

Yes.

How did that work?

That was pretty straightforward those days. The big mill wasn't started out there until '72 – the Brown and Dureau, as it now [is] – that never started until '72. So mainly just local market, and Monier and two or three other small mills there. Once the big mill got going at Hume there, that made a lot of difference to the logging in the ACT.

What did your role entail as supervisor of the contractors? Did you have to actually mark the trees?

Yes. Each forester used to have their own marking gangs. Used to have to go and mark the trees that they had to take out.

How come the foresters didn't do this?

No, they didn't think it was part of their job.

That's surprising. Why?

Some used to go out and do a bit. Ron Slinn, he used to go and do some, but what's his name? – Attilio was my main marking bloke and he used to do all the marking at Uriarra just about.

So both you and he had been close for a long time and knew what trees had to be taken?

Yes; he was excellent.

And obviously the Forestry people had confidence in your judgement.

Yes.

That's interesting. I'm a bit surprised that foresters wouldn't take a more active role in it. But when you had no ... in that period when Ron Murray was overseas, you must have basically run that all by yourself without any forester.

Yes.

Did you ever have any problems with any of the contractors in taking the wrong trees or not cutting them the right length?

Yes, when [inaudible]. If they saw a good big one, they'll take it.

Even though it's not marked. Did much of that go on?

We'd give some a week or so spell now and again for taking a tree that was not marked.

So they'd have no work for a week. Did this happen very often?

Once they knew you was honest about it, they used to be honest, too. If they had a tree in the road, they'd ask you if you could mark it. If it was in the road of the tractor or something and they wanted to get it out. They soon learned that if they take the wrong tree ...

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I suppose, the loss of a week's income, they'd shape up pretty quick. That's interesting.

The fallers and cutters, they tend to be fairly murderous on some of the trees.

You mean they cut them fairly roughly.

Yes. But it doesn't take long to work out which ones should have stopped there.

How did you control the way they cut the trees? I mean, if they were cutting badly what sort of action did you take to ...?

Usually if they was cutting badly and making a mess, they'd have to brighten up their game or otherwise they was out.

Did any of them get the bullet?

Yes, plenty of them.

What, whole contractors or just individuals?

Just individual fallers and that.

Where did these tree fellers come from? Were they just hired willy-nilly by the ...?

Mainly willy-nilly by anyone that had done some chainsaw work and that, we'd pick them up.

There must have been a bit of turnover.

Lots, very high turnover.

What was happening meanwhile with the camps that were at Lees Creek and Bulls Head and so on? When did they stop being used?

We had a camp at Uriarra as well, too, in the settlement there – down at the bottom of the settlement.

What period was that?

That went back through into the mid-'60s or probably nearly the '70s – that one at Uriarra.

Did this have mainly migrant workers, as well?

No, a lot of our blokes were camped there, as well. A lot of them moved to town and they used to camp there during the week and go home weekends. There was still some immigrants there, too. The ones in the Lees Creek, Blue Range, Condor, Bulls Head, they would have probably phased out between '52 and '58, I think.



Mechanical harvesting of pine trees in 1971, machines having replaced the old-time labour-intensive work of men and horses.
(National Archives of Australia, A1200, item L94295)

That's pretty early. So there was no further work for them.

No, we'd started to scale down on the single people because we'd built more houses at Uriarra and they had married families there.

What happened from about the early '70s onward? – you remained at Uriarra?
Yes, remained there till June '92.

I hadn't realised that. That's quite a long period. It must be a record, I think.
Remained there till June '92 and now they've closed down Uriarra depot and Pierces Creek and Kowen. That's one depot at Stromlo.

Did you leave of your own accord or just because it was closed down that you ...?
They transferred me over on to this logging supervisor's job.

When did that happen? That happened in '92, did it?
Yes.

So now you've got the whole – you're in charge of the contractors in all the forests?
Yes.

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You'd have plenty of background in that, I guess.

Yes.

What changes have you seen in the way the contractors operate over the years?

A vast change in the mechanism of the output and the way they work – all the modern machinery, very few chainsaws. It's all machinery work.

Is there much wastage from the methods they use now?

We've got a problem with wastage because we haven't got a pulp mill close to the ACT.

So the wastage is just left on the ground and ground into the soil?

Yes.

I've seen the big tractor dragging the roller. I was wondering why that happened.

We try and get everything we can out of them, but there is still a lot of waste.

Yes, they won't take the small stuff, or the mills won't take it, I suppose.

The mills won't; they can't utilise the small timber.

Does that create problems with the contractors? Do you have a running battle with them over the ...?

Yes, it's an ongoing thing every day to try and get the maximum of utilisation.

What about the people you were working for? I mean, you had Ron Murray but then he went overseas and then briefly came back, and then Bob Cruttwell took over, and then who followed Bob?

Bob Cruttwell, I had Bob Williams, Len Currie

These blokes were living out at Uriarra with you?

No, they always used to travel from town. No-one has lived there since ... Bob Williams lived there for a while.

This would have been the late '60s?

Yes, and early '70s.

But basically the foresters haven't lived there for a long time?

No, not since Ron Murray left.

Does that create problems with communication, or did it create problems with communication?

No, I've forgotten half these foresters; there's bloody heaps of them. There's been a lot go through.

So they came out every day to keep an eye on things?

Yes.

What about the blokes who were working for you? Did you have any great problems there at all?

Yes, just normal everyday ... We used to have a fair changeover of people, particularly back in the early '60s and that happened till about up into the '70s – they were stable a bit, but we used to employ a lot of blokes through the CES¹ and a lot of people – groups of people – would come and they'd put them on and they'd go all right for a couple of weeks. I can remember there were six of them there at one stage in the camp – single fellows there – and they went all right till they got their first pay then they all got on the 'turps'. I went down and put the six of them off in the one hit one morning. They wasn't very happy.

A lot of them, I suppose, wouldn't have been used to the physical work, either?

No.

It would be all right for a few days, but then the muscles would start to fall apart. By a couple of things you've said, it seems to me you lent towards hiring married men, as well.

Yes.

It was a bit more stable?

Yes.

I gather this wasn't any written down policy, just something you learn over the time.

Yes, and we had the primary school and it was always an option to try and get people with families, to keep the school going and that.

What about the teachers that taught at the school? Did they tend to stay very long?

Yes, really. There was a bloke, Norman Cornwell there, he put in twenty-odd years, I think.

Gee, that's pretty good going. When did he start?

I think he started in ... He came back there as well. He started there and done a stretch and then went away and came back there again. It probably would be in the '30s, he started there.

¹ The Commonwealth Employment Service.

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That's really going back.

He came back and he finished in probably the '50s or late '40s there, he finished, I think.

Just at the time your family was moving in. So he obviously lived there, too.

Yes, he used to camp there in a small hut up behind the school. He also used to go to Queanbeyan to stop a couple of nights a week and weekends and things. But he stopped there a good number of years. The teachers seemed to spend a good stretch there.

Who came after Norm?

We had a bloke – he lived there – Mick Demire[?].² He came in and he spent probably five or seven years there. Actually the chap that's there now – he's living there, as well – he's been there about five or six years, I suppose. There's been a lot in between.

The teachers don't mind taking a class with a whole range of ages?

Well, at this stage they've got an assistant with them, whether it be two and a half days a week or something. Yes, they usually make their bottom lines – about twenty is the lowest they can get down to, I think. They've got an assistant teacher with them then, I think, for two and a half days a week or something.

That's good. Any of these teachers female or were they all male?

Yes, there's been some female assistants. The girl used to drive from Brindabella down there every day to teach a few years ago. She was assistant teacher. There's a few females that assist.

They didn't find any particular problems living out there? I suppose they had a lot of...

Most of the female ones have been travelling from town out.

Right, so they don't live out there.

No.

² This was probably Michael Dwyer.

I suppose it's a bit far out for them.

Bill, you said that in more recent times you became in charge of all logging operations in the ACT Forests. I was just wondering if you'd like to describe exactly what that job entails and so on?

The day to day supervision of logging contractors in the four forests: Uriarra, Pierces Creek, Stromlo and Kowen, and also we'd just completed the clear fall in Jervis Bay forest on the south coast. That's been handed back to the National Parks now and no more forestry activities will go on there.

What trees were they harvesting down there?

Pinus radiata.

How does it grow in Jervis Bay?

It grows quite well there. We've just done 200 acres there of *radiata* clear fell at ... Started in April last year and ended up in November.

How long had the radiata been in down there?

Since about 1960, so thirty-odd years.

Thirty-four/thirty-five years, yes. Have you had much to do with Jervis Bay over the years?

Yes, actually Ron Murray and I went down and done some burning at Jervis Bay in '65, just after he come back from the States.

What was that for?

Preparation for planting; we done a running fire burn.

So that was radiata, too, you put in after that?

Yes.

But that's not going to be harvested now?

It's been harvested down there now.

That was part of the immediate job.

Yes, it's all one harvest down there now.

What's happened now that you've harvested the radiata, are you putting radiata back in just to let it grow or are you going to ...?

No, it's just going back to natural bushland now.

That's, as you said, under the control of...

National Parks.

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Have you had any other involvement with Jervis Bay, at all?

No, that was about the only involvement I had with – went down and did a burn off down there and then did this logging there in the last year for about six months.

Getting back to your job as being in charge of all the logging operations, how many contractors are you dealing with now?

About seven contractors – seven groups of contractors.

So, the number has gone up. I would have thought that they'd diminish, that they'd get bigger and there'd be ...

What's happened with them now, they have got two divisions of the contracts. Two groups have got two groups going.

What do you mean exactly?

There's one lot cutting at Uriarra and one lot cutting at Kowen, but it's the same contractor. They've split the gangs.

Right. But it's the same company.

Yes, same company.

So how many companies are there?

There's only three companies.

What are they?

One's Rosin Logging.

Yes, the Rosins.

The BLC, that's Brindabella Logging Company.

Who runs that?

A bloke, Arnie, he's a Swedish chap. And then there's Peter Kostian. He's another Swedish bloke. His trading name is DGR Logging.³

How come the Swedes are involved in it?

I think they came out when this big mill started on the Monaro Highway and they've been into it since '72.

Are they Australian firms or are they backed by Swedish capital?

No, all Australian now.

³ The names of these two men were Arne Sjöström and Peter Kostianen.

So they live here, in other words?

They came out when this big mill was starting up and most of them worked with other contractors and they were established and got themselves into their own contract now.

I guess these days it's all very mechanised – a fully mechanised operation?

Yes, very mechanised.

I just wanted to ask you, too, about the move into logging of the steep areas. How did that get underway?

Back in '72 there was a firm – what did they call themselves? – Timberlift. They got cable logging going on the steep slopes by using the skyline.

Where did this company come from?

The main bloke who was in charge of it was Bob Smith. He used to design these skylines and build them himself. So it came from overseas. But they've gone out of them a fair bit because the cost of logging goes up by ten to twelve dollars a ton with the skyline. It's a lot slower and takes a lot more time.

What exactly is the skyline? Can you describe it?

It's usually built on either a tractor with a high tower on it. Cables run from the machine up to a spar tree on the top of the hill and the carriage running on the cable, as what they call the 'chokerman' up in the forest, hooking up the logs and the operator down at the tractor pulls them down to the bottom of the hill or up the hill, whichever the case may be. With the modern machinery now, they've got machines that can go up the steep slopes and fell the tree and use either a forwarder or grapple skidder for getting them down.

And that's cut the costs?

Yes, a lot quicker operation.

These machines must use an awful lot of diesel fuel?

Yes.

Do you know what their usage rates are?

Yes, I think they're probably eating six to eight litres an hour.

I also wanted to ask you about the big wind blow in '74, too. Did you have much involvement in the cleanup after that?

Yes, a lot of involvement in that wind blow.

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What sort of things did you ...?

We had about, I think, 600 acres at Uriarra blow down and I was looking after all that. I had a truck going down the road every two minutes of the day – a load of timber.

Was this immediately after ...?

Yes, it went on for about twelve months afterwards. That happened on the 22nd July, I think, 1974.

How long did it take you to clear all the fallen timber?

It took us about eight or ten months. It was a huge job.

I bet the mill managers were rubbing their hands with glee.

Yes. We were sending it everywhere, too. We were sending it down the coast, back through to Bombala, down to Moss Vale, Albury.

So you were keeping a lot of mills busy?

Yes, we had trucks going everywhere.

Did this end up in a – I hate to use the word – big windfall profit for the Forests?

Yes, we had a chap, the Logging Marketing Officer then, was Dave Fisher and he done an excellent job of marketing it all. He found sales for it everywhere.

Did you have to put on extra staff to ...?

Yes, we had a good number of people on at Uriarra, cutting it all the time, continuous. We had our own blokes on and contractors. It was just continuous there for about eight or ten months. Had trucks coming from all different parts of the place.

How did this – I know the mill managers loved it – but I just wanted to ask you how you got on with the mill managers, in general, around the place?

They were all sawmillers and they liked the timber as straight and big as they could get it. These days the diameters are causing a bit of a problem because they're too big; they can't handle them. Most of that stuff that we had blown down was the ideal size for them.

In diameter?

Yes, but places around here now, it's grown a fair bit since then. We used to talk to all the millers and things like that. We got on fairly well with them.

Bill Bates

Do you have any problems with them refusing lengths that are too short or ...?

Yes, that happens occasionally when the contractors, if he's on the machines, on the processors, if his electronic eye gets out he cuts it too short or too long.

So it's all done by electronic eye?

Yes, that's on the processors but we've still got some handfallers. Sometimes they break their tape and end up with a short length or a long length.

And this causes a few problems?

Yes.

And what about twisted or knotty bits?

Yes, we've got a specification sheet that rules out large knots and different bends – bends in two directions are no good.

What do you do with this timber that's ...?

That's left in the bush.

And then you just get the big roller in and just ...

... chopper roll it.

When did that system start, by the way, with using the big roller?

Back, probably about '85, I think. Probably it's been going ten years.



A chopper roller grinds branches of unusable timber and other organic matter into the soil in preparation for planting another crop of pine trees at Stromlo Forest, c. 1985. (Department of Territories, *Forestry in the ACT 1984–85*)

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What's the proper name for it?

Chopper roller. It's got knives along it.

It's an evil looking thing.

Yes.

But very effective by the look of it.

Yes.

I talked to Terry Connolly a little while ago and I'm just wondering; you must have had a good time with Terry, I suppose?

Yes, Terry was running the big mill out there for probably ten or twelve years or something, I think. I used to be in contact with Terry quite often. If we got a bad load of timber went in or something he used to ...

So he'd ring up and complain to you because you weren't controlling it properly?

Yes.

I bet that was fun.

Terry used to come out and have a look around the bush and see how things was going, as well. He was good to work with.

Also, I believe that when you first started in the forests way back in the late '40s that Cyril Cole was still there?

Yes. Well, actually Cyril Cole, he started me when I first started. The Forestry Office used to be down where Canberra Hospital is there now – the Royal Canberra at old Acton. That's when the Forestry or Department of Interior, I think used to be then. He wrote my starting ticket out for me to start, Cyril Cole.

Did you have much to do with him after that?

Yes, he used to come out regularly, just about once a week, and he used to visit the forests. Him, and Dave Shoobridge was another chap, too. He was second in command to Mr Cole.

How did you find Cyril Cole?

Good, really good.

Easy to get along with?

Yes, if he wanted something done, he wanted it done.

Bill Bates

You also mentioned earlier about the nurseries that you used to run and I'd just be interested if you'd give me a little bit of background on the nurseries, particularly around Uriarra.

We had one at Uriarra depot and one at what we call Blue Range camp and one at Lees Creek camp. Around September every year we used plough them all up with a tractor and then sow them with seed. Used to have a little hand seed sower and we used to plant the rows twelve inches apart and I think there was about fifty seeds per foot along the rows. We used to plough it all up and rake it. It was all done by hand in them days. Then we used to sow it with this little hand sower and we used to cover the seed with sand because the soils wasn't very good out there and then ... It used to take them about three weeks or a month to germinate – come up.

This was in the Springtime after you'd sown them?

Yes. And then the big problem used to come of weeding them – had to weed the nurseries. Sometimes we'd have to water them, which used to be a big task because of low water supply at Uriarra. Sometimes we used to have – at Blue Range and Lees Creek – we used to have to pump water from out of the creek and use sprinklers.

When you were running or dealing with the nursery at Uriarra and the water was low, this must have been in the period before you had reticulated water?

Yes, we used to pump out of the Cotter Dam and the pump could only so much.

How long after you sowed the seed did you plant out the seedlings?

Yes, you had to plant them out about June/July.

That's right. You mentioned that before; so they had about eight or nine months growth on them. Did you have much of a loss with them?

Sometimes we used to get bad strikes and other times it used to be good, depending on the weather and the season a lot.

Who actually ran the nursery side of things?

The overseer.

So that wasn't you in the early days, though?

No.

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Who was that?

There was Tony Franklin and Maurie Franklin.

What about Lees Creek and Blue Range?

Yes, they used to look after the lot.

How long did these nurseries last for?

About 1960 they faded them out and then they started buying in plants from places like South Australia and Victoria.

Why did they do that?

Economic reasons, I think. About 1960 they developed another big nursery down at Stromlo where they had plenty of water and more area there. I think it would have probably been about the mid-'60s that phased out.⁴

The Stromlo one?

Yes.

So we don't grow any of the seedlings?

No, we buy them all in now from Victoria and some from New South Wales.

Do you think that's a good thing to do?

I don't know. They reckoned they closed it down because of the economics of it and most of these are private people now growing the plants and they can do it a lot cheaper than we could. They're carting them in with a freezer van.

Is the quality of these things pretty good?

Yes.

I suppose with the Lees Creek and Blue Range ones, the nurseries, a lot of the work would have been done by the migrant workers that lived there in the '50s?

Yes, a lot of the work was done by the blokes that lived in the camp.

And they would have done the planting out, too, I suppose?

Yes.

You've made reference to ... in September you'd sow the seeds in the nurseries and then you'd plant out in June. I'm just wondering if you'd give me an overall view of

⁴ It actually continued until the late 1970s.

what the seasonal routine was like during the whole year – during the '50s and even into the '60s and a bit later.

We used to plough them up and sow them out and then the big task would be for weeding and watering.

This was in the nursery. I'm talking about the whole logging operation, or the whole forestry operation. So we start off with January or something like that.

We'll take January. It's usually a fairly hot month and quite a lot of fire duty. We'd probably have a period through till the end of March, probably heavily involved in fire duty. Probably some of the chaps would be doing the road maintenance and road construction. And then in the Autumn, probably through till June, there's getting ready for planting: burning off; and getting the box ready for the planting season. And then through from June till sort of September most people would be involved in planting. And then in the Spring from September through till sort of November, just doing fire break preparation: cleaning the fire breaks and general maintenance work.

You said in the early days you were also involved in some felling or pruning and thinning. When did you carry this sort of work out?

That was mainly through the Summer months – pruning and thinning. A lot of blokes when they're on fire duty they have the truck out with them and they'd work along the edge of the road with the pruning and thinning around the compartments.

These days you're very heavily involved in the fire control work, too, I believe.

Yes, still fairly well. We've got a lot less people these days.

Why is that?

The economics again. Quite a few of our people are tied up on fire duty. It's become very dry this year again since the end of January.

How long have you been involved in this fire control work? – ever since you became head of the logging operations or ...?

No, I've been involved with it since I started just about.

Right. And you're still on call for fires?

Yes. Actually, when I first started I used to do patrols on horseback at Uriarra – fire patrol on horseback.

Canberra's Foresters and Forestry Workers

Was this before they had any lookouts or anything?

Not before they had lookouts. They had one lookout at Uriarra and one at Pierce's Creek. I used to do fire patrols on horseback.

Was this a daily occurrence during the hot months?

Yes, mainly weekends.

You were out all weekend?

Yes.

Camp out somewhere away from home?

No, I used to do a patrol up to Blundell's Farm and out through the Vanity's Crossing.

Have you had any bad fires in recent years? I think '84 or '85 was a pretty bad year. '82 was – we had a really bad year. Burnt out 35,000 hectares out in Namadgi Park. That was a very bad fire.

Did you have any bad experiences in controlling these fires?

Yes, you've got to be extremely careful where you go. I've been around for a while and I know the country reasonably well.

You've had a very long career in forests, in fact I think you were telling me over a cup of coffee that you were recently reported as the longest serving person with ACT Forests.

Yes, I think that came out in the bulletin there a couple of weeks back.

What? – forty-six years.

Yes, it will be forty-six.

Do you think you'll make the fifty?

No, I won't get to fifty, not unless they extend the age limit.

Just looking back, what are the main changes you've seen in the forests in the time you've been – in all those years you've worked in such a place?

The development of new technology and things has really gone ahead, especially in the machinery line; from doing the hard slogging to what we can do today is a vast difference. The real hard work has gone out of it.

What about the changeover from ... it seems to have become a far more business orientated exercise? Have you noticed that and has that brought changes in the way you've worked or the way you've approached the work or anything like that?

Much changes in the way that you worked.

In what way, Bill?

Going out and getting into things manually – you've just got to think of a different aspect altogether. The new technology has ...

So what wouldn't have been possible before is now ...

No, no hope of doing it before.

What about the opening of the forests and the recreational usage? How has that affected your job or your work?

It's pretty good for a lot of the people that look after the forest, but we've still got a few people that don't and we get a fair bit of vandalism and things like that around.

Vandalising what exactly?

The picnic areas, the barbeques.

Were you involved in the development of the recreation areas?

Yes, I think it was about 1965 we first started to open up the forests for recreation.

Do you think in general that's a good thing or has it created more problems than it's worth or what?

It's certainly created a few problems, but if it's only a percentage of the public that create the problems, it's much enjoyment for a lot of the people that can go out and have a picnic or a barbecue out in the forest and treat it as a nice day.

You couldn't very well keep the people out these days, anyway; it's impossible.

No, that's another problem.

Looking back over a long career in the forests, how would you say you've enjoyed it or haven't you?

I've must have enjoyed it. I enjoyed it up till '92.

What were the things that you liked about working in that?

When I was overseer at Uriarra it was a lot better, different things, changes

Fitting memorial to forester's 50-year career



Bill Bates, right, with workmates Bob Cruftwell, Cliff Parsons, Nino Roain and Attilio Apadovan.

Photo by Peter Wells

By PETER GLACK

Few foresters have tramped more miles through Canberra's forests, fought more fires, seen more snakes or knocked over as many pine trees as Bill Bates.

It was 1948 when Mr Bates first signed up with the ACT's forestry operations. Eighteen months later he was sacked when the union found out he was under-age.

But he returned and went on to become one of the most experienced and respected loggers in the district. For the past three years he has been responsible for all forestry logging operations in the ACT.

Last week he decided to retire and he was given the signal honour of having a look-out on Mt McDonald named after him.

From this look-out Mr Bates examined many a tell-tale puff of smoke during his career.

In the early days he led logging horses, built roads at the Centre and supervised logging in places like Bulka Road. In 1981, he became overseer at Uriarra.

The chief executive of ACT Forests, Graham McKenzie-Smith, said Mr Bates would have attended every major ACT bushfire, and had been called upon countless times for advice.

A newspaper cutting reports Bill Bates' retirement after nearly 50 years of work in the ACT's forests. (*Canberra Times*, 15 December 1996)

in work. There was a never dull moment in the day's work. Since they've centralised this depot, it hasn't been as enjoyable.

You're in town all the time now?

No, usually travelling around the contractors all the time.

What isn't it so enjoyable, just as a matter of interest?

You haven't got the variety of jobs, whereas when I was at Uriarra there'd be probably four or five different jobs going on in the one day.

So what do you do now?

Just purely looking after the logging contractors.

So this is what you do all the time when you're not out fighting fires?

Mm.

But generally speaking you've had a pretty good time?

Yes.

No regrets.

No, no regrets up till '92, at all.

Bill Bates

Just looking back again, can you single out anything that stands out as the achievement that you'd be proudest of, that you remember most and you think is a thing well done and well worth doing?

I think it might have been the wind blow in '74 – cleaning that up.

Are there any other outstanding events that you remember – things that stand out in your mind – your experiences in the forests and so on that are particularly striking events or significant events that you remember?

No, not in particular. I suppose because I've been in it so long that they're all pretty much the same, I think.

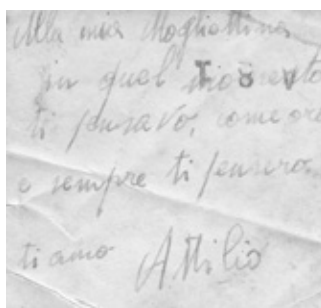
You've seen it all. Well, look on that note I think we might conclude the interview. I'd like to thank you very much, Bill, for coming along and giving us your memories. That's all right, thanks very much.

Thanks a lot.



Attilio Padovan sweeping out his hut at Blue Range Camp soon after he arrived in Australia in 1952.

(N. Padovan)



On the back of the photograph, he wrote a brief message to his wife Nives who was pregnant with their first child back in Italy. The message said:

‘To my wife Nives,
At this moment I was thinking of you. As now and always
I think of you.
I love you,
Attilio

Attilio Padovan

Interview with Attilio Padovan recorded in the sound studio of the Australian War Memorial on 24 May 1994

Attilio Padovan was born on 18 August 1921 in the village of Istrago in northeastern Italy between Venice to the south and the border with Austria to the north. In early 1952, his partner of six years and future wife, Nives De Paoli, fell pregnant. As economic opportunities were severely limited in Italy, Attilio sought a better life for himself and his soon-to-be family. Leaving Nives behind, temporarily, in Europe, he migrated to Australia in mid-1952 and soon found himself working in the forests outside Canberra. While he was absent overseas, his first child, Renato, was born in October of that year and in the same month, as he indicates in the interview, he married Nives by proxy.

By 1954, Attilio had saved up enough money to return to Italy to arrange for his wife and son to come to Australia. They duly arrived in early 1955 and, later in the year, the couple's second child William was born. A third child, a daughter, Lillian, was born in 1959.

Attilio went on to become a trusted overseer in the forests. He ended up working in the forests for 34 years, retiring in 1986. He died in Canberra on 5 September 2000.

Canberra's Foresters and Forestry Workers

Mr Padovan, welcome to the tape. Obviously you are not from Australia originally; I wanted to know where you came from.

Yes, that's from northern Italy in the eastern part, north of Venice – a 100 km north of Venice – if you can put a line and another 100 km from Trieste and another 100 km from the Austria border – that's where the hills finished and the flat starts. We called it Padan Flat.¹

I thought it might have been a mountainous area that you were in.

No, just six kilometres away it started – little hills. In both sides, on the left and on the north.

When did you come to Australia?

In 1952.

What made you leave Italy?

I'd been working for seven years at a joinery shop and mill. I was working more on the mill than as far as joinery goes – more to the mill than joinery – and it was not continuous work; you had probably six months and then they lay you off for three months, then we resume work again and then they lay you off. That was not a reliable sort of a job.

Was this because of the effects of the war?

No, it is that sort of economy. It is not an area where factories are. Is only very little factories. Mostly it's with the building of the houses, the jobs. To build a house people, probably one third, they are working there and the other two thirds they have to emigrate.

So you decided to leave. Why did you pick on Australia? Why didn't you go, say, to the United States or somewhere like that?

At the municipal office they were saying they were requiring people ... there is a demand to go to Australia. So I done it and my fiancée didn't like it very much but I said let's do something, otherwise we know only that bit of a struggle which was the place where we were and the life is not that adventurous, interesting. So I said I would like to go to Australia and I fill up all the papers. That went on, nothing we hear for about two, three months. And then they said, 'Oh, your demand been successful.' So you had to go for the visit.

¹ Padan Plain or Po Valley, Italy.

You visited the office where they ...

Yes, the local office there, but now it escapes my mind where I went for the Australian office. I know I went to Rome at one stage, but I don't know if it was that purpose for that visit or whether it was Genoa. Genoa was embarkation port.

That's where you left from. Did you get married before you left?

I got married after. I got married by proxy.

So your wife was still in Italy, was she?

Yes, and of course I was worried. I didn't want it to appear that I was trying to get a wife.

Did the Australian immigration officials have work for you lined up for when you came to Australia?

No, nothing. I put down because I was working in a joinery shop as a carpenter, but I was going to be prepared to do anything that comes to me. So that's how [it] did happen really.

When did you leave Genoa?

After about three months.

What was the date roughly?

Roughly, it was 1952 we arrived at Bonegilla, so I say early 1952. We arrived in Bonegilla in about March.

About March 1952?

Yes.

How did you like Bonegilla?

Of course, it was a camp. We find a lot of things to do: playing soccer; playing with cards. It became a bit monotonous. It's all right if you're doing that for a couple of weeks, you can put up with things but it went for so long. We were there for two or three months. Eventually some of the young boys ... I had money so I didn't worry ... every month. If [inaudible] right with money, you keep them coming – using them very solidly. But other boys, they would run out completely of money and this particular – it is very important – because those people who run out of money, they start to scream, 'What are we doing here? We want to work, we want to get money.' One day, this particular group of people, because they completely run out, [said]: 'Let's go down to the office

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[and] protest.' Everyone went down there. They say, 'All right, you have to do what people ask.' Down there they start to scream, 'We have no money, we have come here to work, nobody thinks of us', and so forth. And that was, although it appears to be insignificant, the [inaudible] where they start to send people out.

So it had some effect, in other words.

Yes. And myself, I just happened to come to the forest with that groups which they sent – we were twenty-five – and we reach Canberra. Myself, I went up to Uriarra, Lees Creek Camp right up ...

Pierces Creek?

Lees Creek. Pierces Creek is a civilised type of one, but this one was right up in the mountains. It was planting pines and that was nearly to the extreme of the forest for that days. They might have been expanded again, but that was, we were supposed to be camped in a hut there. When the planting was completed – we were nine – and one has to stay in Uriarra, it's been said, but when you are with a group you make a habit of the people with which you are, you tend to stick together. One they wanted to stop in Uriarra so, 'Any volunteers?'; no volunteers, they want to stay with the group. So nine sticks, [the man] who pulled the shortest, he stops. I went to pull, it was the short. Things like that, it never goes out of your mind. And that was the best thing that could ever happen to me because I loved the forest and I learned the area. I had a good life later. I get my missus there.

How old were you when you came to Australia?

1952, I was thirty, not thirty-one, thirty.

Did you have any English when you came to Australia?

Very little. We learn a bit on the ship.

Coming forward a bit then, when you left Bonegilla for the forests in Canberra, you didn't have any choice about going there; they just said 'You're going to Canberra.' Is that what happened?

Yes, there was twenty-five of us, we were sent on the forestry. Apparently there was a demand for all because there was some pressure from other sources. In the meantime between those two – I had a few pounds, it was pounds then, I carried with me and I was very strict with my spending, but other boys, they had that fortune so they run out of money completely. Looking at the paradox

of things, because of them, all those people which run out of money, they went down screaming, and they start to move. I didn't protest. I could have stayed another three months there with no problem, but because of those poor buggers [inaudible].

These twenty-five, were they picked out because they had some experience with joinery or forestry or anything like that?

I don't think so, it was sort of 'Let's do something.' Who can spend the money? If there's no development, then there's nobody. Private, they don't take on people just like that. It would be only the different agencies of the government. So the twenty-five, when we arrive in Canberra, they say, 'One group goes to Uriarra; other group Pierces Creek; the other group they stay in Stromlo.' And then, ten of us went up to Uriarra, right up to Lees Creek Camp.

What for?

Planting – to plant.

What sort of accommodation were you living in?

Up there the camp is formed by four bedrooms and I think we were about ten. Four bedrooms is a lot of rooms; probably more. The house is divided just like that, and then there is the washing and another one like that.

Whilst you were up there you were mainly involved in planting pines?

Planting pines, yes.

You got there in 1952. Were you there when the major bushfires were on that year?

We came after that, after the fires.

Did you see the damage that the fires had done?

We saw, yes, they were in Stromlo; I believe there was a fire burnt it. Here, if you have dry conditions, burns everything.

You weren't worried at all after seeing the damage the fires had done about what might happen if another bushfire came through?

No, because it's something new and you are curious how it works, what you have to do to beat that sort of thing. Your curiosity is winning on top of the anxiety. If you are worried then you lose your sense of adventure.

How long were you at Lees Creek for?

It was about – we had to plant there – probably about two months.

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Is that all, and then back to Uriarra?

No, and then it comes one day – I think one of the bosses, I don't know exactly who it was; I believe it was the overseer – Tony Franklin was the overseer in Uriarra – and he came up: 'Eight of you, one', he will say, one move to Stromlo and one stop here.' So who's going to stop here? You're leaving your company and it's like tearing apart your finger which you've been used to living [with]. Nobody wants to go, so: pull out nine sticks – whatever number we have, I think we were nine – and I pulled the short one.

So you stayed.

Yes, and I went up to Blue Range camp and the others, they moved to Stromlo. They had other things to do there. But myself, I join up with another group, another camp, which was about another ten men in Blue Range.

What did you do up there?

It would be rather a maintaining type of job, but also planting to do mostly. The reason was for us to be up there was [to be] available for planting and then it's other jobs such as pruning trees. Well, they were really established forests which were planted there during the war. In 1939 they started, I think. So it was old enough to be pruned eight foot.

Did anybody train you in this or they just told you generally what to do?

You just work. Right, they said, 'Go and do that. You've got a saw.' Normally you are with a group and if he's a new one, he's always with a group, and a leading hand or a ganger is in charge. They are showing you how to do it and then you just follow the rest of the group. It's not difficult. It's not a like a mechanic where you require a long training. You just pick that – you do the same as the other one.

How did you like Blue Range camp?

It's a beautiful place. You had to cook by yourself, so if you have never done it before you learning bit by bit. Tucker was once a week – the truck was doing the ... where you give the money to the driver and he would buy it for you so much or the driver is giving the ticket with the orders to the shop and there is two ways: pay with money or pay once a month. That's generally how it was. After two months you have two cheques in your pocket. Normally they pay you with cheque every two weeks, so you have two cheques. You go down into Canberra – that was Manuka or Kingston, the two places



Attilio (centre) joking around with two unidentified forestry workers in the 1960s.
(N. Padovan)]

established – Kingston was the greater place. Manuka was the cinema. If you decided to stop there, you went to the cinema and come back with taxi at night.

So you'd go into Canberra about once a month?

Yes, about that. And then it was then we had to pay because travelling from ship from the old country to here it was financed by a company, you see, and we had to repay them back so much. Nobody could afford to pay right away, so it was helped. I don't know if it was the government who financed or what but we had to pay there – IICLA[?] it was called.

I see, so the government paid half of it and you paid the other half.

I don't know if the government did help or if it was direct indebted to the people who was involved with the travelling. At the beginning we had to pay a certain amount, such as thirty pounds that time, but then you had to pay the other gradually within that time.

So thirty pounds to start with and then pay off the rest bit by bit.

I am not that clear about that particular, but I think it was in that line. I think

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it's pretty reasonable. And the rest was financed by a company; it used to be IICLA[?], Institute Internationale Credit ... or something like that.

Were the wages you were getting for the forestry work good or were they just pretty ordinary?

It was good. When you are in those conditions, you are always comparing with the old country. We used to spend two pounds ten or three pounds for a week's tucker. We bought tins or raw tucker or eggs, whatever you needed. You make up a list and then gradually as you go along you become more sophisticated. You know, you want a bit extra.

I don't blame you.

We found that meat was very cheap compared with the old country – always you are comparing. It takes a long time to forget what you were doing with the other side – you always compare. We were saying with two pounds ten I can live a week. In the old country, hardly I could live with the wages that we were working [for]. You follow? When I was working some years in joiner's shop there and my wages was nearly all going for tucker. My mother was always complaining that I never give her enough money.

Maybe you were eating too much.

Now you buy a dress. You are lucky if you can buy a doll's dress once every three-four years. It was definite ... the cost of living was extremely cheap here in Australia comparable. You can afford to live well, dress decent and plus still you have some pound in [your] pocket or to put in the bank. I was being like a Jew all the time; always put it in the bank those money.

When did you get married and when did your wife come to Australia?

I married her by proxy. You know what that means.

When was that?

A few weeks after that I was here, I organised to go to Canberra to a place there because she was worried, maybe I come that far and I want to get away from her. Everyone would think in that way. I never thought that, always being [of good] conscience. I didn't marry there because over there it was not possible.

When did she come out to Australia?

When I finished my contract, not a tied-up contract. To myself, I said, I had to stick for two years. It's difficult to break things if you agree upon. So when I

spent two years I went back in Europe. And then I come back with my missus. The Forestry gave me a house which I did appreciate very much – a new house. A new house [inaudible]. I say, ‘Look here, one to my missus, where would we find a house? – never.’ Over there, my old place, the houses are built of rocks. There is a big stream not far away – the river, Tagliamento, but then there is other waters running and that water which is running is tumbling down rocks from the hill. And by the time they are to the sea, the rocks are nothing left because is all limestone – all hitting each other, grinding – but we were not far from the hills about seven-eight kilometres from the hills and that’s where they were all rolling and the people were gathering the rocks from there and they would build their houses. They made very tight, weatherproof, although the windows were not much good.

But at Uriarra you had a wooden house, I suppose.

Yes, they gave me in Uriarra a new house. I was really appreciative of that because new houses ...

Your wife like the house, did she?

Oh, definitely, yes.

What did she think of coming to Canberra, to a place like Uriarra? Did she like it or was she a bit shocked?

We come to Uriarra in 1954, I think, but meantime I bought the house ...

You bought the one in Yarralumla already?

Yes. Not finished buying, of course, but I was working. Besides working I was engaging myself in contract pruning mostly and scrubbing. I tell you that I pay so much tax that ... I pay more tax than the normal wages before ... just when I came here. After we were engaged in contract I earned good money – seven pounds per acre to prune – and I was able to do one acre very ... That’s three times as much as normal and, of course, part of that money the government get it back, but that was a great help. They helped me to buy that house there.

How did you manage to fit in all the pruning work with your forestry work?

Weekends. You work five days and you will see that I gave it back how many thousands of sick leave, being only one or two days sick in all those years. I never bludged a day because I was working there. You can do it. A person can do it if you have the will; you must have the will, the desire.

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When did you start doing this extra work?

As soon as it come available. That was because the jobs that we were doing during the day with the government, it's three times more expense than a contract; it is much more expense. Because a man goes out there, you never produce as much as if you are a contractor. Firstly, you have to take account of the transporting man to work, having a cup of tea, then a bit now and then you have a bit of rest; you had to follow the rules. Otherwise if you pretend to be the real people who want to change the situation, you find yourself with a boot in the pants. Not done by the employers, but you have to fit in with the others. That's the situation. So that's why a contractor, you're doing there and it was consisting of, if the acreage they were all planted twelve by twelve, there would be about 300-350, between 300 to 400 plants – the person who was planting per acre. If they were eight by eight, you had 650 plants – whatever but with a difference, if you're pruning on twelve by twelve you have big limbs, whoppers – like that – and with a little saw, one [inaudible] saw – you have to give a lot of elbow to cut it. But if you have dense forest, especially where you have ferns, the limbs, they won't grow for that height – only a few [inaudible] – just like that and then the leaves, they fall off.

That's easy.

Yes, much easier in the dense although you are pruning more than in the others. That's how I made a lot of dough. I never failed to pay the tax, of course, I had to pay because I knew they would get me. And that's how I bought that house there.

Before you went back to get your wife were you at Blue Range camp?

Yes.

Right up till that time?

Yes.

And then when you came back you were at Uriarra. How long did you stay at Uriarra for?

In Uriarra – you mean my working life?

When you brought your wife back from Italy and you were living in the house there, were you working in Uriarra Forest?

Yes, we stopped there for seven-eight years.



Attilio late in his working life measures a huge *radiata* pine, 29 July 1986.
(N. Padovan)

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And you were still working with forests and doing planting?

Yes, definitely. In the meantime I was promoted to ganger, so I had a bit more money. I was a ganger which you're supposed ganger, by normal, you had to watch the men working and address the men how to work, but myself I was working at the head of them, show them by same – acting in that way all the time because that's all ... A man is depressed when he has one watching him to see what he does. He feels humiliated. And then on the other hand – that was my reason why I was working – but on the other hand I said, if I get tired, [I am earning] a bit better money than them, and then I have to do something, too. It's a complexity of things that goes through your mind. We are all a bit different but I found that I could cope.

I think that's probably the best way to go, yes.

When that job we proved that we could do it, in the meantime there who was doing the log measuring was an Australian bloke by the name of Eric Alderton. He was doing the measuring on the contractors who were cutting logs, but he was living in Blue Range while myself I was in Blue Range. And the funny part, I always said, look at that, he was clean, every day he was bathing but he was barefoot. He had big whopper foot like that. You should see, he had underneath hard. He was standing a bit higher in the ground. He was going everywhere by barefoot. You could see him bending the blackberries with his foot, like that [demonstrating how he did it] – like chopping with a mattock. It never hurt him. No, gee, he was tough, that man.

Who did you work for when you were working at Uriarra? Who was your boss?

Uriarra, [it] was Franklins and the forester in charge was Slinn at the beginning.² And, of course, the big boss was Cole.

How did you get on with them?

Very well. They liked people who worked, who done a bit. They were very appreciative.

So that's why they obviously promoted you.

Yes, eventually, I think so. You find some resentment on the part of your fellow men. They think you were really but that was not the case. That's how human beings act. One do a bit more, the other one do a bit less.

² The overseer was initially Tony Franklin who was succeeded by Maurie Franklin. The forester in charge was Ron Slinn [GMcK-S].

Attilio Padovan

You never had any problems with Cole or any of your ... ?

No, I found them easy. When they gave me the house I was very appreciative. They gave me a new house. I said, a new house, don't come that easy; I am fortunate. The boss – I was fortunate, that's true.

Did you start having a family when you were at Uriarra?

I had a kid in Europe. When you are young you have to start young.

Maybe I better not ask about this.

Oh well, they all the facts of life. That didn't stop anything. It motivated me more rather than ...

Did the child come to Australia?

Yes, definitely.

With your wife?

Yes, when I went back in 1954 and brought back the missus and the kid – not very adventurous.

How old was the child? Was it a boy or a girl?

A boy, yes – 1952.

He came to Uriarra and ...

Yes.

How did he get on at Uriarra?

Very well. He went right through all the primary schools there.

At the Uriarra school?

Uriarra schools, yes. He went to St Edmunds. And then I had another boy and then a girl.

This is while you were living at Uriarra?

Yes.

So you and your wife brought a family of three up there.

It's a good place.

You were at Uriarra for about seven or eight years?

Yes. We bought that house in Yarralumla. Being a bit of Jew that I am, I rented [it] for a few years. That's how things were. I don't know if it was normality but I never ceased to not pay up there, so I don't think it offended people.

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When did you leave Uriarra?

It was about '63, I think.

As late as that. So you lived there right up till 1963?

Yes. I could be wrong but not much difference. Just about that.

And then you moved to the Yarralumla house, did you?

Yes, moved in.

You were still working for ACT Forests?

Yes, I travelled backwards and forwards every day then. I bought always old motor cars. Travelling cost me very little – twenty-five/thirty quid in those days; a quid was two dollars. Mostly I had Simcas. I still have one there at home. I keep for the cat now. I was industrious – mechanically I find it easy. The Simca was a vehicle which is very easy to handle for the handyman. You have a four cylinder motor and you can change parts very easily. It's not like a six cylinder. I had quite a few of them ... I still have one there.

It must be fairly old now.

Yes, generally they were early 1960s, those type of vehicles.

Anyway, you were still working with the forests. Were you working at Uriarra, still?

Yes, I did a great deal and then they promoted me for overseer.

When was that?

The first time was in the 1970s. I had to go to be overseer at Stromlo. I spent two or three months there. I did not want the job for overseer. [Inaudible] because I could see that it is sort of friction building between ... Up to ganger it's very easy to tell people do this, do that and be amongst them and do the same as people. They don't resent to be commanded by a foreigner. But overseer is a bit more involved and you have not only forest workers, you have plant operators and plant operators, they think ... and drivers – you have to direct them, too. This is the job of the overseer. Then you have a combination of things where you have to be diplomatic and at the same time you have to tell them what to do because if you don't tell them you can be sure they tell after: one, I never was told, so that's how the system works. I finished up in Stromlo as an overseer, then I had a go in Uriarra and Pierces Creek. Pierces Creek, I spent two or three years there as an overseer. So I had a go all over the place – with the exception of Kowen, of course. I had never had anything to do with Kowen, although we did some planting pines up in that way.

Most of your work was planting pines and then pruning and thinning. Was that what you were involved in?

Early? Early days, yes.

And then after that, what?

If you had to do the overseer job, you have to direct the people. You haven't got the time because overseer, is office work involved and then you have to make sure that people are doing what you are directing them to do, especially if it involves machinery and they expected that – to be told. If you are in charge of bulldozers which the overseer indirectly is in charge, you have to organise. They expect that the overseer has to direct things.

That's right. So you were at Stromlo for a while and at Pierces Creek and Uriarra.
Yes.

That's a pretty wide range of experience, isn't it?
Yes.

When you became an overseer who were you working for then? Who was your boss at that point?

First time it was Currie, a very young forester.³ I would not say the first time because I cannot pick exactly how it happened that I was given the honour to be overseer which is a great involvement. So I did in Uriarra and Pierces Creek and in Stromlo – very unique, not many have done all the three. Most of the time as replacement. The old overseer probably went [on] holidays or he was sick so they were replacing him. Stromlo, of course, was the more [inaudible], more delicate there. I find that they are dealing with plant operators. For instance, you have to be more careful when you deal with them than if you deal with forest workers. I find that drivers, they are much easier lot than plant operators. You see what I mean? If a forest worker goes, that's different. You grow up with them. You understand them and expect [them] to do what you were doing, but not necessarily it is going to be that way. If you are tolerant with people, it seems to me, you get the best results.

I agree with that, yes. You mentioned just a few minutes ago that you felt when you were overseer that there might have been resentment – you might have got resentment, especially from Australians – people who were native-born Australians.

3 Ian Currie.

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Did you have any problems with people like that who were working for you or working under you?

Not really. I understand that I would have the same feelings if people ... but I was thinking I must make a living myself. I have to find a way where I can get along with this person and make him understand that he, too, he has a duty for the money that he is paid to do – to work – no matter who he is telling, 'Who is that fellow that's coming from Italy or coming from Northern Territory, whatever?' He is still paid for work.

Apart from the Australians you must have had a lot of different types of people, different nationalities.

Definitely, yes. We had Hungarians and Yugoslavs, but everyone is a good worker if we have the right approach – everyone is a good person – just as well. Sometimes for reasons unknown you hurt each other but I never had run any risk, I would say, although [there were] so many. There were Hungarians, Yugoslavs, Romanians, whatever.

I can see that you had to be quite diplomatic dealing with all these different types of people. It would take quite a bit of effort, really, and skill.

When I was with a gang in the bush, I was ahead of them chopping and snigging, doing more work, so they have to do something behind me.

You were leading from the front.

You are leading from the front, yes, doing it that way, yes. It was a good time. Overall, I would say it was a good time.

So you were still working for them through the 1970s.

Yes. I think 1986 I retired.

If it was 1986, that means you worked for them for thirty-four years.

Yes, thirty-four years, that's correct.

That's a tremendous record.

Yes, I never changed. I don't know if I spent one day in compo.

Not one day?

No, no, probably one day.

Only one day, well, that's all right. In thirty-four years we'll give you one day off.

We've been talking about your time in forests in the 1970s and 1980s and you became an overseer in this period. I'm just wondering what stands out as the major events that occurred in this time. Did you have any big problems with bushfires or were there other big achievements that happened in these years that stand out in your mind?

Nothing exceptional, I will say. But it was always lively and especially when you had to deal with contractors which were the logging. Their main purpose was to make money and that's understandable. Their life was not easy for them at all, especially in their early days when the logging was conducted by the bow saw and axe. There were people who were making – two men, sometimes there were three but generally there were two plus the driver – they would make three loads a day. Three loads consisted of each load to them was worth eight pounds, especially if they were early, and the other eight pounds was to do the driver; you divided the money. The driver was hiring, more or less, the men but in a loose way, no conditions at all: you produce the cut logs, I cart them away. They were loading by hand in the beginning, extremely [tiring] – terrible to lift, big logs. People at the end of the day were exhausted. But later on they learn that the cranes were best; for each truck they provide a crane. The life becomes much easier for the logger and still earning the same amount of money because they could not produce more than three loads a day.

How big was a load?

The load was about three cords, higher than the trucks which they carried – much more. But in the beginning they want short type of logs; they were cut in three cords. It means – one cord, how much would it weigh? – between five to ten tons. It could vary. It depends on the thickness. If they have the small type of logs, they weighed less because less wood. In three of them they were making three loads a day but they worked late at night, early morning and sometimes Saturday and Sunday.

So it's very long hours.

Yes, very long hours. I did quite a lot to supervise them. My job was to measure the logs in the beginning and brand the grading the logs which they were considered second class. If a log is beautiful, that is first class, and that's supposed to be ... I was measuring them. Measuring the logs, they were leaving aside them. They were loading only, for instance, when the case has

to be loaded. Those which had been rejected branded with a harruner[?]⁴ or with a cross with the chalk – not so much with the chalk, everyone can buy a chalk – but mostly it was stamped. It proved enough to last long enough. So they had to work Saturday, Sunday, early morning, late in the afternoon to produce three loads a day. If there were three men, the money, we, on the average, were earning, say, two pounds ten, they were making for a load eight pounds. If they were making three loads, they were making eight pounds a day. That was good wages for them, but it still remained a very busting sort of a job – terrible! Then later the cranes came in, make life very easy for them, and the chainsaw. First they were with the bow saw, cutting, and with the advent of the chainsaw everything changed completely. I saw a man alone in Uriarra – this fellow was taller than myself but all muscles – he was able to produce by himself three loads a day. I never saw anything happen like that, not any more. He was a real Hercules. Of course, they had their crane to load it then. Changing conditions.

They were only cutting pine in this period, they weren't cutting eucalypts or anything like that.

No, all pine and they were mostly thinnings which is totally different from clear falling. Clear falling you have the best left for last.

Did you have any problem with bushfires in the time you were there?

Not so much. We had opportunity to go out fighting fires, mostly on the weekend. I don't know if it was attached to the [inaudible]. It seems to be, most of the fires they were with the picnickers but not a great deal. Some of the years, of course, are worse than others. Every five or six years you have a very bad year and that is could be disastrous, but generally everything is under control, shall we say.

I just wanted to return to when you and your family were living at the house in Uriarra. Can you just tell me what it was like living there and what sort of rules you had to abide by?

There was no exceptional rules. More or less the same as living in Canberra. You must have respect for the house that you are living in and sometimes the balls – somebody busts something but nothing much in my history, anyhow, that people were in trouble because of the house. Forestry was very tolerant.

4 Possibly a type of branding hammer.



Attilio (right) watches a skidder (front) and skyline (rear) conducting logging operations at Hall's Block, 29 July 1986. (N. Padovan)

They liked to keep these people on the good side.

You told me before that you were doing this private work with pruning and so on.

How long did you keep that up for?

I kept it up until I buy the house.

The Yarralumla house?

Yes, the Yarralumla house.

When was that, roughly speaking?

It was about – it took me ten years.

So about 1962–63? That's right because you said you moved into the Yarralumla house in about 1963.

We moved in which was not paid, so I finished to pay about early '70s – I keep working. But I could be wrong.

So you finished paying off the house in the early '70s.

Yes.

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But you did the pruning work, the extra work, up until about the early '60s. Is that right?

Later than that.

So for more than ten years you were not only working five days a week up in the forests, you were working another one or two days every weekend on pruning.

On pruning or scrubbing, generally.

You must have been working very hard.

Or planting. Sometimes you do some planting in winter. It was hard, yes. You have to do it, and mostly by myself. If you are by yourself you are free. If you are in two, you have to be agreeable with the other. So if he's sick, you have to be sick. You are not ... I always said, if there is one – 100 per cent. If there is two – 75 per cent. If there's three – around 60 per cent and level off there. You see the difference between one and more people – the efficiency of doing work. And that goes for everyone. You try yourself. You put yourself in one place, you never stop. But if you have another one, you want a smoke, you want a chat.

That's right. Anyway, you retired eventually in 1986. Is that because you'd reached the retirement age?

Yes, the retirement age.

How did you feel about retiring?

At the beginning life is hard for everyone. You have habits and you feel nostalgic. Now and then, still now, I want to go and have a look at the pines.

You get the urge to go back to the forest, do you?

Definitely, it becomes part of your life, the same as drinking tea. It's true. Once a year I feel the urge to go up to Blue Range – probably more than once a year. That's where I have more sympathy than any other place – Blue Range. There is pines there where I put the seeds myself. Oh, look how big they are.

So there's something you've done that you like to see grown up.

You feel nostalgic for something. It's like you used to see a young girl, you like her, you want to go and see her. Not to that extent.

I hope not.

Till nowadays, I feel I must go. I tell my missus, I must go up – like the [inaudible], they have a weakness in some way: I must go up, that's true.

What about the other people that you worked with, do you still see them or do they go up to the forest?

Not that. Mostly I have to be by myself. I find that even when I am with my missus it's not the same thing. She tells me, 'Why go and look at the pines?', 'Oh, why go up the hill?' But every one of us, we have some weakness in some way.

I don't know if it's a weakness.

It's a revival. I call it a revival. If you spend thirty-four years doing something connected, it doesn't dissipate just like that. You're functioning with the memory and memory always drops back, especially with trees. Trees are inert type of thing, but it's enjoyable to look. They never kick you back. They never land you on your arse. I won't say ...

I take it that when you go up there you must feel a great sense of achievement of what you did in your time working in the forests.

In a way, yes, I can say that time I spent with the forests, I didn't like to bludge. I wanted to put whatever work and not to avoid work and do things. More or less, you get paid for something, you have to produce. That's in line – always been – it's not so poetic but you have to cope with yourself. You can blame your missus, you can blame yourself, but still you have to do with yourself, the things.

Did you feel it was a worthwhile job all those years?

Definitely, I always considered myself fortunate that happened to me to be on the forest. It was a really good time. Some days you had to work hard and [others] not that much. Trees, I always say, they grow by themselves, they don't need anyone.

What would say is your greatest achievement or do you see your career as an achievement?

Achievement. I comment myself [that] I had the fortune to go to work in the forest and to spend [inaudible]. It doesn't seem very brilliant and boring rather, but that is what I feel. I am happy. If it was now ten years it would be even ... I said ... sixty-five, now I had to go out, that's right. Plenty of other people have to come in. But for the person at that age you have more feeling than when you are young. When you are young you have other things on your mind. Between fifty and up you become really part of what you learnt to do. That's a

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Attilio's long service in Canberra's forests was recognised in the naming of Padovan's Crossing over Lees Creek after him. (N. Padovan)

goal for everyone. I really, as I said, now and then I have to go up there like the [Aborigines] – must go around to have a look.

So obviously you're very happy with the years that you spent in the forests and [inaudible].

Definitely. Thirty-four years, very beautiful years.

And since your retirement you've stayed in Canberra.

I've bought a farm, I planted pines.

Where was that?

[Inaudible] but it's different – the type of country is different.

Where is that?

Burra. It's the hilly country of Blue Range or the Cotter Valley that has a sort of appeal. Then in its way it's different. You don't feel the same thing as up in that way. It appears to be I am here, you say to yourself, I belong to this. That's very good. That sort of feeling.

And generally speaking you liked the people that you worked with and for whilst you were working for Forestry?

Yes, you know, you have always a mix [of] people, but overall Forestry people have been good to me – nearly all the bosses.

I'm just wondering if there's anything else you'd like to tell me about your time in Forests that you think is important.

Important?

Either to you or to Forests.

Well, it wasn't important in the sense that when you come from that part I come from where you have to battle, and everyone does, to make something and you come here and you find that with the same amount of willingness you can do three times as much. That's why you can call yourself fortunate to have the opportunity. That's not very brilliant but if you consider the facts of life.

So you don't regret leaving Italy or ... ?

There is no future in being how long in one place. I had started when I was fifteen and for about eight years I work, you get only that bit of bread or polenta, as we call it.

It's good stuff. I like it, actually.

Yes, if she is a good cook in the morning. Without money in the pocket you are not free, and that's what it amounts [to]. It gave to me that sense of freedom because although through the hard work – I did a lot of contract work: scrubbing and pruning, planting, everything that come in handy with my craft.

What about your wife? Is she happy that you came to Australia, that the family came to Australia?

Yes, she remembers Mum now and then but ...

But she thinks you're better off in Australia than ...

You are free. Without money in the pocket you are never free, never. That's the basic.

I think we might conclude the interview there.

Already, hey.

We can go on if you want.

No, I think I bore you enough.

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No, not at all. I've enjoyed talking to you and it's interesting to hear what you have to say. It's a different sort of angle on the forests and I'd just like to thank you for spending the time and it's good to hear what you had to say.

I say thank you to you to listen to me.

Thanks very much.



Attilio at Blue Range Camp, 15 February 1986, near the end of his working life in Canberra's forests.

(N. Padovan)

Ron Murray

Interview with Ron Murray recorded in the sound studio of the Australian War Memorial on 28 March 1995

Ron Murray was born in western Sydney in 1936 and commenced the four-year course of study to become a forester at the University of Sydney in 1954. After completing the final two years of his studies at the Australian Forestry School in 1956–57, he emerged with a Bachelor of Science (Forestry) degree and a Diploma in Forestry. Early the following year, he was taken on by the Division of ACT Forests and was soon appointed the Officer-in-Charge of the Cotter Valley. He married his fiancée Pamela in 1960, he and his wife living at the Uriarra settlement for the next five years. Ron became Officer-in-Charge of Uriarra forest in 1961.



Ron Murray as a fresh-faced young graduate in the mid-1950s.

(R. and P. Murray)

With the aid of a scholarship, he took leave of absence in mid-1965 to undertake advanced studies at the University of Michigan which had the oldest forestry school in the United States. Here, he studied, observed and gained practical experience in the multiple-use management of forests, as practised in the US. On his return to Australia in 1967, he was appointed head of Planning and Marketing in the ACT Forestry Section. Although his job was based in the Civic office, he and his family took up residence again at Uriarra.

Ron continued to work in Civic until 1976 when he left ACT Forestry to become Director of ACT Parks and Gardens. He returned to ACT Forests

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in 1984 as Assistant Secretary (Forests) and, in December of the following year, he moved on to become First Assistant Secretary of ACT Parks and Conservation, soon renamed Parks and Recreation. From 1989, he occupied a number of senior managerial positions in the ACT Senior Executive Service, having responsibility at different times for such diverse areas as urban services and recreation, arts and tourism.

Following his retirement in the early 1990s, Ron and his wife continued to live in Canberra. They have five children and currently five grandchildren.

I'd like to welcome Mr Murray to the sound studio and to the interview. I'd like to start off by asking him how he first became involved in forestry?

Yes, that was in 1954. I got a Commonwealth Forestry Scholarship that was given by the Commonwealth government for the study of forestry for four years. You did two years of straight science at your own university, in my case the University of Sydney, then you came to the Forest and Timber Bureau here in Canberra and completed two years at the Australian Forestry School. In those days [it] was at Yarralumla and subsequently formed part of the ANU. You now do the whole four years at the Australian National University.

What attracted you to forestry? Did you have a family background in it or something like that?

That's interesting, Brendan. At the time I didn't have a family background because I didn't know about a family background, but my wife has been researching my family history and she found out recently in the early 1800s that some forebears came to Australia and went pit sawing on the North Shore and that's a very prominent forestry activity. And then some others went cedar cutting, down the south coast, and we've traced some cemeteries and things like that. But at that stage I didn't know anything about that, so presumably it was in the blood. No, I did a vocational guidance test at school.

And you believed it?

Well, it was one of the things of it and I applied for this scholarship and I got the scholarship and so that was fairly decisive. I had started doing surveying, but with this scholarship and with the degree related to forestry at the time and the interest I picked that up.

Were you a Sydney boy?

I was at Sydney University, yes.



Pine forests covering the slopes of the Cotter Reservoir, 1963. (National Archives of Australia, A1200, item L45307)

Did you come from Sydney?

Yes, I came from Parramatta.

Not much forestry there, I suppose.

No, not at the time. It wasn't a specific interest in it myself, but it was that sort of basis. I did some fieldwork as a Commonwealth student. There were two kinds of students in those days. There was a Commonwealth student who wasn't specifically bonded to forest service, but the State Forest Service had their own students and they sponsored. There were very few private students in forestry. But with the field trips the closest I came to Canberra was Moss Vale. I worked in the Belanglo State Forest and the forests and things there which are fairly notorious in the current day. And worked up the north coast and entirely the New South Wales Forestry Commission.

This is while you were doing the basic science ...

That was the basic two years. I first came to Canberra in 1956 and during the Forestry School studies you did a lot of practical work in the ACT, so I got to know the ACT forests through that during 1956 and 1957. When you graduate

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you apply for jobs around the place ...

Because you were a Commonwealth student you weren't bonded to any of the States?

No, I could apply to all the States and all the Commonwealth. In actual fact we started off with quite a big intake of Commonwealth people in ours. I think there were about twenty when it started and there were about ten graduating at the time I graduated. Two of us chose to stay in Canberra. It so happens that two of us both married Canberra girls – whether that was the sole reason, I don't know.

So you were married before ...

No, I wasn't married before, but I married a Canberra girl that I knew at the time subsequently.

Was Canberra your first choice of place?

Yes, it was at that time. I liked Canberra. I hadn't had much experience with the other forest areas. The bonded people go and spend their time in the forests. After they do the two years, they did a year practical work and went back to the [State] Forest Service and then came here; and so they'd either gathered more ... Actually, the State services did seem to attract more country guys, people from Murwillumbah or Casino or Tumut – the forestry areas – but I wasn't necessarily attracted to those. I liked living in Canberra and I'd formed social contacts here and I liked the place and it offered opportunities. It's interesting, a lot of the State people and a number of Commonwealth people, particularly if they came from other States, weren't attracted to work in softwood plantations. In those days the real forestry was hardwood and hardwood management, so the only people that worked, and primarily worked, in softwood plantations were South Australia which had no hardwood and Canberra which had very little hardwood. That wasn't necessarily a factor, but I didn't mind working with softwoods. I thought they were the way to go quite honestly, and I didn't have the prejudices against softwoods nor the great liking for the hardwoods that a lot of the forestry students developed.

But it's interesting; my first job was as forester for the Cotter valley which was the hardwood area of the ACT. They were pretty keen. I finished studies in '57 – 1956 and 1957 here – and I started in January '58 as an overseer because that's the way they could get me on as an industrial employee but at

an overseer rank, so they could bring me on to the pay strata straight away, because they were having a reasonably heavy fire season and the forester out there – the tradition was in those days that foresters stayed on their forests through daylight hours during the fire seasons. There were only three foresters in the ACT in those days and the forester out in the mountains there had been on for a while. The fire season had started early and they were anxious to get someone else on, so I started as an overseer and it was in February that I was appointed as the forester for the Cotter valley.

Who was in charge at this stage?

It was Cyril Cole.

Still there.

Yes, Cyril Cole was still there. I think he retired towards the end of '58. Traditionally most of the foresters from the ACT had come from South Australia. Cyril Cole had come from South Australia and I think he'd come here in 1926 or something like that,¹ but he'd been a forester after the First World War in South Australia and he'd been in a forestry battalion or something during the [Second] World War. He's known as 'The Colonel' and he was a very well respected person. He retired in 1959 but he was still working then in 1958.

How did you find him to get on with? How did you find him as a boss and so on?

He was reserved, he was slightly distant, but he was – how would you say it – he was a perfect gentleman and he was well respected by everyone. Forestry was a different place then than forestry is now. Traditionally most of the people worked their whole life in the forest or be forest workers. They lived on the forest. They had, we would say nowadays, perhaps even an unhealthy respect for their bosses. When I came here a number of them were European. In fact a good number of them were, or they were old bush types or older bush types that had been on the land and then been in forestry for years and years and years. It was in lots of ways a friendly feeling and certainly 'Colonel' Cole was a father figure. It was well known that if people wanted anything that they would send their wives to talk to Colonel Cole because he was such a gentleman that, one, he'd find it hard to say no, but he'd listen

¹ Cole actually came to Canberra in 1929 to take up the position of the Territory's sole Forestry Officer.

in a tremendously attentive way. Forestry influenced lives a lot because they'd decide which house you went into. Even though the houses were owned by the Commonwealth, they were controlled by Forestry, and Forestry had, in terms of getting, say, just things like ... all the older places had open fires and wood stoves and whatever else, but they were gradually being upgraded. To get a certain number done most years, depending on budgets and whatever else, but to get on to that and to get those done it was the forester that managed that, and little things like that. If there was pay difficulties or rent difficulties or whatever else, the Forestry sorted it out with the paymaster and Forestry was paid in amongst others, so they didn't do the final things on their pay, so those sorted out. Or if there were difficulties. Well, getting jobs in town, children transported into school and all these sorts of things, there was a degree of intercession or foresters had some sort of say, so it was a community. The people at the time, say up to 1963, and then after 1963, in the recession, it was very difficult to get people working.

As I say, forestry had a very stable workforce, but the activities increased a fair bit because in the mid-1950s there was a thing called the 'Softwood Forestry Agreement Act' where the Commonwealth contributed to the states establishing pine forests. It was run by the Forestry and Timber Bureau and we were part of the Forestry and Timber Bureau. The Forestry and Timber Bureau had the ANU, the research area which is now with CSIRO. The teaching area which went to the ANU, the research area which went to the CSIRO, the ACT Forests which went to the ACT government and the export/import policy type things and growth things which went to Department of Primary Industry. So the old Forestry and Timber Bureau which had a Director-General at the time, G.J. Rodgers [*sic*]², split up into a whole lot of segments, but at the time I came with the overall command of Rodgers and then 'Doc' Jacobs. So we were part of the Forestry and Timber Bureau and part of the Commonwealth used to sponsor – in this time a shortage up 1963 – sponsor people, and sponsor them as migrants and find them a home and a job, and the job used to be in forestry. So in the early days we had groups of Finns, Yugoslavs, still Italians and the odd British person coming through. It was interesting meeting those people; bring them in and then get them in ... They were dumped ... They weren't dumped, they were taken out to Uriarra. It was quite a strange thing coming

² G.J. Rodger.

from Europe and then coming out. Most of them used to seem to come out in the summer, so they'd get dumped into the area. So as a forester, you'd look after them and settle them in as well as you can and tell them that the blowflies wouldn't eat them and all those sorts of things.

When you started in the Cotter area you weren't living down there, at all, were you?
No, there was a forestry settlement still at Bulls Head and Maurie Franklin was the overseer, and Maurie was just in the process of moving from Bulls Head down to Uriarra or had just moved down, I can't remember which. His brother had been the overseer up there and most of the permanent people had moved down. There was Col Maxwell, Tommy Bateup was up there but he was down, so the permanent people had moved down just prior to the time I had arrived. So my duties consisted of managing ... The settlement was still up there and there was still a single man's quarters up at Bulls Head and, interestingly, some of the people we sponsored were actually even sent further than Uriarra; [they] went to Bulls Head and lived in the singles persons' quarters there and did some of the work on the roads and the silvicultural work and other work that we were doing. But from the time I was there in 1958, it was essentially run from Uriarra because we had enough transport at that stage.

And this was probably the start of ... I suppose it started earlier because there were camps all around the forest. There were still single man's camps at Lees Creek, Blue Range, Bulls Head as I mentioned; no, they were the only ones left at earlier days, but we still used those a little bit. There was a nursery at Lees Creek still and there was a nursery at Blue Range and that's part of the reason why they survived. People used to camp out there still, but not to any great extent and not for any great length of time. As I said, transport had improved and people were transported from Uriarra up. Now, as you'd probably know, it's got back to a stage where Stromlo is the headquarters and there's no Uriarra headquarters as such and there's no Kowen headquarters as such. I suppose that late '50s process had been continuing and it's quite reasonable now. At the same time, the staff, after the mid-1960s to '70s, the staff numbers have been diminishing to a certain extent, as well. Contractors used to use those camps a bit.

Certainly the hardwood logging contractors at Bulls Head used to use the Bulls Head camp for some little time after. We didn't cease logging on Bulls Head till about 1962, and I'll talk a bit about that later. I'm not quite sure,

I think it was 1962, could be 1963. So the contractors used it – the grading contractors did for grading road, and we were still building roads, particularly in Bulls Head, the Cotter valley where, when I arrived in 1958, we were still building the road through. That was a Bushfire Council road, along Mount Franklin down into the upper Cotter to link right around through back to Tharwa way. Both roads were dead end. The Mount Franklin road was a dead end and the road into the Cotter hut was a dead end. There was an agricultural ranger, Tom Gregory, was living up at the upper Cotter and he used to come in through Tharwa. But the Bushfire Council linked the road. Forestry did the work, but it was a Bushfire Council did the work, linking the Mount Franklin road. That was about ... that wasn't finished until late 1960, I think, or 1961. Ray Margules was the engineer for the Forestry section. Ray was in town, but being the Cotter valley person, Maurie Franklin and I did a bit of the location of that road down there. Road building was still a significant factor.

Was it purely just for the purpose of controlling bushfires or was it also to get access to other timber and so on?

That particular road didn't give us much access to extra timber. There was some timber along it but it was a fair way out. There was some timber in under Mount Franklin and we built a road down into that and there was some; Warks Road dead-ended and we built that around to up above where the Bendora Dam was built and we got some timber out of that. I did a survey of what timber was left and where, and I did a report that said that – I did that survey in 1959, 1960 or early 1960 most of it – at the most there were four or five years' timber. We were cutting about two million super feet Hoppus³ in those days for the government mill in Canberra. That was run by the Works Department – Works and Construction – that was at Fyshwick. I said that there was about four or five years supply, so there's about eight million super feet Hoppus, at about two million super feet a year.

But it needed road building, so I did a bit of a rough economic analysis on it and, also at the time, we were looking at the Cotter a lot because in Canberra all the water came from the lower Cotter Dam, and after very heavy storms there was turbidity in the water. So the water was turbid and there

3 The Hoppus foot was an old Imperial unit of volume applied to round logs of timber and was equivalent to 1.27 cubic feet. It was used to estimate the proportion of a log that would produce usable timber and the proportion that would be wasted after processing.

was a concentration of the forestry activities – the clearing, the logging, road building and whatever else in relation to watershed management – producing clear water. So with the supply situation – that was the location, the cost of getting it out – I recommended that we didn't build any significant extra roads for logging and that we close within two or three years. And that left some timber in there that we could have possibly got, not logged, and I did find some relogging closer in under Mount Coree and in under Mount Franklin where we had roads already existing, and down Moonlight Hollow Road [1] found some extra timber. We got some timber out of the clearing of the backwater for the Bendora Dam. The Bendora Dam started – the construction people started building a road right along the Cotter River from our Warks Road and they started building that. We got some timber off the road and then we got some timber off the backwater. But we closed logging, as I said, around '63 or so.

1962, I think.

1962, was it? – Yes.

I've got a note in front of me. That was purely for watershed management.

No, not purely. One, there was very little timber left.

Two, it would have cost a lot to put the roads and I suppose it was time that the government [sawmill] ... The government was taking about half softwood and half hardwood at the time, and softwood was becoming increasingly utilised. So combined all those things, it was time to drop the hardwood and shift over onto the softwood totally.

Did you have problems with rabbits out in the Cotter area?

We had some. We still used to trap for rabbits and we used to do 1080 poisoning for rabbits with the new plantations. When I first went there I worked the summer which was the logging season, the best season to work in the hardwood area, and I'd worked the winter in the pine area because that's when you established your plantation and did whole lots of things. One of my first jobs was ... they used to fence every block, so rabbits were still a problem and their fences ran for miles. They'd been building these things for ... There was a contractor called Commisso. He had a large family and his family ... He used to use huts to camp and he built along Lees Creek and Condor and along the ridges. He built miles and miles of fence lines. I went and surveyed those as one of the first summer jobs that I did. So we still had the costs – rabbits

were still very prevalent – we had the costs of doing that, and we had rangers that we employed that would go out and set trap lines, rabbit trap lines, and in areas where we had no fences along the top of Blundell's Farm area; so we did some 1080 poisoning and it was some of the first 1080 poisoning around. I think they'd just introduced it. We didn't do it for very long, as a matter of fact, because myxomatosis knocked them around.

Is the poisoning compatible with watershed management in the Cotter area though?
It wasn't the watershed management that worried, it was more the possibilities of killing wildlife that was a problem at the time. We didn't do it by air. We did it by hand and by tractor and horse, so it wasn't as though we were spraying the stuff or dropping the stuff. We'd pre-feed with oats for some time to attract them in and then we'd poison with oats and carrots and in there. It didn't continue on for very long; as I say, myxomatosis got on top of it and we neither fenced nor poisoned for quite some time and the damage wasn't unacceptable.

How long were you in the Cotter area for?

When I went there Ron Slinn ... The person I replaced was a guy called Reid Clark who'd had a very serious car accident. He'd been going up to work and he'd hit a truck and his kidney damage and he couldn't work at all. He eventually went back to work as a teacher at a grammar school and he's still around. So I went up to replace him in a hardwood area. Ron Slinn was the forester at Uriarra, they had a forester at Uriarra, so I worked with him for a few years. I think in about 1962 or late 1961 he became the Chief Fire Control Officer. Ray Margules left and became the 2IC, second in charge, or in charge of development in City Parks. Ray subsequently went overseas, did a landscape architecture course and then came back to City Parks for a while and then became our forestry consultant and a landscape consultant. He's an extremely successful landscape consultant, particularly if it's still with John Groome, who's still a forestry consultant. I just mention this as Ron Slinn actually became Chief Fire Control Officer for a while and he was based in Stromlo. So I looked after both Uriarra and Bulls Head, Cotter valley, for a few years.

Ron Slinn then moved on to the Forestry and Timber Bureau proper, and then studied and went overseas and got his doctorate at Duke [University] – I think it was Duke – and stayed in the US and became head of the Plywood Institute Corporation. He stayed there. When Ron left I was still fairly

young. I did a little stint in Northern Territory in the summer of 1959/ 1960. Bill Bateman ... was the Forester for Northern Territory. The Forestry and Timber Bureau managed the Northern Territory because it was part of the Commonwealth. So there was one forester in the Northern Territory and he had an accident and Ray Margules went up for a little while first and then I went up to manage the forest activities of the Northern Territory. Then at this time Ron Green had succeeded Cyril Cole, so Ron Green was the Chief Forestry Officer. So I actually stayed fairly continuously at Uriarra till I went to the US myself in August 1965 and then when I came back, I came back to Uriarra in August 1967, and then stayed there even though I started working in town, till about 1969 when I left and moved into Canberra.

What was your US trip about?

I went to do some post-graduate study in the University of Michigan to deal with the multiple use management of forests. That's for recreation, for watershed. I think I briefly touched on the watershed values in Bulls Head and Uriarra. When I first joined Forestry, all the forests were shut during the summer. No-one was allowed in the forests. There were gates, there were fences. As I say, the fences weren't only for the rabbits; the fences were to keep people out as well. There was a great fear and I think it dates back to the South Australian antecedents of our Chief Forestry Officer – also the typical Forestry view at the time – great fear of fire because there had been fires in forests in Canberra, serious fires in 1939 and 1951.⁴ 1939 was out the west and parts of Uriarra and Pierces Creek had been burnt. And in 1951 it was Stromlo that was burnt quite substantially.

South Australian forests were traditionally closed and, as I say, most forests were traditionally closed, but it had become quite obvious that that wouldn't work around Canberra or shouldn't work around Canberra because 1) significant main roads around through them, and 2) they were so close to a large, increasing population. So I went to have a look at, both formally and informally, in travel and whatever else for my own study, to have a look at how the US was managing their forests near towns and centres where people had used them. There was a controversy also going of whether the Cotter Dam should be used for recreation because there's traditionally been a debate about whether you should use water supply for other activities. While we don't use

4 This fire actually occurred in February 1952.

Canberra's Foresters and Forestry Workers

the Cotter for significant activities, we do, say, for instance, now use Googong for a lot of other activities.

Was this trip to the US, the study trip, entirely your own initiative or were you sponsored by the Forests?

It was my initiative because I put in for it and organised it, but it was sponsored in part by the Public Service Board, so I got a Public Service Board scholarship. I did some lecturing and teaching while I was over there as well, and I did some work in the engineering school and I did a lot of travelling with the US Forest Service. It was quite an interesting time.

I take it because obviously Forests were sponsoring or at least supported you in going to the US, it indicates they were looking ahead to opening up the forests and looking to multiple uses themselves and that this was the beginning of this whole process.

Yes, to some extent. Yes, there was certainly a recognition that this would happen and we'd been talking to the NCDC about land use planning and those sorts of things and the fact that Forestry wanted to get land that had these sort of values and if a significant part of the ACT was to become pine plantation, for instance, as one of the trade-offs and one of the benefits would be that you'd need a recreation content in there. I did a report in 1965, February 1965, recommending activities – that forests be open more and that we conduct activities and things. We'd started on letting car rallies and these things through. So yes, certainly there was general recognition that you couldn't keep the place closed and there was a recognition that we had to learn how to manage our forests for more than just wood production. I was particularly interested in this because I'd been up to my neck in the debate on the use of water catchments and I'd been part of an Institute of Foresters deputation to the Minister for Interior about that sort of thing. It was a personal interest of mine as well.

Was your report the first report to recommend recreational usage?

Yes, it was. It's beating it up a bit to say that it was a report; it was four or five foolscap pages that said that this was going to happen and these were possibilities and these were the drawbacks and here were some of the areas we could start moving on fairly quickly.

Which areas were they, Ron?

The car rallies was one; some of the picnic areas. See, I was particularly interested in Uriarra, of course, because I knew that, so Vanity's Crossing, Condor, Blundell's Farm were areas that we developed and after I came back we'd cleaned them up and mown them and made them ... We had public use there but we cleaned them up and made them as fire safe as we could and whatever else and we stopped, as long as people were doing the right thing, we'd stopped moving along. We used to have – well, we still do – we had ranger patrols. The initial intent of the patrols was to make sure no-one got in there. By this time then the intent of the patrols was to make sure that any person in there was doing the right thing; whether they were picking blackberries or whatever else. And as I said, we had authorised the first car rallies through there. Now, admittedly, they were at night-time and essentially the forest was closed, but at that time it was an adventuresome sort of a step.

You've given the impression that ACT Forests gradually woke up to the fact that they were going to have to open the forests up and you indicate that it was being forced on them a bit, that they couldn't keep the people out, but do you see or were there any advantages for ACT Forests, PR or something like that?

Yes, there certainly was and I think one of the significant advantages, I think I alluded to, was the fact that we were bidding for ... we had an agreement with the Commonwealth Treasury at that stage that we would be funded to get 20,000 acres, but we had to negotiate with a number of people with our own Lands Branch and with the NCDC about where that would go. When I first came to Forestry the plan was to go further and further into the mountains. It was to go up around Bulls Head, up around Coree further and up around Lees Creek and there was quite a few years of logging. About the same time as we ceased on stopping hardwood logging, we did an analysis of the direction of softwood plantations, and this country west, while it would grow good pine but it was getting steeper, it had the disadvantage – and it would grow better pine than a lot of the pine we already had and existed in the flatter steeper country: higher rainfall, better soils, but it had additional costs in clearing. It had risks because it was steeper in terms of watershed management and, as I say, there was quite a debate going on about it.

At the time also it was the start of the hardwood versus softwood forests. Because of the Commonwealth softwood agreement there was a large amount of softwood plantings going on and most of that was clearing hardwoods

and planting softwoods and this was by states. There was something like a million acres a year being planted and this was in all states. While there wasn't a significant conservation movement protesting this, it was starting and if anywhere it was starting in and around here more than in the states because it was more obvious here, and Canberra was an aware area. So if you add the financial, the watershed, the conservation things, about that time a decision was made not to extend those forests further into the mountains, so we had to look elsewhere. The NCDC was just becoming established and we were just developing land use planning. The CSIRO was interested in land use planning, and Ian Gordon may have mentioned some of this to you, so things were formalised in the mid to late '60s in terms of land use planning were being considered, so we were talking to the NCDC about what we might do and where they might go. So there was an advantage in being able to say give us these hectares and we can manage them free and we can provide free recreation and whatever else. A short time later we got – I think 1966/67, '67/68, the year I came back from the US – we got the first funding for recreation management: 16,000 pounds from the Commonwealth – 16,000 dollars rather. I think it was 16,000 dollars – it had to be dollars.

Yes, that's right.

16,000 dollars we got in our budget from the Commonwealth Treasury to manage recreation and that was the first time, but that was not till '66/67, that was after I came back. In the meantime Tony Fearnside had joined the place and he was promoting recreation in Stromlo, and Stromlo was the logical place to start – not necessarily – to start more intensive recreation because it was closer to the thing. At that stage the City Parks people used to run the Cotter, of course, and the Paddy's River which were in part in the forest but not of the forest, and the Molonglo Gorge.

Yes, I was going to ask you about Molonglo. In fact that was earlier, wasn't it?

No, it was ... City Parks started in the 1960s, I think, but that was a City Parks activity and was regarded as more part of the urban things rather than our extensive use of the forests; and they were associated with main routes more than the general forest tracks. I didn't mention one thing that was significantly going around this time that changed a whole lot of things later on. When I first arrived in 1958 things were still done very, very manually. There wasn't much logging going on. They were still in the stage of building

up the forest and virtually all the logging that was being done was done by horse and it was cut down by cross-cut saw – hand – it was trimmed by axe and it was carted out by horse and loaded. It was brought to a bank and then loaded down off the bank onto trucks, flat tops – Bedfords and Internationals and those sorts of things – just flat top trucks by hand. It wasn't really until the mid-'60s that that changed to any great extent and that limited the country ... We hadn't thinned any steep country and the difficulties we'd had in logging steep country; and the steep country [we] already had was another thing that persuaded us to go into that [inaudible] mountains. But that changed fairly rapidly from mid to late '60s.

With new technology.

With new technology. The Forestry and Timber Bureau formed a logging unit. In fact Ron Green – I forget whether it was Ron Green or Bill Bateman – imported a Skyline winch, a little thing called a Kupfer. Attilio Padovan worked on that and we did some experimental logging in forests ourselves before the Forestry and Timber Bureau – Bill Kerruish set up a whole unit to do that and there's been major strides since then. But everything was manual. As I say, a lot of the contractors lived out in the camps. There was a lot of contract work done and even our own employees did a lot of contract work and that was, I suppose, it was one of the things that kept them on the job and helped the continuity then because they could work on weekends in pruning and other sorts of things. And that continued right till fairly recent time, even to the extent that a unique thing operated where some of our employees used to take leave without pay in the winter and actually go planting.

There was quite some difficulties over this at the time and that's been stopped for a number of reasons. Part of that community thing that happened and part of the reason why people stayed, I suppose, is they could earn extra. Their wages weren't high and, as I said, the people stayed there, but they were often people that worked very hard and they did this extra sort of work. A lot of the work was manual.

In fact most of it was manual. It didn't require a large investment in capital so they could go ... Others went and cut firewood and delivered it in Canberra. When I first arrived, in '58 and 1959, we were still cutting wood for firewood and delivering it into Canberra. There was quite a large – behind Black Mountain on the old Weetangera road there – was a wood yard, a government wood yard, and the last lot of areas was from Blue Range. It stayed a little

longer at Kowen, but the Forestry would cut under contract and deliver into that wood yard and that would be delivered into Canberra and the remaining boilers and heaters and everything else in the government offices that were still powered by fuel, but they were being phased out. So I suppose when I first came, right through in people's attitudes, employers' attitudes, the situation in relation to bosses and others, the non-mechanisation of the place, the fairly *laissez faire* forestry approach was on a change.

It was a change from a very old system to the new, and part of the new was watershed management, conservation, mechanisation, broader consideration – open out the forests and whatever else – the stopping of the hardwood up there, the stopping of plantations there, and the classification assessment and better economic assessment, back land utilisation down here; those sort of things happened from the late '60s through to the early '70s. I suppose other people have mentioned those sorts of things.

With the increasing mechanisation and so on and new technology, did it become more economically feasible then to think about planting or logging up in the steeper mountain areas? Was that a consideration at all?

Yes, but not ... Well, the economic – Ian Gordon may have mentioned this because Ian was involved in this, and this was done in the late '60s and early '70s. We did a fairly good economic study and I was in charge of planning and marketing at that stage.

This is when you came back from the US.

Yes, when I came into town. When I moved into town I became the Planning and Marketing Officer. Ian Gordon was working in there and we had an assessment section to assess growth and whatever else. But on the planning and marketing side we did study this to see what was the best areas to continue to develop the plantation. That study came to the conclusion that it was better to utilise the flatter areas closer in because of the logging costs and the transport costs, rather than the steeper areas further out. Now, that reinforced part of the decision we'd taken earlier to stay away from the very steep places, but there were intermediate slopes which you can do and said that we weren't doing a bad thing in coming more into Kowen and Blewett's Pines and things there which were planted in the mid-'60s and things.

I suppose looking back on that now, one of the things that we still hadn't ... the mechanisation in logging hadn't taken off to a great extent and I think if

we were doing the study now it wouldn't be as heavy on transport, it wouldn't be as heavily biased towards the lower flat, less productive country as it was then, because the costs were still very, very high in logging steep country and transport costs were quite high. But I think Graham McKenzie-Smith would say now that those costs aren't the means of doing it; the technology is there and it can be done far, far cheaper than at the time we did that sort of study. But the study did lead us to plant around Stromlo, around Kowen and down lower in Uriarra, around Hyles's Block there in Uriarra, and it backed up that decision which we were ... backed up other reasons for making those decisions as well, but the economics wouldn't be as conclusive now as they were then because of advances in technology. Remember, then we had very little experience in logging steep country.

One of the fortunate things was a lot of the early plantations were planted twelve foot by twelve foot spacing and right up to the First World War that spacing was used.⁵ During the war – there was some planting during the war – and certainly after, it was planted as close as eight by eight on the assumption that you needed to grow as much timber and you could have a pulp wood market. Terry Connolly would have talked to you about pulp wood and certainly Ian Gordon would and anyone else who spoke to you, the small sizes, and perhaps we'll talk about it, the utilisation of forests didn't really start till the '70s. In some ways it didn't have to because you didn't have to do a lot of thinnings at twelve by twelve, and the thinnings were very minor and selective and there wasn't a big industry, and the main developments were on growing right through to the late '60s and that was the emphasis on all the stages in growing an estate.

I think this was one of the reasons why softwood forestry, when I graduated, didn't have the attraction because in the hardwood areas you got out and you did big things and you had [?] tractors bursting around and logging and you had a bigger variety, whereas you had tamer things in growing pines in that (1) it was concentrated; and (2) you seemed to be only planting them and growing them rather than harvesting or thinning. In lots of ways I got real satisfaction in seeing the final harvesting done of some of the pines we planted when we were forestry students; they've formed their full rotation. When I first went there the rotation age of the forest was to be forty years and

5 This was actually during World War 2.

a lot of it had exceeded forty years because there hadn't been an industry or a significant industry and there wasn't enough of it *in toto*. But now it's down as low as thirty and may be even lower, I'm not quite sure, so that's a change. When I first went there the thought was on growing as much timber and being able to provide for a pulp industry and a small timber industry and now, unless you've got immense areas, far bigger than Canberra, it's very, very difficult to get rid of the small sizes.

In other words you were planting it in quite close distances from ...

Yes, I still think in feet, as a matter of fact. We were planting right through till the mid-1980s or till the early 1980s in eight by eight and six by six in some places. Now, I think they've gone out wider than that – ten by ten and more back to the twelve by twelve – because the balance of crop that you want is far different. That's another thing that changed. In the early days in the logging under Cyril Cole and Ron Green, when we were logging if you went out there and found a piece of waste timber that hadn't been logged – hadn't been taken into the sawmill – you'd have to explain why that ... even if it was twisted and knotted and almost useless for anything. And a lot of our supervision of contractors and cutters and [inaudible] was to make sure every piece of timber went off the ground. That hadn't been the tradition – that had been the tradition in South Australia where timber was scarce and every bit of timber that grew had a very important ...

In hardwoods the tradition had been somewhat different. All round the world the wastage in hardwoods had been because it was a free resource apparently. There was a lot of it there and it was all big and whatever else; any piece that was of lesser quality or was difficult in some way or other – bent, twisted or a bit rotten – did not go anywhere. But in softwoods, to start off with, every piece was used and we did a lot of early assessments, of course. The thing in saying how much timber you've got available to sell depends on how much of it you can utilise.

By the mid to late 1960s the techniques were fairly well known for the ACT. The program was approved to go to 20,000 acres. A lot of discussion had taken place with the NCDC and land use planning and sites had been identified. The public use, multiple use, of recreation had been accepted and recognised and was being refined. The establishment of plantations had proceeded under a series of South Australian directors, which was the main area that had been establishing pines for a long time.

You're talking about Ron Green and Mark ...

Yes, Cyril Cole, Ron Green, Bill Bateman and then the next one was Mark Edgerley. Now Mark started in 1965 and Mark's background was utilisation. He'd run sawmills in South Australia, large sawmills, I think at Penola and Mount Gambier; and he'd also run a private hardwood mill in Herons Creek, up in the North Coast. There was a substantial forest established but the utilisation was only small. I think I mentioned earlier on that the government mill used to cut about two million super feet Hoppus of pines and two million of hardwood in the very early 1960s. When the hardwood cut out the government mill increased its cutting of softwoods. Most of that, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, had gone into weatherboards and flooring – weatherboards [that were] not particularly suitable for exterior, but a lot of it did go into weatherboards but had to be quite laboriously painted very, very regularly; flooring [was] fine – in ACT housing construction. Very, very little of it went into building scantling. It was still predominantly hardwood and predominantly throughout Australia or wherever they had hardwood, it was predominantly hardwood.

There were several case factories around the place. One that had been run for quite some time by Norm McGregor over in Fyshwick and Norm rented a lot of his own machinery and they actually cut packing cases: fruit cases and boxes that went to Leeton and Griffith and around these places, and went to Sydney and were wholesaled from there. There was some other case and packing manufacturers [who] cut flitches [like] Johnny Voveris over at Fyshwick as well.⁶ They took quite small timbers initially, logs down to even three inches or so, and small lengths down to eight foot. There was not till, I suppose, the mid 1960s that Hicksons set up a treatment plant in Queanbeyan, just across the railway line really from the airport there. They had a treatment plant. They were treating posts. They were later taken over by Koppers and they used to take a small amount. Prior to that, in the early 1960s, CSR used to take timber from out in front of the government mill; there was a rail siding there. They'd take small timber which ACT Forests put in a Cambio Debarker. We used to send it in there and debark it, and it used to go by rail to CSR in Sydney and it was made into wood fluff. It was sometimes used in filling for Canite stuff and I think later in replacing asbestos type things, but

6 Flitches are large squares that are cut from logs and later resawn to boards for packing cases, etc. Voveris cut flitches as well as some boards (GMCK-S).

those sort of compact boards, and a little bit went there. So the utilisation was very small and the logging side was quite small. Large timbers only went to the government mill.

Forestry used to manage the logging contracts because it used to take the larger timbers to go to the government mill and the smaller part, the trees and things to go to the forest ... so we used to hire the contractors. I think from the early '60s when I first arrived – when they were cutting in small timbers – some of the timber mills were given their own block and they'd take the lot. There were some other episodes. Two [inaudible] utilisation was tried.

Ron Green at one stage entered a contract to supply telephone poles to Japan. Japan were looking for poles from right around Australia at this stage and we set up an activity where we went out and selected poles and actually Forestry did most of the selection, logging. Bill Bateman who'd then come as Deputy went up and bought from Cessnock or somewhere up there, some pit ponies to do the pulling of the logs and they were on our stocks for quite some time. In actual fact they bred at one stage.

This was the early '60s.

Yes, very early '60s. It would have been '61 or early '62.

Was it successful?

Some went to Sydney. I don't know whether any went to Japan. Some were around the forests for quite some time. It really fell ... there was a middle man involved and it didn't blossom. But can I say, it probably illustrates the sort of feeling that markets had to be found and we had timber here that should be sold. A proposition was put to Cabinet about an industry here in the mid-1960s – that was the time Mark Edgerley arrived – and that was for an integrated sale of ... It started – I can't remember the figures now – it started at fifty and went to seventy-five thousand cubic metres, something like that. I'd have to look up the figures, but it was certainly an integrated package that contemplated taking the whole of the stand and chipping, and taking small timbers as well as sawn timbers; and this was the tender that Integrated Forest Products won.

Whose idea was this originally, do you know?

The execution of it was certainly Mark Edgerley's to the extent that Mark got the Chief Forester's job, I suppose, [because] there was a recognition by the Commonwealth government that there was a resource here that needed



Mark Edgerley, the ACT's Director (Forests), about 1980.
(R. and P. Murray)

to be utilised because Mark was most certainly an expert in utilisation sawmilling; not, as the previous Chief Foresters had been, resource growers. So the recognition was there, but really Mark put the whole package together and was responsible for the selling of the whole idea and putting together, I think, the final Cabinet packages and that sort of thing to get approvals and the consequent need to reaffirm the established matter of by this time, I think, 20,000 hectares to ensure the sustainability of the deal. So it was Mark's effort. It was a consortium that got the tender and the consortium was: APM⁷ which were presumably the experts in the small sizes, the chip side of things; Duncans who were the sawmilling side of it; and Hancocks who were the plywood specialists. And it was called Integrated Forest Products which was on the basis that it would utilise small and rough timber as chips, saw large logs as saw mill and take the flitches and by-products as chips, and peel for plywood, and take the cores and whatever as chips again. So it was at that time a very progressive move for ACT Forests and a progressive move Australia-wide. And as well there were other very progressive things that were done in it.

⁷ Australian Paper Mills.

The timber was sold by weight which until then each individual log had been measured and calculated so the timber was sold by weight and sample-loaded to get the size and class distributions. Significant modern equipment was introduced: the tree-felling tractors and those sorts of things were introduced. The transport was quite modern. It gave every indication that it would quite adequately utilise the bush as it existed.

And what happened?

The consortium didn't last too long. They introduced quite significantly different equipment from other mills in Australia. The chipper canter [which] was introduced meant that a considerable amount of the large logs went to chips. I think the chip market changed. I think the New Zealand situation changed a lot in the chip markets. I would say – and I haven't been involved for a number of years now, so Graham McKenzie-Smith would know – but my understanding was that the plywood mill was quite successful after teething problems and whatever else, but that's now been closed or transferred, and I don't know all the ins and outs of that. The chip side of it, as I say, is diminished and increasingly the company sought exemptions from taking the smaller size wood and substituting larger size wood for it. That has meant that the full range of forest products as they were available weren't utilised to its maximum and the promise wasn't realised. I don't think it's any particular fault. I think a lot of circumstances changed but what looked to be the ideal set-up to utilise the ACT forest. I think there were a couple of other things that contributed, too. With that through-put, the type of equipment that was used meant that utilisation in the forests went down because it was highly mechanised, fairly selective in terms of lengths that needed to be cut and carted, so that the utilisation level that had been achieved in the early days when you're carting each log and treasuring each log and pulling it out by horse and loading it by hand or even by tractors and things and utilising and sending it to individual mills for individual products was not realised.

That all led to a reassessment of (1) the utilisation side, and (2) the forest side. The silvicultural needs to satisfy the industry that exists now. I suppose the other product that I didn't mention was the tile batten products which Monier now ... There was a mill there previously which Alec Carson – I forget Alec's name now – Alec, anyhow, was taken over by Monier.⁸ He cut slabs for

8 This might have been the sawmiller Albert Carson, who lived in Narrabundah.

Monier and sent it down to Sydney and they re-sawed some of them in their ignorant [?] days, as well as boxes and crating and things; but Monier vertically integrated and they set up here after taking him over to cut tile battens out. They're still in existence and some of the smaller mills are still in existence and they take other [inaudible]. Koppers is still in existence but they don't take a lot of small sizes and they have to be quite straight, so they're quite selective. So it turns out that the ACT doesn't have much of a market for small sized chip sort of stuff as a residual or ... Well, it can sell it as a residual for tan bark and dressing and those sorts of things where it's produced. So the silviculture now has to be varied to suit the market. I think this is a bit of a finding elsewhere, that you need a huge resource and a guaranteed need, I suppose, for residual materials and chip materials, and particularly small pine logs. I understand now that the forest is geared ... It's geared its silviculture more to the industry rather than trying to find an industry geared to the resource, and I trust that there's a happy marriage there somewhere.

When you came back from United States you moved into town and you were in charge of marketing, so you must have been with the new emphasis on utilisation of the products; you were at the marketing. Can you tell us a bit about that and what your role was and how it felt and what problems you might have encountered and so on?

I was working directly to Mark Edgerley on that and it was putting together – I was in charge of the assessment and planning side of things – and so it was putting together the package and getting the tenders out and then getting the logging going for IFP to set up. I suppose apart from the general problems that I've just spoken about in terms of changes of circumstances and whatever else that it was just a lot of hard work. It's a step that had to be done and it's a step that other forests and other forest resources were about to embark on at the time, and some of those still didn't get going even now, so there's been ... I might have emphasised some of the difficulties there: roads had to be improved; we had to plan the clear fallings. The clear falling – except for the wind blow in 1962/63 there – clear fallings hadn't been practised, so we had to look and see what effect that might have on other uses and those sorts of things. We had to plan those because we were still worried very substantially about the possibility of further wind blows.

So when planning the coops we had to do a fair amount of assessment to see what the size products were and it became quite obvious that the

size composition of the yield would change, would get smaller because we'd accumulated quite a lot of large timber. But that didn't prove a great problem or I don't think has proved a great problem because one of the things that modern equipment does is handle a large number of average size logs better than it handles a small number of big size logs. So if anything some of our problems were that some of the logs that were fifty and sixty years old were just too big and they had to be shipped elsewhere; so IFP shipped some of those logs out of the ACT because they just couldn't handle them.

There was a decision by the Commonwealth government, by Cabinet decision, that forestry in 1984 should pay its way and essentially it's done that. So I suppose that whereas there'd been, till IFP got started, a net debit and not as great an employment and utilisation of the resource, the second stage was started where the resource was adequately utilised where a cash flow was achieved, where employment was increased. And to the extent that the resource hasn't been ideally utilised or hasn't ideally been able to be changed to meet up with the utilisation capacity or the utilisation regime now, the ACT Forests has had to adopt a business approach and seek resources elsewhere and supplement its own resources and/or build its resources or start changing the composition of resources by changing its practices. I think the appointment of Graham McKenzie-Smith in 1991 was a recognition of that sort of need. Graham had both the silvicultural experience and the forest experience and the commercial and industrial experience to appreciate that and do that. I came back into Forestry ... I left Forestry in March 1976.

Had you been in charge of marketing and these sort of functions ... ?

Until 1976, and that was the running-in period of IFP, from 1972 to 1976. I'd acted for Mark Edgerley on quite a few occasions in that time, so I was – well, I was essentially the deputy of Forestry.

How did you find working for Mark Edgerley?

I found it immensely satisfying. Mark was a man of great vision and very, very energetic and not to be put off by setbacks or opposition and he did have a lot ... he had vision. Utilisation may well have been quite different if some of his vision had been realised, too. Mark till the time he left forestry still had in mind to establish a centralised log sorting area where all the trees were logged in a rough fashion, in a whole tree length fashion, and brought in and cut under more controlled circumstances – rather than out in the bush

and rather in a rushed or a difficult situation – into suitable products for sale and it could be done in ... and the residues which didn't cost very much to cart or could be perhaps turned into something – chipped or whatever else – whereas in the bush you've got to make a decision then and there on each individual tree and where it's to go and what happens to it; you could do this in a controlled situation in a log yard. That has worked in other places. It didn't ever get off the ground here. I'd left Forests by the time Mark was ready to start that and going on it and I'm not quite sure what got in the way. It may be that it wasn't the answer, but certainly it seemed to overcome some of the problems. I've no doubt that he would have had more ideas. He certainly did ... I think he succeeded where bigger and perhaps even better resources didn't attract industry. The fact that there have been changes and that, subsequently, doesn't detract from his achievements. I think if he'd been around longer and more actively involved for a longer period, he'd have kept on coming up with ideas.

Which he wasn't short of, as far as you ...

He wasn't short of ideas, at all, and he wasn't short of the perseverance to put that through. He was a very persuasive man and things were never dull with Mark Edgerley.

When and why did he leave?

I think at the time he thought that he'd achieved most of the things that he'd wanted to achieve. He'd also, I think, got quite frustrated with the Public Service way of doing things. I don't think Mark ever got used to being a bureaucrat. He was always looking for different ways of doing things and I think he believed that government stifled business decisions; I'm sure he did because he always felt – well, he quite often felt – a degree of impatience with red tape. So I think he felt that he'd fought the good fight and that he'd contributed and that things were set out quite well, and I think it was very, very major step forward; and as I say, at the time when other people were trying to get the sort of utilisation of resources that the ACT had grown, that Mark achieved more for the ACT than a lot of the other forest services were able to achieve at that particular time.

You'd actually moved out of ACT Forests in 1976, before Mark Edgerley went?

Yes, I had. I'd become Director of City Parks administration and I found that suited me at the time quite well because I was interested in recreation and

public utilisation of lands and resources and things like that and that suited me; and I'd worked with Mark for quite some time and we'd got the IFP thing set up and run and Forestry was on a good planning basis. I came back – Forestry was upgraded to an executive level type job, Senior Executive Service job, in 1985/86 – '85 it was – and I came back then. I had progressed on in the general Public Service after leaving Forests. I came back then for six or seven months and that was at a time when the forests were set up as an independent commercial exercise and not subject to being funded by the ACT government; they were self-funding. Also at about that time we were required to pay a dividend to the ACT government if possible. Then till about '87 I actually was in charge of all the land management resources – conservation, land management, parks and gardens, forests, recreation – in an acting capacity for almost two years.

So when you came back in '85 you were Director of Forests at the time?

Yes, the level of the job had changed. And then subsequently it was then again amalgamated ... I can talk separately on the status of forestry. At various times it's been a section in land management and a section in its own right and it's been a branch and it's been, at various levels – I think this is one of the other things that frustrated Mark Edgerley to a certain extent, and this is not unusual for land management groups to be put together or have separate departmental status and then to be grouped as a general land management branch, land management department with several branches; so it has changed. It's diminished – it expanded and the number of foresters increased through the mid-1960s through to the early 1980s, and it's diminished a little bit again now as economies are made, and also as it consolidated. As I mentioned earlier it's run from Stromlo now, it's town, whereas in the '60s and 1970s they had separate units. The number of direct employees has decreased quite substantially, I think. When I first joined Forestry it had about 150 employees at the various centres; now I think it's somewhat less. I think it's sixty or seventy or so direct employees. Of course, they do a lot of work contracting. We used to always do a lot of work contract; logging, of course, has always been on contract and I think I mentioned earlier in the old days the contracting fencing that Commisso carried out in the very early days. And where the actual employees used to do a lot of contract on weekends – pruning and planting and scrubbing, those sorts of things – these are done generally by multi-purpose contractors now. But there's always been a fair bit

of contract. It's ideal work. It's piecework type stuff and it can be seasonal or it is seasonal to a large extent.

How did you get on with the contractors when you were there, particularly the logging contractors?

Well, I thought quite well. I think ACT has been very fortunate in the log contractors it's had and got. Some of them have got quite a substantial history; they've been employed for thirty and forty years, and brothers and sons and uncles. In the old days I used to find that a good number of them had quite a very strong feeling for the bush, too. We did have times when we used to have to ban them for doing something wrong, but they were very, very few and far between. It's a big, big business now. The investment in earlier times was really minor, fairly small. So long as they fed their horse properly, utilised the timber properly and stayed by the rules – only felled the trees that were marked and did all those things – it was fairly straight forward. It's a big business now. One of the things that you used to be able to do in the old days – and we used to do it because we were quite concerned in relation to watershed management and things – is to close the bush and do those sorts of things. It's become increasingly difficult to do that, so that means that your road work has to be spot on in terms of making sure that the roads hold out and [that you] don't do things to watercourses and all those things because with the amount of money tied up and the employment related to it, and the mills being the size they are, you can't close the bush or close operations or do those sorts of things. It's become quite a ... Decisions in relation to those types of things is far more critical than it used to be in the old days.

One small thing, I'd just like to go back a bit. There was a brief period when Bill Bateman was Chief Forester. We haven't really spoken much about him. I just wonder if you could say a little bit about him and why he left after such a short time; this was in 1962/63 period, I think.

Bill didn't actually leave. Bill stayed on under Mark Edgerley till he retired. Bill – I mentioned earlier that I went up to the Northern Territory in '59/60 to replace the Forester for the Northern Territory that had broken his leg, actually. Bill worked for the Forestry and Timber Bureau and was the Forest ... He was a South Australian as well originally, and then he went to work for the Forestry and Timber Bureau as the Forester for the Northern Territory and he was quite a figure out there. He was quite well known and somewhat of

a character because he knew the outback extremely, extremely well. He was very, very self-reliant; a sort of pioneer up there. Forestry was quite intriguing because they had a couple of logging areas in Cypress pine and native forests: paperbark and some of their gum trees around a few areas. They established a plantation on Melville Island, which the Melville Islanders are utilising quite significantly, of Cypress Pine. At the time I was up there they were establishing a nursery or a nursery was being established. Bill used to go up there in the dry season, or mostly the dry season, and spend the wet season down here in Canberra or roughly the wet season down here in Canberra, working at the Forestry and Timber Bureau.⁹

Another big part of the activity up in the Northern Territory was collecting seed of the eucalypts and seed of trees because things that would survive in that sort of climate were quite valuable all around the world. The Forestry and Timber Bureau did then run and still does run, or the CSIRO runs, a seed bank of native seeds. Bill followed Ron Green. Bill came down before Ron Green retired – sorry, just before Ron Green transferred or about that time – and acted for about three years, I suppose – two or three years – and Bill didn't have the sort of experience in utilisation that Mark Edgerley [had]. It was obvious that Forestry needed someone to get the industry side of things going and Bill filled in between Ron Green and Mark Edgerley's appointment, and then he stayed on and worked for ... I can't quite recall when Bill left. It would have been 1978 perhaps.¹⁰ He was there for two or three years at least, maybe it's even a bit longer or maybe shorter, I can't recall now. So he was there when I was looking after the marketing side of things; that would have been about the time I came in there. He was still around looking after Forestry side of things for a while, but then Tony Fearnside came in, and Tony Fearnside and myself – Tony looked after the forests side of things and I looked after the marketing and planning side of things. Tony was also before that Chief Fire Control Officer.

That was the next thing I was going to ask you, actually. We haven't really spoken very much about the Bushfire Control Council or indeed bushfires themselves. I'd

9 Wilfred ('Bill') Bateman was Forestry Officer Grade 3, Division of Forest Management Research in the Forestry and Timber Bureau, before he joined the ACT Forestry Branch in early 1960 (information from Ron Murray).

10 This was probably in 1968.

like to ask you what you know about their activities or the activities of the Bushfire Council in this period and the work they did and so on?

I wasn't involved personally in the big fires: '39 not, nor the '51 – sorry, 1952, not '51, '52. It was quite interesting that one of the jobs of '58 was cutting Christmas trees from the regeneration from the 1952 fire at Stromlo. I was put in charge of Christmas tree selling. We had trucks coming down from Sydney and we'd direct them to places and direct the cutting of the trees. It was done so that they would thin out the regeneration that came up very thickly. I think that was done for another year at Stromlo, but they were getting too old and spindly by that stage. This was right at the top of Stromlo which was fairly slow growing.

The Bushfire Council ... fairly traditionally Forestry had been a core area in the Bushfire Council in that the full-time firefighting force had come from Forestry and the main trucks, particularly when they were very few on the ground, had come from Forestry; and in most cases the Chairman of the Bushfire Council had been Forestry. Certainly a Forestry person had been the Chief Fire Control Officer. In my time it was Ray Margules, Ron Slinn, John Kellow who came to Uriarra for a short time and then ... he came from the Metropolitan Water Board. He was a forester with the Metropolitan Water Board and came to Uriarra for a short period, and then Chief Fire Control Officer and then into Primary Industry in the forest policy area. Tony Fearnside and Cliff Parsons and then ... Roger Fenwick and then Lucas Smith. Except for Lucas Smith who is now the current one, they were all Forestry people. He came from conservation area; he was with the Conservation Service. The Chairman – well, Cyril Cole was, Ron Green was, Mark Edgerley was, Bill Bateman, I'm not too sure. I think Dave Shoobridge from Parks Service was the chief at that stage. And Mark Edgerley who was chairman of the Fire Control and then Val Jeffries, a landholder, and I think Val was one of the first non-Forestry people.¹¹

Particularly I was tied up with the Uriarra/Mullion/Fairlight – Uriarra Fairlight Brigade – the rural brigades. There have been rural brigades around in various strengths at various times and they've always been a very, very substantial part; and they've been increasingly equipped as more equipment was held and obtained. Forestry was equipped first and then the rural areas were equipped

¹¹ Val Jeffrey, of Tharwa.

Now and there's more probably volunteers now that aren't actually rural people, so that there's a trend from the actual rural people and the rural people had a substantial number. The numbers in both Forestry and the rural area have downgraded, so that volunteers have joined the rural area; and Conservation has come in and are managing some of the areas that were traditionally Forestry and in most cases with far more people per hectare, type of thing, because of the intensity of use and the type of things they do, so they're a more substantial ... although departmental agriculture and departmental conservation resources, and parks resources were always represented on the Bushfire Council. It was funded separately from Forestry and till recently used to, in actual fact, probably ... There wasn't a segregation between what was done for Forestry and what was done generally, so that I understand now that Forestry pay for their own protection to a degree and do certain things separate and so do other areas, but I'm not a hundred per cent sure on that. But it was generally allocated to protect the whole of the land resource and it was controlled by the Council. So that's why the various parties were represented and the Commonwealth government traditionally paid for that and topped up in bad seasons. If it was underspent it was going ... They built quite a number round ... the Two Sticks Road around the west of the territory was built after what started after the 1939 fire and built there. It's quite a substantial road and the road along the top of the Brindabella and down into the Cotter, as I mentioned.

Who built those, actually?

They were all built by the Bushfire Council. I think I mentioned that Forest resources built them, and the roads up to the lookouts and those sorts of things were built. There have been several changes on the bushfire front. There was a period in the early 1960s when hazard reduction burning was quite popular – well, it was popular before then. The ACT has continuously leased a lot of the western New South Wales country and the prime purpose in that, certainly when I arrived there, was to fairly systematically burn that to provide a break because that's where the '39 fires had come from. That's changed. There's, I suppose, a far more sophisticated approach to it now. Also there's been a tendency with the efficiencies government is looking for now is to look at integrating emergency services. So as urbanisation has spread out and as forest and other resources have become closer, the integration between fire brigade, emergency response rescue and police ... Although things were

coordinated they tended to operate separately, but be coordinated. Now the government is tending to try and see whether they can operate as one, as an integrated whole. But certainly the firefighting aspect was very significant. When I first started working in Forestry, it was traditional for the local forester to stay on his forest during daylight hours during the summer in case he might have a fire; and for him, whenever any of his resources, at least, were on, he'd be on ... on call, if not on duty. They were paid an allowance, a small one.

You were involved in regular back-burning, too, I take it?

We did quite a lot of controlled burning and back-burning. At the time when Alan McArthur who was with the Forestry and Timber Bureau and then with the CSIRO on research – he's the fire expert until Phil Chaney took over – Alan used to do quite a lot of experimentation: Black Mountain and out in the mountains. We used to do some of the early helicopter ignitions – area controlled burning were done out there and we'd assist in that. We did quite a number just walking through the bush with forestry students and our people. We'd prepare breaks and have trucks and things up there to make sure they went right. That was quite a lot of experimental stuff and that was carried out, again in the early '60s, early '70s.

I gather the smoke from these controlled burning fires were a bit of a nuisance around Canberra.

Yes, I suppose, up till reasonably recently it was just regarded as a nuisance or a worry and there'd been a lot of inquiry about it, but people had become quite ... I suppose, you've got to say in the old days people were used to having a lot of burning going on in the spring and the autumn when people burnt off. But controlled burning in general has been put under scrutiny quite a deal. There is now pollution regulations as well as the scrutiny about who is doing it and why they are doing it and what they are doing. Whereas it was concern and quite legitimate concern, I suppose, at the times because if Tumut were doing plantation burns and we were doing plantation burns we could virtually blackout; it used to look like a huge dust storm, only you could smell the smoke and things. So at various times ... I could remember Government House at a Royal Garden Party ringing us up and asking us not to create so much smoke, so there was that sort of concern. But I suppose until recent times it wasn't the environmental concern; it was wondering what was going on or the aesthetics of things.

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Ron Murray in April 2017.
(B. O'Keefe)



Just jumping forward now, to the end of your career; when did you retire finally or have you retired?

Yes, I have retired.

Have you been involved in any way in forests since then?

In 1987 I moved out of Forests and ... I previously worked generally in the department, managing business and business leases which was quite interesting. It was in the stage between City Parks and going back to Forestry. I moved out and looked after the City Services area which looks after roads and traffic management and parking – the Motor Registry. I became the Registrar of Motor Vehicles and that sort of thing. Manages the garbage disposal and lots of quite essential services. And then I retired in March 1992.

I'm enjoying quite a happy retirement.

Are you doing any forestry consultancy work?

No, I'm not.

Nothing at all?

No. I drove through Paddy's River. I was quite surprised with the change of landscape. I was quite pleased to see some additional area planted; and I had a look at the blackberries and due to the dry weather they weren't too good.

I think we might finish there. I'd like to thank you very much, Ron, for your time and all your information.

Thanks, Brendan.

Thanks again.

Franco ('Frank') Rosin

Interview with Frank Rosin recorded in the sound studio of the Australian War Memorial on 2 June 199

Frank Rosin was born in 1932 northeast of Venice near the border with what was then Yugoslavia. Although his family owned a small farm in the area, it was barely sufficient to support the family. Somewhat prefiguring Frank's own experience, his father had gone to the United States in the 1920s to earn money as a farm labourer, but he had later returned to Italy to raise a family.

Frank migrated to Australia with a schoolmate in 1956 and first went to work in north Queensland. After two years, health problems he encountered in the tropics forced him to seek a cooler climate more like the one he was used to at home in northern Italy. He headed to southern NSW, hoping to find work in the Snowy Mountains Scheme. Arriving in Queanbeyan, however, he was immediately offered a job with a fellow Italian who was a logging contractor in the forests of the ACT. It was this chance event that fixed the course of the rest of Frank's working life, as well as that of some of his close relatives.

He was soon joined in the logging work by an older brother, Gino, who



Frank Rosin in retirement, about 1990.
(L. and N. Rosin)

had followed him to Australia in 1957. Just two years after starting in the forests, the brothers bought out their Italian compatriot and thus laid the foundations of what would become the Rosin family's large and successful logging enterprise. Nino, the son of another brother, later became part of the family business as well.

Frank and Gino continued to work at and build up their business as logging contractors over the next quarter-century. In their mid-50s, they both suffered serious accidents in the forest and, unwillingly, found that they could no longer cope with the hard physical work that logging demanded. They both retired in 1986, their nephew Nino taking over the family business. A third generation of the Rosin family ended up in the business, too, when Nino's daughter Simone worked as a lumberjill.

Frank had married in the 1970s and, after his retirement, he and his wife moved to the south coast where they still reside. Gino, who had married in Italy earlier in the same decade, died on 29 January 2005 aged 75.

Mr Rosin, welcome to the tape. You're obviously not from Australia originally. Whereabouts do you come from?

From Italy, from Venice.

What brought you to Australia?

When did I come to Australia?

Yes.

In 1956.

Why did you leave Italy?

Why did I leave Italy? – because at the time life was not successful there, a very poor country, too many people. We were in a family [with] six brothers and three sisters so my father got only a few acres of ground but no to be stay there for ... Not much work around, for a start. So I had to leave Italy and come here. I came here engaged, actually, with the government – sugar cane cutter. They wanted cane cutters up in Queensland. I had to stay there for two years. We had a contract signed. When I finished the two years ... Queensland doesn't go very well for me because I suffer a bit from asthma and in the tropical

[climate] it's very hard to breathe. So I finished the two years and then the doctor said ... I went to see the doctor to find out what had happened to me because it had never happened to me before, because Venice was a fair bit of a cold country and to change from a cold country to a hot country like that in Queensland. The doctor said, 'There is only way to do it for you to stay good, to move in the country where there is similar weather to where you come from.' 'I know nothing about Australia.' He said, 'The best place to move to would be Canberra or Cooma and work in the tunnel.' Then I said, 'All right, if I have to stay here – I can't go on like this otherwise I would have to go back to my country again.'

Anyway, when I moved to Canberra, straight away I started to breathe all right. I came by train and I stopped in Queanbeyan in the Royal Hotel and there was a couple of Italians there. And I said, 'It's probably all right here', so probably ask these few people – I hear straight away they are talking Italian. I went across to another bloke and I said, 'Excuse me, do you speak Italian?' He said, 'Yes.' And then he said, 'I never see you in Queanbeyan before.' I said, 'No, because just I get here now from up in Queensland and I'm looking for a job.' He said, 'I'll ask my boss if he has got a job for you. He works in the bush.' So he got [into] his car and we go and see the boss – his name is Joe Lustri – actually he lived in Narrabundah.¹ So, from Queanbeyan to travelling to Narrabundah to see this contractor. So I meet him and I say, 'Have you got a job for me?' He said, 'Yes, when do you want to start?' I said, 'Tomorrow morning.' It was about four or five o'clock in the afternoon. I said, 'Tomorrow morning because I come here for work.' So that's when I started. So I work for this bloke for about two years.

Was he Italian, too?

He was Italian, actually coming from the south. I don't like much south, but ...

But he was giving you a job.

It was a job. I carry on for two years and after two years. They'd been logging for probably four or five years before I came here – before I started with him. He looked like he was a bit sick and tired of working and he wanted to sell the business. So to finish up the story, my brother, too, came at the same time or a couple of years later in Australia. About that time we got not much

¹ Giuseppe ('Joe') Lustri.

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money to buy the business, but the Commonwealth Bank asked what we had got. They wanted a bit of security for us. Only strong arms and a good idea to make a bit, but no money. But the bank manager said, 'You are a very honest brothers.' And they thought they would lend me at that time – I can't remember exactly – I think it was about a thousand pounds to buy the business.

Who was the bloke who owned the business? What was his name?

Joe Lustri.

Keep going.

Anyway, we started. At that time it was a bit of a hard life; by horses – everything by handsaw. We work long hours. It is not easy, actually, the bush. You had to have a bit of experience, but in two years I get bit experienced because you had to sell the wood by grade – it goes by grade. You've got first grade, second grade, third grade.

So you had learn which one was first grade because even the foresters they go crook [inaudible], and if you try to sell the wood to the sawmill second grade because he gets less money – because the first grade you had to cut in one length, twelve foot it was at that time; second grade, ten footers, and third grade, eight footers. They use it for something different. We picked it up all right and we buy this truck and the horses and this sort of thing, and then we pay back the bank after a couple of years.

You must have worked hard to pay them back in that time.

This was our plan before. We started at four o'clock in the morning, winter or summer, it doesn't matter. Actually in summer at four o'clock in the morning it's all right, it's daylight, you can do something different. But in winter we got the wood already stacked up and we got a spotlight in the truck and we put the lights on when it was dark, ready to go and come into town[?].

How many hours in a day did you work?

The checking station up in Stromlo closed up at five o'clock in the afternoon, opened at seven and closed at five o'clock. My brother actually drove the truck and I stayed and made the wood in the bush until dark – winter and summer. I say on average fifteen hours a day for seven days a week.

How long did you keep this up for?

I kept it up for at least twenty years. The last five years life came a bit easier

because they started with the logging skidder – they call it Timberjack – and the faller, the six-wheel drive you can go and pick up the wood in the middle of the bush. But you had to produce a lot more wood because Forestry actually ... We looked after always the Forestry because the Forestry looked after us. We got straight away a good name in the Forest. We never – even the boss he never came to see me, ‘Frank, you do this wrong’ – never, because of the ways ... Even we turn up in the back storey when we use the horses. It’s very hard to get the wood out from the bush all the time because snigging with the horse you take a long time; so we tried to make some track in the bush when it was dry weather. When it was wet you can’t do it because you can’t go in the bush when it’s wet because you’d make a lot of mess – bogging.

But when it was dry we made some tracks in the middle of the bush so we can pick up with a truck – it’s much quicker to get the wood – spend the rest of my time making it. A lot easier for the horses as well. But some time when you make this track in the middle of the bush, some time you’ve got trees that make it a little bit narrow, you can’t make the track properly. Some contractors, they fell the trees without asking the Forest and it’s the wrong thing. This is wrong completely because you can’t go and destroy the forest. If you do like that, your way, you can’t last. So what I did that time, I get the ute – 1958 model ute, Holden – I go and see the Forestry and I say [inaudible], the foreman, now he’s the boss, I have known him for the last thirty years. His name is Bill Bates. I said, ‘Bill, would you mind coming round in the compartment because we want to make a track in the right spot where it’s much easier for the horse, but we’ve got a couple of trees that have to come down.’ ‘Yes, Frank, straightaway.’ He never said no.

Some of the contractors, they never think of that, not to spend the time and do the right thing. But always they come around because the trees that had to come down they spray with silver paint – they spray the trees. Even when they do the thinning, they spray the ones which have got to be cut down because some don’t grow properly or are too thick or they grow with a fork; so they had to be sprayed, all the trees. They have to come in there. But sometimes where we make the track and there were good trees, I feel guilty myself to knock down the trees; but to save a bit of time for the horse and it was more convenient for us and for the Forest as well because when you make a track they would be there for the next thinning. Because before you start the clear felling like they do now, you had to thin three or four times. It all

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depends on the ground how they grow. When the track has been made they stay there for the next thinning or eventually for the clear felling. And then, I say five years later, we get rid of the old truck because we make a bit of money.

How long ... ? You were using horses for the first five years, were you?

I think we gave the horses up in 1970.

You gave them up in 1970!

Yeah, in 1970 we gave up the horses.

Where did you keep the horses?

In the paddock up in Uriarra, you know, Blue Range Road, when they were up in the old camp in Blue Range, to the left side where there is a big powerline, there is a paddock there. You had to go and catch them every morning. But even the draught horse is a very sensible horse. If you feed him well and if you look after ... When they see me open the gate in the paddock they come because he knows I feed him and I look after. I have to put his shoes on every now and then. I had to put the shoes on myself – we learn.

So you didn't know anything about this when you came to Australia.

No, not a thing, not at all. Just when I was back home in Italy we got a bit of a farm, helped my father, but about wood, nothing.

What kind of farm was it back in Italy?

We got a bit of corn, bit of wheat, but not really much, just enough to keep going – not really a big farm.

So when you got into forestry in Australia you knew nothing about logs.

Nothing about logging at all. Even when I was up sugar cane cutting, I knew nothing about sugar cane cutting; actually, I liked the job.

Whereabouts was the sugar cane? Where were you exactly?

Ingham. I liked the job because it was actually good money at that time. Normally wages were about twelve pounds a week just for normal work, and us – we were four: me, another two German fellows and one Spanish – we make about fifty pounds a week – three times more than normal wages. It was good.

But hard work though.

Hard work, and a bit young, too, and a bit silly sometimes. It really was not my idea but the other friends – we all worked together – 'Are we going to the pub

Frank Rosin



Frank Rosin (right) and his brother Gino (left), both heavily bearded in the 1960s, and between them Mando Menegazzo who helped with the work in the forests.
(L. Colbertaldo)

tonight?' When you are young you never think much about saving money. But it was good. I liked Queensland.

So you came to Canberra in ...

In the beginning of 1958.

And two years later you bought the logging business.

Yes.

Okay, and then, you were saying, you were using the horses in the forest – one horse or two horses?

Two horses. Two draughthorses and we give it a bit of a rest, one work in the afternoon and one work in the morning. You can't work all day with one horse. Not too bad in winter time when it is a bit cool weather, the horses can work all right – work better. But in summer when they start to sweat, I really feel guilty for the animal because really if you don't look after even the horses they – these animals – they fight you if you try to smack with a stick and do



Frank Rosin with one of his draught horses at Laurel Camp. (L. and N. Rosin)

in a hurry, the horses don't feel like it – healthy like. We got one horse named Jack and sometimes in the weekend – we deliver the wood from Monday to Friday – and on Saturday and Sunday we go up and make a bit of a stockpile for the next week. Sometimes I was up in the hill trimming and my brother was there cross-cutting because at that time we snig full-length: full-length trees you have to falling, trimming and cross cutting down the hill. I was up the hill doing the trimming and my brother was down. My brother sent the horse up the hill and he comes straightaway walking by himself. When I was up I said, 'Jack, turn around.' He turned around, he waited for me to hook the trees. 'Go down now', and he started walk steady, steady in the track – very, very good horse. This is what I wanted to mention before. After five years, we trade in the old trucks.

What kind of trucks were they?

International, 160 [actually 1600].

160 hundredweight.

Yeah, 160 hundredweight, and then we changed to a bit bigger, we bought a 180 [actually 1800]. I can't remember exactly the first crane coming in the ACT. I think it was in 1970 or '68.

The first crane?

The first crane – Tico crane. So we changed the truck because essentially the 1600 it was a bit weak to put a crane on; so we had to buy a more heavy truck to put the crane on because when you got your arm ... in your truck when you've got your arm [of the crane] right there, right out, to pick up the logs, so you've got a fair bit of weight – if you know what I mean. Another contractor put the crane in a 160, 1600. They had to cut – the side they got the logs – they had to cut a piece of wood, the same height as a body, and put it from the body to ground otherwise they would tip over the truck. The one-eight-hundred you didn't have to do that because it was a more stronger truck and a bogey truck, no single wheel in the back so a lot more stable. We keep going with this truck for another four or five years – it could be early 1975 – '74 or '75, something like that. Then we started to get a big bigger, employ a few men and we trade in the one-eight-hundred and we buy a Volvo.

A Volvo truck.

Yeah, just a prime mover and a couple of trailers. So then we started. We picked up the job all right and we got along all right with the Forest and we like the job. And then we buy these two trailers; one stopped all the time in the bush and we're loading. By the time the driver, my brother, goes in town – it took about ... We had to work all the time by the watch because they took about two and a half hours.

To take a load into town.

To take a load into the town and then come back. So in two and a half hours, you had to get the other semi which was stopped in the bush already loaded because, if you don't get ready, if they missed it by, say, twenty minutes, he missed a load. You had to work all the time in case something happened – rain is a different story – but if the weather was all right. Sometimes you had to push when it was wet, too. When it was raining you had to work in the rain.

When you say 'miss a load', you mean he wouldn't get the load to the mill on time. In time because at five o'clock.

They close. Where was the mill?

At that time they put a weighbridge in this Cooma Road there. What do they call it? – Hume.

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Yes.

In 1975 they started. '72 actually they started, but us, we keep going for another couple of years. We look at ... because Crawford they come when they opened the new sawmill in Hume. They had Crawford come in with a big order, half a dozen semi-trailers.

He was logging, too, was he?

He was logging, too. He was a big operation. But really Forestry, he doesn't like a big operation.

The ACT Forests.

The ACT Forestry he doesn't like it at that time – even now – because there is a lot of mess, a lot of waste. They've got a lot of faller[s], no experience in the job. Even now sometimes I go in the bush just for fun because I've been there for long and I go there and look at it. You see along the edge of the road are logs, good quality, first grade and just ...

Disposed of.

Forestry, has never been like that. And us, we never – me and my brother – we don't want to come really big, just the way Forestry want to do it. For that, the Forestry, when you talk about Frank Rosin and Gino Rosin, my brother, they was very appreciative about us.

Whilst you were working in the Forests from 1958 whereabouts were you living?

We were living up in – Forestry, they give accommodation to us, just a small house.

Where was this?

When we was up in Uriarra, we got a house up in Uriarra near to the settlement there. When we was up in Pierces Creek, we got accommodation at Pierces Creek – it was a camp. They called it a logging camp. Just a kitchen and fuel shed. It was all right at that time – better than paying rent – we got it free. I think they charged us very little – I can't remember exactly – it could be two or three pounds a month or something. When we started to get a bit bigger in 1975 ... no, I bought the first house in Lyneham in 1974, I think.

When did you get married?

I got married just about around that time. I got married in Australia.

Was your wife Italian, too?

Yeah.

You met her in Australia.

I met her in Australia.

So you got married in about 1974 and you bought the house in Lyneham.

Could be – I can't remember if it was 1973 or 1974 – something like that, very close anyway. I bought the first house in Lyneham and my brother bought a house in Queanbeyan.

Actually they found a good buy to buy in Queanbeyan at that time. They're still there in the same house. Then when I make a bit of money ... Actually the government gave to me – I put in an application – the government gave to me the house in Lyneham.

When you came from Italy?

No, when I got married. When I got married I put application to the government and they gave me a government home. And then a couple of years later I got a bit of money and I asked for authorisation to buy the house off the government. Finally they say yes. At that time it was not so bad, I think it was eleven thousand pounds or something for the house in Lyneham – or twelve thousand, something like that.

How much was your business making per week when you started, when you took it over in 1968 – in 1960, I should say?

1960, roughly five hundred pounds.

A week?

A week.

And how much expenses did you have?

You had to put away in the bush half and half – half for expense, half ...

For yourself.

Sometimes when you got ... In a small operation it was all right you haven't got much expense: only a couple of tyres in the truck and the petrol, diesel, whatever, but it was not too bad. At that time we made a bit more money than when we was a bit bigger.

You made more money then than when you got bigger?

Yep. You don't believe it?

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No, I believe it. Yes, I can see with a big Volvo truck.

This is true. And not only that; and with a machine they call a logging skidder, a timberjack or whatever, up in the bush; and they had to rush all the time because you had to buy the Volvo, you had pay by term and at the end of the month and the tyre[s]. When you've got this logging skidder you don't care anymore. You go over the top of stumps and you break the tyres and sometimes break the diff and, oh ... trouble, trouble and spending more hours in the bush to get the wood out. We were more organised when we work everything by hand. More hard work but more organised, everything go nice and smooth all the time. This is true – be honest.

I can see it's quite right.

It was very good. I put aside more money when we work by hand than when we were bigger.

Your brother was doing well, too. He bought the house in Queanbeyan. When did he get married?

They go back to Italy to get married. I think they go back in 1970 and then come back in 1972. He never wanted to come back any more, so for two years I had to carry on the business myself.

Did you have any help?

I got my brothers-in-law. I was not married at that time, but my brothers-in-law, they come and give me a hand sometimes; but normally I had to push hard by myself and a couple of men: one driver and one give me a help in the bush. My brother looked like he doesn't want to come back any more and, after, I write a letter saying, 'It's up to you if you want to stay there.' But in the end he said, 'They changed a lot since we left Italy, they are going so well.' I write a letter we are going well here, too. I tried to convince him to come back. Anyway, he came back and he's happy now anyway.

How old were you when you came to Australia?

I was born in 1932 ...

Born in 1932 – [came to Australia in] 1956 – twenty-four.

Twenty-four.

When did your brother come?

My brother came a year later, 1957.



Gino Rosin about 1990. (L. and N. Rosin)

How old was he then?

He's three years older than me. He's a bit older than me.

He was around twenty-seven.

He would have been twenty-seven, twenty-eight. They go back in 1972. They got married a bit old – about thirty-three, thirty-four, something like that. But that's life. The Forestry actually, they helped us a lot because not many, even at that time, they stay, they work in the bush and always – we can hear – always there is something wrong: the contractor on the other side of the town call the Forest, they've got an argument with the boss. But not [us] – because we're coming from a very ... from the right family. My father had been in America for a few years and always they said to me when they knew I wanted to come to Australia, he said – only one thing they told me, they learn in America – 'Be a good boy, not a wrong boy, be good boy.' I remember from back home.

So your father went to America before he got married.

Before he got married – in 1928 or something. At that time they requested in

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America for us – they said to collect some potato work in the farm and this sort of thing. They was engaged by the government, too, in America.

Why, when you were a young fellow, didn't you go to America? Why did you come to Australia?

There's another story because actually the government of Australia or embassy or ambassador or whatever at that time, they got a request for some sugar cane cutters. In America there was not much, I think, because we don't hear much from America to go to America. Always they say better money in Australia at that time. I can't remember exactly. But apparently I come to Australia because one day one of my friends, we'd been to school together – and they also live in Sydney – and we come together. He said, 'Frank, are you coming to Australia?' I said, 'Oh, it's too far away', just when I was coming home from national service – I'd been to national service. It was one or two weeks, I'd finished my national service and I was home. And then he said, 'Come on' and he tried to push me. I said, 'All right.' So we go in Venice to the embassy and said, 'Have we got any chance to come to Australia?' They took our name and address and a couple of weeks later, already I got my passport in my hand ready to go.

That was quick. And you both came out and cut sugar cane.

Sugar cane, yes – me and my friend.

But he didn't come to ...

Canberra, no, because he got another ... After a while he got married up in Queensland and he got another brother-in-law who lived in Sydney, so he decided to stop in Sydney. Nearly every Christmas we see each other, anyway. Either he comes to Canberra or I go to Sydney. We've been friends from when we were little kids in the school.

When you say you worked well in the forests and you got on well with ACT Forestry, did you ever have any problems with them at all or did they have any problems with you?

Not at all, nothing because – this is what I say before – we got good help from the Forestry because we were being honest all the time. And even some time in winter time when we got a wet compartment he tried very hard for us, for me and my brother, to give me the next compartment where it was more rocky country, like more solid – not to get us bogged. They tried to look after

us well. We go back and finish the wet compartment when it was dry – when the dry weather come, we go back and finish. Not only that, because when we were ... You get used to the job and you like to get everything done properly. Even when we finished the compartment to thinning, you had to clean the mess in the road – leave everything in order. Sometimes you fell trees and they've got big branches and, if you leave it sticking up in the air, it never goes rotten quick; and you've got a lot of trouble for next time when it's time to go back and thinning for the second and third time anyway because every two or three years they thin it out. So you had to chop, you had to go past the compartment, you spend maybe one weekend to do a proper job, thin it out properly and then slash the branches two feet from the ground – I think it was two feet anyway or sometimes two feet six, not much difference anyway. Afterwards when you drive in the road, you can see where us worked and where somebody else worked because everything was ... They don't say Frank and Gino, they've done a wrong job; he does professional job and you enjoy. I feel a lot better inside. Me and my brother, for that we never get any argument with the Forest.

How big were the compartments that you were cutting?

Could be around fifty acres – fifty-sixty. All depends if it is in the corner, it may be a bit smaller but it's quite a fair bit a compartment.

When you started off, how were you cutting the trees?

With a five foot handsaw – one on each side. And you had to make a scarf to put it where you wanted because the trees is just like that. You had to put exactly, otherwise you hung up to the next trees and then if it's wet[?] or some time you missed it. You can't help because probably it's a bit windy and the trees move up in the top. You're just about ready to [inaudible] and you can't hold them. Sometimes you miss and they hit the other trees. When you hit the other trees it does damage because pine, they've got very soft branches, very soft bark. Even when you snig with the horses you had to have ... So if you're working the slope and you tried to snig with the horses on the slope, the bark comes off on the next tree standing. You had to get the right direction all the time. Somebody doesn't look at that, but us we look at it because Forestry looks after us and we look after the Forest. If you go down Pierces Creek or Uriarra or Stromlo Forest or Kowen Forest, all the bosses they know our name because we'd been working for ...

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After you cut the trees down and you got the horses to take them out. Did the horses drag them on the ground?

Yep.

And then you loaded them onto to the truck down at the road.

Yeah. Down where the horses also had to snig, you know, where you wanted the wood, there you had to cross-cutting after with a three foot handsaw [and then ?] with an axe. Sometimes you had to lift the log, lift the full-length trees on top of each other because if you leave on the ground – or put something underneath – because if you leave on the ground and they start to cut it when you're halfway through the logs, they start to jam the saw. You had to have it open all the time. Now with the chainsaw, it's a different story because if the logs are on the ground and if they've got nothing underneath you start to cut from underneath and come up. If you've got logs underneath and it's still a bit up in the air, up off the ground, you can start from the top and keep on going.

With the saws you were using you couldn't obviously get underneath.

No, no way.

When did you start using chainsaws?

'75 – 1974-75.

Up till that time you were using the handsaws.

And when they were blunt you had to sharpen – had to learn to sharpen. It's not easy. You had to learn the job. It was quite interesting to learn this job. Even now, if I'm around in the bush I can hear straight away – if some contractor work and they've got some of the fallers – I can hear straight away if the chainsaw is not sharp enough. I can hear the smell from the smoke because they work hard and the smoke – the chainsaw has white smoke – and they burn away. I can hear straight away those working.

In the early days after you got the horses to drag the logs down the hill and then you cut them or did you cut them first before you dragged them?

No, the horses they dragged a full-length. If it was a bit downhill, the horses got a bit of help, but if it was sometimes up, you had to cut probably in half, probably leave it to full-length, twelve footers, and the rest ... It all depends if it goes for first, second or third grade.

So you took them down to the truck.

To where we've got a dump, what we call a dump – a place. Forestry, actually,

make a place for every contractor for every block of land. They make a bit of land where you can park the truck.

How did you load the logs on to the trucks?

This is very interesting. After the dump, if you've got a bit of a bank, you had to grab with the horses again and stockpile in the bank, a bit more higher, if you've got a bank. If you haven't got a bank, you had to grab again with the horses and put in a pile because you can't load the trucks. The eight footers, you load just by hand like that – lift and goes – one bloke on the top of the truck. Ten footers – between nine and twelve footers – you had to stack on the top of the hill and then with two sticks about that long – about that size ...

Big, thick ones.

And put them from the bank to the truck one each side – two sticks – into the body of the truck and then push, roll onto the truck. And then you've got your body on one side, the lift the stanchion. The stanchion was made just like that, just like an 'L' on the side of the truck. So you start, you roll up the logs, lift up to the ... so you've got the logs on this side to the left or to the right, it doesn't matter, because you've got four stanchions: two on the left, two on the side. And then when you start to lift them up on to the body of the truck, you lift up – not where you've got the sticks, [but] where on the side you lift up the two stanchions about four foot high and start to pack from one side.

So you pack them on a slope.

On a slope and when you start to get a bit higher you have to lift up the stanchions on this side as well and lift up the sticks as well. You understand what I mean?

Yes.

And then for walk from the hill to the body you need about four metres plank to walk in or to roll up the logs. Four metres long hardwood plank and then every foot they got two by two or something. They're stuck with an iron [?] to grab it, to push the other way is slippery, like a stack.

So you push it up over these.

No, you push up to the stick where they go in the top of the body of the truck and for ourselves to walk, we've got these two planks and walk on the top of the planks. Otherwise when the truck started to go high ...

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One of the Rosins' International trucks in Queanbeyan, c. 1970s. (L. and N. Rosin)

You'll slip. Yes, I see.

You can't reach any more, but if you've got your planks from the logs where they are up to the body of the truck, you've got a chance ... until you reach it because we go up, I think, it was about two metres, two and a half metres high.

Two and a half metres high.

So from the ground, between the ground and the body of the truck is about what? – about a metre or something, roughly – plus another two and a half is three and a half metres. You can't push a log up there, so you had to have something to walk, to push all the time. It was not easy.

Did you ever have any accidents?

I got one small accident in springtime, not really bad but because it was springtime when the pines they started really grow – move – the bark comes off very easy. And even when you snig by horses and they hit the stump or rock or something, the bark will come off, will peel off. [Inaudible]. So when you roll up on the sticks to go up in the truck it's very slippery. When my brother said, 'I can't make any more, they go.' I tried to jump out and let the logs go; and when I jump out, I jump out and got the axe just next to the truck and I fall ... just the axe. I don't know what is happening. Probably when I jump, I hit it with the legs, with my shoes – the handle of the axe – and they turn up a bit and I get a cut here – twenty-five stitches.

That's not good.

The only one accident I had. It was bad enough. So [inaudible] had to ... I goes up in the bush the same after a couple of days, but I can't do nothing - very stiff.

Where did you go to get the stitches in the cut?

The first hospital ... We were up in Pierces Creek at that time. I think what they call the John James Hospital. Actually, the forester was there because every morning the forester had to come and measure the logs because we were going by super feet; and the measure man was there, Forestry, just give me a lift in the four-wheel drive. He said, 'Come on, Frankie, we can't lose any more time.' They tie it up with my belt [?] because blood ... And they said we ... I'll go straight to the hospital. [Inaudible]. This is what he did.

That was good.

This is the only one accident I got in the bush after twenty-six years.

When did you get the crane to lift the logs on?

When we got the crane in 1975-76, it was not easy because ... the crane they've got now is all hydraulic. They've got a grabber. They push a button or a lever, whatever, grab it and up she goes. But the first Tico crane coming, they got a winch. The harder you pull out - it was in three pieces ... So you pull out the first bit and put in a pin, the second bit and put in a pin, and the third pin, you put a bit. And they've got like a scissor to grab it with a rope - they use at that time with a [inaudible] or something to grab the scissor. They've got a really round, like a hook to grab the scissor and when you pull it the scissor closes.

I see what you mean - closes around the log.

Just like that and it closes around the logs, but my brother - normally they use the crane and they hook the logs underneath, and I wait in the truck to unhook the logs and put it where I want it. But sometimes if you hook in the middle - the logs - it was not too bad to get balance, but if you put a bit too much - it's heavy wood, especially twelve footers - if you put six inches over and you had to grab - sometimes if it was a normal, not really bad, you can hold the log. But if it was a bit too much, you had to drop the logs now and again and move the scissors to where they come in between balance.

So it was a bit fiddly.

It was dangerous, too, because you've got the logs and you are in the truck,

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three or four metres up in the air and you are there and they try to push down the logs and they never come. The logs can just move all the time because the crane is not stable, it's just a rope.

But you never had any accidents with it.

No, I never got any accidents because we are very understand not to get ... Because when you have an accident, you waste time and there was no compensation at that time, no insurance, no nothing.

No insurance.

The insurance started coming 1975 or '76 when the big operation come in.

Before that you couldn't get insurance; they wouldn't insure you?

You couldn't get insurance. You had to look after yourself.

Yes, I can see that.

You had to look after yourself. Insurance started in 1974-75 when Crawford, this fellow we were talking of before with the big operation. That happened at Pierces Creek. He was two fallers, two cousins. Then one cousin, he felled the trees and the other one was not far enough – trimming – hit him with the logs – dead on the spot. Killed him on the spot. After that the Foresters, they put their foot down; there had to be insurance. Actually it was better because it was not an easy job; it was a bit of a dangerous job if you don't know. If you know what you are doing ... but still with the operation, one of these days ... It's dangerous – believe it or not.

Yes, I believe it's dangerous. One thing I wanted to ask you was who were the people you worked for? Who were the bosses in ACT Forestry at the time you were working as a logging contractor?

Ron Murray. I think he was the second boss, Ron Murray. The first boss, Bill Bateman.

Bill Bate?

Bill Bateman? Bill Bateman actually was the foreman up in Uriarra. They call him Mr Mann or Lamb.²

² Frank has apparently confused Bill Bateman with Bill Bates. The latter was Overseer at Uriarra, while Bill Bateman was Assistant Forestry Officer based in town. Ron Murray was the Officer in Charge of Uriarra and Ian Lamb was Logging Officer.

Lamb.

Mr Lamb, he was the big manager boss in the ACT at the time.

Who did you actually deal with when you were logging? Who actually looked over what you were doing and so on during the years that you were logging?

During the years, mostly it was Bill Bateman. He was in charge to come out and see us.

Mostly when you were logging you were on your own, there wasn't somebody from ACT Forests there all the time looking ...

No, not at all the time. If you need him, you have to call him or go in the office and see him and 'We need you to come in and watch what we had to do it.' But most of the time, when you know what you had to do, well, you probably see him once a week or once every fortnight. It wasn't really necessary to see him all the time, anyway, because there wasn't only us to look after. He might have half a dozen contractors at that time, could be more. What he does ... What we needed actually if we need for the road to be done with the grader or need a couple of loads of gravel, or a few rocks – we had a bit of a bog here – this sort of thing, but nothing else actually.

How did the contract work? You signed a contract with ACT Forests and how much did you have to pay them for the contract?

Nothing, just that they send you a letter – they call it a contract for such and such a compartment: number nine or ten or twenty or whatever. You go and look at the compartment and you give a price. Who puts the low price gets the contract.

So you give a price to say how much you'd log that for and then do they pay you that price?

They pay us that price, but normally the Forestry they get the pay from the sawmill. And then after – this is another – you had to be ... When you sign the contract, you get so much as tonnage or super feet goes every day or every week because the sawmill they've got men to pay and if they [have not] got any wood they start to complain to the Forests.

If they haven't got enough ...

If they haven't got enough wood. So you have to keep going some time even if it was bad weather to deliver the wood to the sawmill because you've got a contract. Forestry never give you any fine, but it doesn't look all right because

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Forestry got a complaint [from] the mill and, us, we've got a complaint [from] the Forest. Actually it got something to do with the Forest itself.

So you took the wood to the mill, the mill paid ACT Forests and then Forests paid you?

And then Forests paid us.

How long did it take to get paid?

They pay us every fortnight. Every fortnight you got your cheque in your mail – no question at all.

That's very good.

Every second Friday you look in the mail, cheque coming. Some time probably it missed it, but no later than Monday – no later than the following week Monday.

That's very good.

We got no question for that – no trouble.

When you first started where was the mill at that stage?

Only in Fyshwick. The logs, the first grade, had to go to the government sawmill and it was in the Causeway. Now what they call the Electrician ... near to the lake there.

In the powerhouse area?

Yeah, I think around there.

Around there somewhere.

Yeah, the first grade had to go there. The second and third grade, it goes down in Fyshwick.

Was that a government mill, too?

It was a private one.

Why did the government take only the first grade wood?

It belonged to the Forestry and it does at that time a lot of Housing Commission – these government houses – they need a fair bit at that time.

So that's why they wanted to control the first grade wood, and the second and third grade went to the Fyshwick private mill.

The private mill where they does mostly cages for cherry. They send it to Young.

Cherry boxes.

Cherry boxes. A bit of battens for the roofing.

Roof battens, yeah. Whereabouts in Fyshwick was this private mill?

Now, I think they put the Readymix or something.

I'll have to find that. I don't know where it is. Who ran the mill? Whose mill was it?

I think one is still running there. It's Voveris.³ I think it's Croatian or something. And another two fellows there [inaudible]. They call it Monier Sawmill.

When did those start?

It was there when we started, anyway. It was there. I think probably Monier, they buy out some Albert Carson, come from England, I think, and Frank Carson. I think it was two brothers. I'm not sure.

So Monier bought them out.

Monier bought them out.

Whereabouts was their mill?

They were close.

In Fyshwick?

In Fyshwick – very close. I think there was another sawmill. But normally us, we work for Voveris, Johnny Voveris. We get – what I have to say – mostly they want the third grade because they make these cherry boxes at that time. I don't know, because probably we come from a poor country and we don't want to throw away nothing; we got a lot of third grade stuff. We pick up everything. Well, Forestry actually they were very appreciative because we never wasted much of their time. Not like now – forget it.

When you were quoting for a block or a compartment, did you have any problems with quoting how much it was ... ? – especially when you started.

A bit of a tricky.

Tell me about it.

We know Forestry, actually, has got its own price. Probably at that time I think it was a dollar 100 super feet.

3 Adolf Voveris and other members of his family.

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A dollar or a pound?

A pound. No, ten shillings – a dollar – for a 100 super feet. But now you had to work it out, maybe that contractor is a bit cheaper than us, probably have to put nine shillings or eight because each forest, they've got a different price.

Each forest area.

Each forest area. I think in Uriarra it was the far[thest] forest from town so they pay a shilling extra; it was there eleven shillings, I think. In Pierces Creek, it was ten. It could be ten shillings, it depends – around ten shillings. Stromlo was eight because it was closer. And I think Kowen was more or less the same price as Stromlo. So when you were tendering you had to work it out in price each forest. If you call it ten in Uriarra, you had to tender for a bit more than Pierces Creek. And if you were tendering Pierces Creek you had to tender a bit less than in Uriarra, and Kowen and Stromlo the same sort of thing.

So you quoted on super feet, you didn't quote on the whole amount that you were going to take out of a forest.

No, only on super feet – so much per super foot. Now they change, now they go so much per tonne.

That would make it even harder, I think, would it?

It's harder for the Forest.

For Forestry?

Yeah, because they have to check the first, second, third grade all the time. They got a man full-time in the mill or in the weighbridge to check. At that time, it was – I don't know now for sure – but when we were still in logging they got a man and he check: this load looks like all first grade; next load probably half and half.

Why didn't they do that when you were quoting on super feet because some super feet would be much more valuable than other super feet. Like first grade would be much more valuable than third grade.

Yeah, but the contractor, they started to complain because they lose a lot of time because the forest they are sent to, I say, in Stromlo or in Pierces Creek or Uriarra or whatever – Kowen – there are three or four contractors. And the men coming to check the logs: first or second or third grade and they write down so much super feet. If they come first to you and if you've got not enough stockpile you're all right. But the next contractor, they have to wait

and they miss a load. And by the time they finished, some time it was – he do as quick as he can, the bloke who comes and checks the logs – but he can't do everything in one hour. They have to pass from one contractor, the next and the next. And after they think to put a weighbridge and weigh the wood; and it goes some amount. Probably the Forestry they got an arrangement with the sawmill. But there's a bit of sequence [?]; it's not easy like it used to be.

Did you have much competition from other contractors?

Yep.

Were they undercutting each other's prices?

Yep, some time you missed a good contract for five cents a ton or something, probably if you put five cents less. Some time you get to the same price, and they call you in the office. Some time you go to the same price and two contractors, they've got the same price and they call you in the office and they say ... They never call you in at the same time. They call first you and after me or first me and after you. And they say – it's a bit of a tricky – we got so and so, seven cents lower than you. You make it for seven cents lower – maybe it's only five. But a couple of cents, you know. And they say all right. But you've got references there, too, if you're good, you've got the job anyway; it's not hard to get the job.

Yes.

If you had a good reputation with them, ACT Forests would take a higher price from you.

How many other contractors were there when you started in 1958 and when you started your own business in 1960?

We got about ten or eleven contractors.

And they were all competing against one another.

Some time you had to work for a bit less. But you had to understand one thing: if you got the right compartment, the right block – they call a block a compartment – you can still make it because you got good wood, good area, easy to make wood. Probably you have to make a load if you put a bit low price – probably you have to make a load a week extra, but it's nothing.

One load a week extra.

One load a week extra for a cheap price – if you put a bit low price, but it's nothing compared if you've got a rough compartment, rough trees and hard to

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Frank's nephew, Nino Rosin, cutting a log with a chainsaw, c. 1970s.
(L. and N. Rosin)

work. Probably you have to work for the same amount of hours to get probably less loads per a week – a lot more less. Some time if you got a really rough compartment, maybe three or four loads a week less than normal.

That's a lot less.

That's a lot less. So for one load a week if you put a bit cheap price – you can't win all the time in the life.

Were the other contractors working the same long hours that you and your brother worked?

No.

They worked shorter hours.

Shorter hours and, I don't know, because probably there were quite a few Australians working and probably got a bit 'yappy yappy' with the bosses. They go along with talk too much with ...

Talk too much with the bosses.

No, we don't say that but they got a better ... They come up better than us, anyway. You know what I mean? Put it this way, if somebody doesn't care, even some Italian doesn't care – some of the Italian contractor doesn't care – if the mill run out of wood and they have to pay the men, he doesn't care. But us, we keep caring all the time – to the mill running all the time. This was the idea because ... I put you in my position. If you've got men to pay and you've got no wood to cut it, you had to work around the other way, isn't it? If you've got men to pay and the mill runs out of wood, how do you go? Your name goes bad.

You mean, if you've got no wood to go to the mill, then the man in the mill is not doing anything.

That's right. And for that we had to work long hours. When you are in that position you have to do something with the sawmill and Forestry. And you get a bad compartment and you can't produce much, we try many times to employ men. But I remember the year I get married 1972 or 1973 or whatever, I want a week off at least and in one week we employed seven men. They stay a couple of hours, and after ...

They go.

They say this a job for a blackfella – a job for animals – we can't do it.

They wouldn't do it.

Even when sometimes we got a bad compartment, we try. They were there with me and I try to teach them and tried my best to have a bit of rest when they were a bit tired; you pick it up, no worries. The next day there was not anyone. They never turn up.

Doesn't come back.

No come back because they reckon it is a job for a bulldozer not for a man.

So even after you got married you couldn't even go and have a honeymoon because ...

No.

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You just had to work. Is the number of contractors still the same or are there more contractors now or less?

Less.

Less, because they're big.

Big. I've still got a nephew there working in the bush. They call him Rosin Logging Contractor.⁴

So the family contracting business still goes on.

Yeah, actually when I'm off work, when I said I can't do any more, my nephew still works with us – me and my brother – and I retire because of my hip and my brother for the back – it's very bad. He can barely walk. He walks but oh ... here, there. It's too late, anyway. Yes, we've still got a nephew. We sell out the business to my nephew. He still goes.

You were saying in the early days you were taking the wood to the government mill at the Causeway and then at the same time to the Fyshwick mills. Did that change later on?

They changed ... In 1974 we got a very wet year and very windy. The wind blows down half of the forest. And then after that it changed. After that the wood it go ... If you paint it ... When they go blue and black when they're down. They go for a fair while because there's still roots in the stump, but after the roots are out from the ground they go blue and dry very quick. So we had to work like mad to pick up all this wood and there's nowhere to sell it. So this IFP,⁵ the biggest sawmilling in Hume, they get as much as they can. So after that they changed the system. I think the government probably get a big contract with this big sawmill, so they close down at the Causeway. They close down a few sawmills in Fyshwick because most of the wood goes there [to IFP].

So they wanted one big mill to be able to take as much as possible.

As much as possible.

And that was the one in Hume.

Well, it wasn't enough because more contractors come from Tumut to get this wood; otherwise the Forest, they waste a lot.

⁴ This was Nino Rosin.

⁵ Integrated Forest Products.

This is when it was blown down?

Blown down, yes, in 1974. And then they carried on for two years I think – two or three years. At the last when they started to get a bit dry, there was one sawmill down the coast in Ulladulla, they take this wood there. At that time we got a driver, me and my brother, and one driver from ACT during the day. And we had to pay one driver from roughly six o'clock in the afternoon up till the next morning because they took overnight to Ulladulla with a full load and then come back. They come back at three or four o'clock in the morning so the other driver started. A lot of struggle at this time to look after because Forestry never push you, but we feel guilty ourselves. One day you pick up at [inaudible] the staff, and the next wind blow they blow up all the beautiful trees and a lot of it waste. You had to push hard to help with the Forest as well. This is the way they go at that time.

Did you employ extra people to help at that time?

At that time I think we got three or four men, I think.

Was that normal or extra?

Extra, to get this wood out as much as possible.

Was it most of the time just you and your brother?

Most of the time we worked me and my brother, yes, up to '74.

And then after that you started ...

After that we started to get a bit bigger. My nephew come from Italy and another nephew come from Italy and then we started to grow with the family a bit bigger. Now, actually we got another three nephews coming from Italy, but now two were not very interested in the bush. The first nephews that came they were more or less, but the other two were bricklayers back home and now they have got a big company, Rosin Brothers Bricklayers – they make homes.

In Canberra?

In Canberra, yes. They've got a big job in O'Malley. They put up thirty or forty houses at a time.

You said one of your nephews took over the family business – now runs the family logging business – which one was that? Was that the first one that came?

The first one that came.

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What's his name?

Nino Rosin.

Nino Rosin. So he's still working up in the forest.

Yes, and he married an Australian girl, too. They learn better English than me, anyway. It's better coming here young, actually. He came here when he was seventeen or eighteen, something like that.

During your time as a logging contractor did you do logging work in all the forests or just mainly in one or two areas?

No, all the forests. Where they call a tender you had to go, if you get it. Mostly we work between Uriarra and Pierces Creek. We work a fair bit in Stromlo but not very often. In Kowen. I say probably in twenty-six years we spent roughly twenty years between Uriarra and Pierces Creek; and the other six years, probably three years in Stromlo and three years in Kowen. It was a bit ... We tried to be always in the same area if we could because when you move from one forest to the other we got a lot of trouble. Not trouble ... I mean we had to spend a lot of time because you have to move the machinery at that time with the horses and find a yard for the horses and do the right thing. We try actually to move all the time on the weekend if we could. Even now it is a lot quicker if you have to move from one forest to the other because you've got the machinery to move and you've got your float – your prime mover and float – put machinery in the float and the next day you are ready to work in the next forest.

At that time with the horses it was a bit of a ... I remember once I had to move from Pierces Creek to Kowen, and I move the horses in the night-time after tea. My brother said, 'We've got a tender up in Kowen. There is nothing we can do in Pierces Creek tomorrow.' I said ... It's a bit of a funny story, a bit of a question? What are we doing? I've finished my tea. After, going to Pierces Creek; grab the horses and go up to Kowen. So we walked right through [to] Kowen because we've got nothing at that time. We don't know nobody. All our time was in the bush. And so we moved the horses from Pierces Creek to Kowen. At six o'clock in the morning we were in Kowen and keep going with the work, never go back in the bed – a bit slow the next day though, a bit tired.

So you walked the horses from Pierces Creek to Kowen and just kept going.

I say from probably eight or nine o'clock in the night, I can't remember exactly. At daylight I was in Kowen with the horses. We never do nothing with the

horses, actually, because the horses were more tired than me, but we started felling and trimming ready for the next day, gave a bit of a rest to the horses.

Tell me, what happened to the horses in the long run?

What happened to the horses? Some of them are still alive.

Did you sell them?

We leave them there in Uriarra mostly. There was a bloke there, the bloke who came and measured the logs for us. He comes from England. His name is Eric Fream [?], a very good man. Then when we finished up with the horses he said to me, 'Hey, Frank, you want to sell the horses?' I said, 'No, we keep them.' 'Okay,' he said, 'Because if you sell them you are no good to me because the horses have always been good – good friendly horses and I'll look after them for fun.' One died because it was too old.⁶

Which one was that?

One of the horses.

That wasn't Jack, was it?

No, Jack is still alive – Prince.

Prince died.

Prince died and Jack's still alive.

Where is he?

Up in Uriarra – very old.

Do you go up and see him?

Yeah, my brother goes at least every fortnight to feed him. They buy a bag of lucerne chaff and they give it to Eric, to this bloke. I go and see him, but he is very old now.

He must be a great horse.

He was.

So most of the time you worked in either Pierces Creek or Uriarra and a bit of the time in Kowen and Stromlo. Was most of the wood you cut radiata pine?

Yes, radiata pine.

⁶ According to Graham McKenzie-Smith, the horses ended up at Pierces Creek looked after by Eric Hayes.

Did you cut any ponderosa or any other?

Yes, we cut *ponderosa*, too.

And any other types of ... ?

Ponderosa or *radiata*. But *radiata* they use here and *ponderosa* they use in Albury. There is a big sawmill in Albury. They call it Laminex [?] Sawmill. They do all the chip because *ponderosa* is not much good for dressed wood because very old wood and – this is what they explained to me. I'll tell you what the bosses explained to me. In Australia, especially here in the ACT, we've got very cold weather – not cold weather – but they prefer better to grow where there is hot weather. It's very slow growing, *ponderosa*, here. And when it grows slowly it's very tough inside because there's not enough sap. It's very dry wood. And when you dress it up, cut it on the bench and whatever – dressed up four by four or two by two or whatever – they twist, so it doesn't like it. Actually, it's good only for chips.

So you can only make wood chips out of it. So it's all sent to Albury.

This Laminex [?] they do all the chip wood. They chip even *radiata* because up in Tumut ... My nephew – they've got another two sons – they've got a contract up in Tumut as well, but all the wood is *radiata* and the wood goes only to Albury for chip.

Is the radiata not good enough in the Tumut area?

In the Tumut, this is probably second or third grade, anyway. The first grade probably they keep in Tumut. I don't know the situation there, but this is what I heard. First thinnings, you never get much out from first thinnings, it is all the stuff, very small size. They use a lot of it, if it is straight enough, in Koppers Logs. They treat them.

Did you log any other types of pine like nigra or anything like that?

No, only *radiata* – mostly *radiata* and *ponderosa*. But the *ponderosa* we get. There's a big performer there, a bloke in the Tumut area – I don't know if he is in Tumut area or around that area – they've got a lot of trucks running.

They call it Dean Company⁷ – trucks. So they've got a lot to do with transport, cheaper from this Albury sawmill then on to Sydney. They send it to Japan or somewhere to get pressed wood or something. I think there goes one big ship a week or a fortnight, I'm not sure. These people, these trucks

⁷ C.J. Dean Transport Pty Ltd, Adelong NSW.

from Sydney on the way back, they call it backload. They come and pick up our wood and take it to Albury. We've got nothing to do with transport – just to cut it. Forestry pay us just for an amount of tonnage.

When did this system start?

I think they started early 1980, between 1979 and 1980. It's a bit hard to remember everything.

Whereabouts was the ponderosa mostly?

Ponderosa they've got in every forest. Not much in Stromlo, but in Kowen and in Pierces Creek they've still got a lot.

But it's only being chipped.

Only being chipped. They try to sell it here, too, but it doesn't go. I spoke to my nephew a short time ago. I think the biggest sawmill in Hume, they've got a chipper as well, now. But I never asked him if they deliver any *ponderosa* there or if it still goes in Tumut; I never asked him.

You don't hear much about it. Usually you hear about the radiata.

I know very well *radiata* – I can tell you everything.

What sort of machinery did you get together over the years? You started off with the ordinary saws and loading the logs by hand and then you got a crane, but what other kinds of machinery did you get?

If I explain to you, maybe you will start to cry. The first chainsaw, we talk about. After, they come with the steel chainsaw it was not too bad. But the first chainsaw we buy it was a Danarm saw, forty-two pounds heavy. Carrying it on your shoulder to go up in the hills, up to forty-five degrees – to carry the saw up there and fell the trees – oh, my goodness! When I was up there, then after, there came in this sort of steel saw, I think, made in Germany or something – a good saw, a really good saw. It lasts because I never got any trouble. When they're old they start to give a bit of trouble, but if you had to make a living with the logging business, you had to have good gear. Otherwise when you have an old saw and start and pull it out and it never starts, you waste your time and get cranky – it doesn't work. Then after that we got this logging skidder, they called a forwarder, they come from Sweden. It goes up forty-five degrees.

How does it work? Can you explain it?

It's got six-wheel drive, two wheels where the engine is, another four in the

trailer. But it had to go all the time in reverse up because, if you try it, it turns over up the hill.

So the skidder gets backed up the hill.

Backed up the hill all the time. It's got its own crane. It's like a little trailer in the back. In the back of the cabin you've got your own crane, like Hiab or something – something different crane, there are a lot of different cranes – and you've got your grabber and you're carrying fifteen tonnes at a time from the bush.

Fifteen tonnes a day.

No, fifteen tonnes each trailer. You have to do a lot of bloody trips because normally we shift in the last five or six years from 1976 up to '85 – nine years – we shift, me and my brother, with a couple of fallers and a driver, a 120 tonnes a day. So we had to go eight or nine times because you need two full loads to fill the trailer because we're carrying thirty tonnes at time, a load, in the semitrailer. And four trips a day is 120 tonnes. The fallers took fifteen tonnes a time up in the bush and get down to the road.

Fifteen tonnes comes down in the skidder?

No, they put in the trailer – it's a forwarder trailer. From there with a crane you're loading – it's the same crane, the same machine – you're loading the semi-trailer. So this job I do for the last six years.

How much did this skidder cost from Sweden?

Very dear, around 150,000 [dollars], and they never last long.

How long would they last?

Three years.

Is that all and they've had it and you had to buy another one? How many did you go through?

We go through three. We sold the last one to my nephew who is still carting wood with it. It was not too bad, but don't push very hard – a bit of flat country – but in the hill and you need a good machine, too – it's very dangerous. It was automatic. [If] something happened with the brake, you can't put it in gear, you can't put nothing.

Why was it automatic? I would have thought ...

Automatic, I don't know why they make it like that. Because when you were ready to load it, you had to look ... no gear, no nothing, just stop and keep



A feller buncher that Nino Rosin built himself c. 1960. (L. and N. Rosin)

going. Leave the brake down a bit and stop and keep going. It happened to me a couple of times. Brake leaking a bit of air and they started to move it, but they had to be very careful. You had to wait for a long time. When they start to move it, you've got the brake on and you start to move it, you had to put the stake and a couple of logs under the tyres – grab a couple of logs quick to stop it rolling. And then after that you have to find out where the leak is and had to change probably the hose.

Weren't there any other types of machinery that could do the job and were manual rather than automatic?

The way they go now, everything has changed. My nephew buy a couple of ... they call it Kettle or something⁸ – they're using the big chain track. They use it in town for the excavation or backhoe or something – this sort of machine. They've got a big hump [?] and they've got a scissor and they chop down the trees and they put it in bundles. They've got another – it's not that dangerous because it's got gears, it's not automatic. It goes up a fair bit of a steep. And behind is nothing. You can't trim any more now by hand.

⁸ Kettle is the brand name of a type of excavator. When it was fitted with a cutting head, it was referred to as a feller/buncher (GMCK-S).

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Behind this machine you've got another machine – we're talking about 300,000 [dollars] each – we've got another machine the same with a bigger grabber on the top of the cabin and they grab the logs; and they've got a de-limber, like a scissor again – hydraulic – and they grab the logs and they push back to the cabin; and this de-limber saws the limbs and when they're coming – there is a red light on the dash – when they're coming, you want four metre in length or five metre length, you press the button and the chainsaw, a jolly good chainsaw, cuts the length. And then behind this machine they've got a [Swedish-built] forwarder [logging skidder] ... grabs the logs, put in the trailer and take it down the hill, does the lot. Now, to be a ... I know my nephew, anyway, because we see him now and again. Now to be a contractor, he said, at least you need a million dollars just running around all the time.

It's become a big business.

And they're lucky because my nephew learns a bit of welding and fitting, but sometimes he never had to go in the bed because if they're broken down you had to get this machine ready for in the morning or during the day or as soon as you can, anyway. Sometimes he never goes to bed because he has to fix the machine, otherwise he goes broke very smart. He told me a short time ago he got \$2,000 a day to pay back the bank for seven days a week – Saturday and Sunday as well. He has got a lot of worries. He's a fair bit bigger because he's got two sons helping at Tumut. He's got a contract there and a fair bit in the ACT. He's a big bloke. He's big in one way, but a lot of worries, a lot of risk.

You'd have to be making a lot of money every day to cover the costs.

It's true. He's no liar.

So, one of your nephews went into the business. Did you have any children of your own?

Two daughters.

Not loggers.

No loggers.

What do they do?

One is an accountant – my son-in-law. No, my daughter never does ... She got kids now – normally was in the Public Service. The youngest work in the ACT bank before getting married and the other one worked in Russell for the Department of Defence.

A bit easier than logging.

The sons-in-law, one is an accountant in the university – very clever bloke. And the other one is a rep [who] sells wine for a company.

And what about your brother, Gino, how many kids?

My brother, Gino, has got two daughters and a son. The son, actually, he drives, he works for a company as a mechanic. He works for a company – Fremont [?] or something – big company – trucks. It's in Queanbeyan, they've got a big company in Queanbeyan.⁹

What big events stand out in your mind from when you were working in the forests? Did you have any big disasters apart from the blowing down of the wood? Were there any big bushfires or anything you had?

Sometimes, when we were involved with the forests, we get a fire. We had to go there with the skidder and help the Forest. It happened only once, a bit of trouble, up in Brindabella, a fire started in the forest. One day the bloke who was in charge – what was his name? – he's dead now. Anyway, he gives us a ring, he said, 'Frank, we've got a fire in so and so.' I said, 'All right, I'll be there as soon as possible.' It was pretty handy that time because it was up in Uriarra. We were very close to where the fire started, so I had to go there with the skidder and make a couple of tracks. We had to work out how to stop the fire.

When was that roughly?

1978, close to 1980.

Fairly late in the piece.

Even the Forestry was not organised like now. They had at that time a fire truck but old trucks. Now they've got special things. In Stromlo they've got a big fire truck. At that time it was a small tank in the back, an old International and very hard to go up in the hills. Sometimes you had to push it. It was a bit of funny sometimes. The bloke who drove the truck, his name was Harold¹⁰ – I forgot his second name – maybe very close to getting caught between the fires, he said, 'Come and help me, Frank'. So I go along with the skidder and push him out. It was a bit hard, I tell you.

⁹ Possibly Finemores Transport Company.

¹⁰ Harold Flint.

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A driver for Nino Rosin's logging company, Greg Donaghue, known as 'Tubby', standing beside his truck fully laden with cut logs at the weighbridge at Hume in the ACT, June 1986. (N. Padovan)

That's really amazing that they only had the one old fire truck that they had to push sometimes uphill.

They've got another little tank in a four-wheel-drive, but that was interesting. Up to now, that time, it was You spent your time ... What am I trying to say? It was very interesting because you try to help ... we were like a brother, everybody, now it's a different story. If you go around now – sometimes I go around – in Uriarra or Pierces Creek and a couple of the oldest – I've known them for a long time – and they say hello, how are you and this and that, but the young people say what are you doing here, you old man, but I never mind. I was young myself many years back.

Frank, during your time as a contractor did you ever have any work with hardwoods in the forests?

Yes, in the dam there.

What did the work involve with the hardwoods?

Well, I don't know what they did with the hardwoods, but they sent us over there because we didn't have much job here in going.

Where did they send you?

Forestry asked me if I would go because otherwise I didn't have much to do. Probably at that time, I think it was early 1960 or 1961, logging was a bit down and Forests said they have probably got two or three days job a week. If you want a full job then they asked probably – the contractor was building a dam – they're asking if there is any [inaudible] in logging. The Forest asked if I wanted to go and do a bit of work over there for a month until the sawmill picks up. I said I wouldn't mind. So we go there, me and my brother, and we started clear felling behind where they make the retaining wall for the dam. We started to clean up ...

Just clearing all the Eucalypts and so on.

Eucalypts – a fair bit. It was hard, I tell you. Rocky country and steep, probably fifty degrees.

Do you remember the name of the dam? What dam it was? Where was it, anyway?

I think it was about thirty Ks up to Uriarra place.

Thirty K from Uriarra. Which way?

I think probably Upper Cotter Dam.

I'll have to look it up, I think.

I can't remember exactly the name, Brendan.

Anyway, it was pretty hard work clearing this hardwood forest.

Well, they've got a job for ... like my age if you go there fifty/sixty years old, you can't make it anymore because you can't stand in the place – very hard to stand up.

It's so steep.

It's so steep. Imagine yourself to knock all the trees down. A fair bit of size we can fell by handsaw, with a five-foot handsaw, one each side, and the small stuff you had to clean up by axe. It was good money, actually, better than staying home.

So that was only for about a month or so.

I think we were there for five weeks and then after, when the Forest came around, they said, 'How long have you got to keep going?' We said, 'We've just about finished this', because now the sawmill said they started to improve a bit. He said, 'Any time when you've finished you can start back in your job.' And we did.

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So this clearing was just for the sake of this dam that was being built.

Yeah. I don't know after that what they did with because most of the big stuff when we fell it, it goes straight into a creek where water started running. I think that time they snig out by bulldozer, push it and burn it or something, I don't know. I don't think they used this wood, anyway. Who would get it out from there? It was very hard to get out from there.

So you just cut it down ...

Cut it down. Yeah, after there was a contractor, he got a contract with the dam. They called me there just to fell, anyway – clearing.

You said you were in ...

I forget all about it before to tell you because you asked me if I did any other job other than pine, but I forget ...

About the hardwoods. You said all up you worked for twenty-six years in the forests. What made you give it up?

When did I give it up?

What happened? Why did you quit?

I give it up for this trouble.

What happened?

When you finished putting the loads on to make a safety for not to get any trouble in the roads with the logs, you have to put a chain around – a dog chain, something like that – and you have to tie them up properly, to tighten as much as you can. As that was happening, the chain broke. The chain snapped and I was on the top.

You were standing on top of the logs.

And then when I come down, I try to do my best when I get the dog chain a bit loose, I hear straightaway banging on the chain and tried to grab the logs as quick as possible, but no chance and from there I fall down in the logs. I can't hear much straightaway. I'm a bit sore but keep going. But I keep going for a fair while, a couple months. I don't say much, not even to my wife because it would start her worrying. She told me many times to give up the bush, no way seven days a week and this and that. I said, 'One day, one day.' After a couple of months more sore, and I started to limp, too, a bit. I said I had to go and see the doctor this time. So I went to see the doctor and she said, 'What's your trouble?' I explained the story and

they checked. They pushed a bit hard where we've got the join on the hip here.

On your right hip.

And she said to make sure we'll have to send you in to x-ray to see what is happening. The next day – I think the same day – I go to the x-ray and they said they'd send a copy to me. He said, 'You come and see me in two days time.' A couple of days after I go and see the doctor again and he said ... He never said to me, the doctor, straightaway, 'You've got your hip cracked.' He said, 'You've got a bit of arthritis.' I said, 'But I don't think it actually comes quick like that, arthritis,' because rheumatism or arthritis they take a bit of time to build up. But I said it happened to strike after I had my accident when I come down from ... I started to get sore and more sore. He said, 'We'll wait another month to see how you are going,' but it was getting worse and worse. He said, 'What do you reckon about an operation?' I said to the doctor, 'If you think that it would be better, we'll do the operation.' He said, 'I don't know about working in the bush anymore because they have to cut your legs.' I said, 'What?' He said, 'They have to cut your bone and your legs completely to take out the hip and they put a plastic hip.' I said, 'Let me think about it for a couple of days.' I've got to have a bit of a talk with the doctor [who] actually explained to me somebody I know, one of the other fellows, they get the same operation, but for arthritis. He was an Italian living in Queanbeyan. 'Because,' I said, 'if I have to finish up, I'll be without my work anymore ...' 'But if you go on like that,' he said, 'you'll finish up in a wheelchair. It's as simple as that.'

So you had the operation.

So I decided to have the operation. I talked with another of my ... not my friend really, but I know the name of the bloke; I go and see him. I said, 'How are you going with your hip?' He said, 'It's not like before. I feel it when the weather changes a bit. It's not really sore, just something is not mine, but I walk. It's not bad.' 'Okay,' I said, 'thank you very much.' He said, 'Why?' I said, 'Because it looks like I have to have the same operation.' So he asked me what was happening with this and that, and I explained to him what was happening. Anyway, to finish up, in 1986, the beginning of 1986, I think, I get the operation.

The hip replacement operation.

And after six months ... because Dr Kitchener – I have my operation here – he

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A third generation of the Rosin family involved in the logging business – Peter Rosin (left) and Simone Rosin (4th from left), with other company employees, c. 1991.
(L. and N. Rosin)

said to forget about the bush, but I was not convinced. My mind was there. But he said, 'For three months you can't move from your chair.' It was not an easy operation. But I'm coming after six months I said, I'll try one morning. My wife said, 'Where are you going?' I said, 'I [am going] up in the bush this morning.' She said, 'You can't walk properly.' 'But maybe,' I said, 'I can overlook the men – what they are doing.' So I went up there. I tried to go in the logging skidder to clean up a bit of the road, do [inaudible] a bit of a job. A couple of hours later ...

You couldn't do it.

I said no.

This is the end.

I had to go home. I said to my nephew and my brother, 'No, [inaudible].' My brother said, 'Go home. If we can't do nothing about it ... If it's impossible, it's impossible.' I stayed home for another week and back again, back in the bush. My nephew said, 'What are you doing here?' I said, 'I'm sick and tired of

staying home.' I tried again with the logging skidder – it's the easiest job you can do. Somebody has to do it, but I can't do it with the chainsaw, I can't do it with the skidder, with the falling or to get the ... Because even with the faller there is another ... if something happened you had to be quick, otherwise you've lost your life and I wasn't in condition to do it. So I tried with the easy job to do it and for another couple of hours and I said, 'Now, it's just the end', and I had to give up.

Was your brother and one your nephews operating the business while you were off?
Just about that time my brother was not very good, too.

He had a bad back.
He had a bad back.

Was that from an accident or just from ... ?
From an accident, too.

Up in the forest? What happened to him?

It was a very frosty morning and he tried to walk in the [inaudible], three metre trees, and tried to walk back to go and trim the next trees and decided not to walk in the middle of the branches or rocks. He walked just on the top of the trees and it was frosty and slippery – slippery on top of the logs – and he hit it with his back straight on the logs.

When did this happen?

1982. Very close ... a couple of years before me. He kept working for another three or four years, but he was getting worse and worse. The doctor said, 'It happened because you fall off on the logs, but it happened because your back is finished, too. You use a lot of the chainsaw.'

And it had affected his back badly. When you finally stopped working what happened to the business then?

We sell it out to my nephew.

Gino decided it was time for him to stop, too.

Yeah, time for him to stop and we stopped just about the same time.

So this was about 1986?

1986 – end of 1985/beginning of 1986.

And you sold out to Nino then. Looking back over your twenty-six years working in the forest, can you say you enjoyed the work?

If I never enjoyed it, I would never have gone back after the operation.

That's right.

Some time I still think about going and giving a hand to my nephew. I've gone up some time more or less, but where I saw the machinery going up forty-five, fifty degrees, you think – everybody has to think – it's a job for young people. For over sixty, you can't make it any more. You can do it a bit in the flat country sort of thing because you have [to] think all the time about if something happens – breaks. Sometimes you have to jump out of the skidder very quick smart. I can't jump any more.

It's a young person's job. What did you do after you stopped work?

My daughter saw in the newspaper a bit of a job in the yacht club – maintenance: mow the grass around and do this bit here and there. I did that for a few years. Even sometimes now I go – Wednesdays when they've got something to do with the beer delivery or whatever, I go around there and I help a bit, but very little, probably five or six hours a week or something – just to stay away from home.

You don't like not being busy.

Really, before I go completely retired I go, Forestry ... No, I go really by myself, my idea was to go and see the ... because I want to have – before I started with the yacht club – I wanted to have a job again, not easy, not hard. I went to see the Employment Department in the Plaza and I said I was looking for a job. I explained to him what had happened, what sort of job – probably a clerk or a driver for the government – a worker for the government. And they send me one day to go to the government doctor in Civic – the Employment Department. They give me the name and address and I go into Civic. The doctor looked at my record and said, 'You have had a broken hip replaced. Do you know where your job is?' I said, 'No.' He said, 'What happened if you go [inaudible]. If you've got a fire, you have to run.' I said, 'I can't run much. I'm lucky if I walk.' He said, 'It's all right if you run for a little while but not for ... Your job is behind a desk, pushing a pencil.' I said, 'I'm sorry, I'm Italian, I can't get to school here. What sort of job is there for me?' He said, 'It's very tight.' This is the last time I went looking for a job.

Do you miss working in the forests?

I miss it a lot. But even if I got a different job with the government to do a bit of like what it does – use a chainsaw to trim a few trees along the street or what have you – I wouldn't mind that at all.

What does your wife think about your time in the forests? You said something before about ...

She was not happy at all.

She wanted you to give it up.

Yes, she was worried about ... Really, I don't know if it was my idea or in my mind to work all the time in this sort of job, but I never listen much to her. I look always because there were three in the family – a nephew and a brother – and it looked like to me when I left a bit guilty or something [to] not be in a job with the family because we went along all right.

You still like to go up to the forests sometimes.

I like especially early in the morning when I hear all the birds and magpies and [inaudible] all singing – I like it.

What's the most remarkable memory you've got of your work in the forest? What's the thing that stands out in your mind most about your time in the forest?

It was always in my mind when I was in the forest to have at least – sometimes I'm dreaming all night – to have at least logs in the stockpile for a week ahead all the time. Sometimes, even now – and I left the job nine years ago – I still dream. Do you believe it? You don't believe it? I've been for twenty-six years and I get up in the morning four o'clock, and then now after nearly ten years I left the job, four o'clock in the morning.

Wake up.

I never woke up but I know I had to get up. It was a bit of I enjoyed the job. It was a nice clean job, fresh air and you work on your own, no boss behind you, nobody complained about what we did.

That's all important, yes.

This is important. It's very important because if you've done something wrong or you're not happy in the job and this is no good and that's no good you have no happy life, anyway – if you know what I mean.

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Gino Rosin (left) and Frank, c. 1990. (L. and N. Rosin)

Yes. Is there any one incident that you remember that stands out more than anything else?

It was one accident, too, when I cut my knee but ...

But any one event or any one happening that stands out in your mind?

No.

Nothing in particular.

Actually, a bit of a scratch but it's superficial, but no stitches. I got a stitch here and the hip in twenty-six years; it's not bad. I've got a good record, actually.

Yes, that's not bad. I take it from what you've been saying that you have no real regrets about emigrating from Italy to Australia. You're happy to have come to Australia?

I've been back home twice, after ten years in 1956¹¹ and in 1980. Because in 1980 actually I go back because one of my brothers died, the second oldest brother. He started with a heart attack and [inaudible] he had been sick for a fair while and [I decided] to go and see him because we were brothers. I look at the other of my brothers and my father, what he does after many years. They reckon he does good, but it was not good enough compared with Australia.

Were they just still farming?

Still farming, but you had to work hard just for living and put nothing aside where we come from. I don't know, some other parts of Italy might be richer than where we come from, but where come from just on the border just between Venice and Yugoslavia, just there.

¹¹ This would have been in 1966.

Do you still miss Italy?

Not at bit, not even dreaming. I got one of my nephews, the builder, he goes back this Christmas past and for a couple of months you can't talk to him. He looked like he's dreaming: Italy here, Italy there, 'I go back.' When he said to me like that, I just laugh because I said I've been there for a couple of times and I never see any improvement. Maybe, this is what I say, maybe in Milan or Rome or some other country, I mean some other town, maybe it's all right, but where I come from, I've still got other brothers there and, 'Oh, if you're coming home, why do you go there? You've got to sell your house there in Australia and you can buy a house here.' And I say, 'What am I doing after? Work with pick and shovel twelve hours a day to make a living.' And the wages there are not that great anyway compared with Australia; [and] one house is next to the other.

You haven't got any room.

You have no room and here you can ... You know yourself anyway, I don't have to say. It's different. I never dream of Italy.

Just before we finish up I was just wondering, is there anything else that you think is important from your work in the forests that you'd like to tell me?

Every time – very important, really important – every time I go and see the operation now in the forest – [although] I never cry – because they waste in the forest.

So much waste now.

Too much waste. I never cry, but I feel like crying. From when we started up to now I feel like crying. A few months ago I met Bill Bates in Fyshwick. I was there in Dunlop to change a few tyres in the car and probably for a service there, and just as we were talking of a few things about the forest. And Bill Bates said – he's one of the Forestry; he's the manager now up in Stromlo – he said to me, 'Frank, things change a lot.' 'I know, Bill,' I said, 'I know.'

Is this because you think the ...

'And the people,' he said, 'they don't understand anymore.' They said to bring down the wood instead of from up the hill and down, it costs money and after they leave it there in the ground to go rotten.

This is the contractors doing this?

This is the contractors doing this. This is what he told me. He said, 'You can't

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say nothing to them because they don't care.' I said, 'Why are there no chances to tie them up a bit? If you don't do that, you get a week off or something – what they were supposed to be doing many years back.' He said, 'We've got no control anymore.' This is what is happening in the forest now. I like to go, but I like sometimes to stay far away from where they work because you see big piles everywhere of good wood.

You're saying that there's not enough control over the contractors now.

Over the contractors – maybe there's too much pressure: a lot of money to pay for the machinery and they have to keep going all the time. But it doesn't work. If you think back it doesn't work at all ... because I remember some time in the early stage of when we started with the horses, if you were a bit greedy and you tried to smack the horses, the horses got frightened. And by the time you were behind the horses and hook them up to the logs, the horses were frightened and they started running and it's hard to catch him. You think you are doing more, but you do less because by the time you spend the time to go and catch the horses when they start to go. It doesn't work.

You've got to be careful.

In the logging you have to have a lot of patience and spend your hours and do the right thing with the logging system. This is what I've got all the time in here but now. This is life.

That's it. Okay. I've enjoyed this very much.

I thank you, Brendan, I've enjoyed it, too, because if you describe it to somebody they think you are telling bullshit, but it is a true story. It's true like Jesus Christ.

Well, thanks very much, Frank. It's been a pleasure talking to you. Thanks for the time.

My pleasure.

Cecil Robert ('Bob') Cruttwell

Interview with Bob Cruttwell recorded in the sound studio of the Australian War Memorial on 25 May 1994

Bob Cruttwell was born at Dorking in Surrey, England, in December 1922 and, while growing up, he developed a keen interest in natural history. From 1940, he studied forestry at the University of Edinburgh, graduating in 1943. In the late 1940s, he moved to New Zealand where he worked for the New Zealand Forest Service for the next twelve years. During this time, he met Marjorie Constance May Good from Melbourne and the pair married in 1957. There were three children of the marriage.

In 1960, Bob and his family moved to Australia where he took up a position as Assessment Officer with the Division of ACT Forestry, then a part of the Forestry and Timber Bureau. Initially based at Stromlo, he embarked on a detailed assessment of the ACT's forest resources. In 1968, he was appointed the forester or officer in charge of Uriarra and, in November 1974, moved into the city office as Forestry Officer 3 (Operations). He retired in 1983, having spent 23 years working for the ACT Forestry Division and its successors.

In retirement, Bob was able to spend more time following his favourite pastime of gardening. He was also a member of Canberra Ornithologists and of the National Parks Association. His wife Marjorie died in January 2003, while Bob himself passed away in Canberra five months later, in June of that year.



Bob Cruttwell, about 1980.
(R. and P. Murray)

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Greetings, Mr Cruttwell – Bob. I'd like to ask you first how you became involved in forestry work in the first place.

When I left school I thought I'd like to get into forestry because it was the best way of indulging myself in my interest in natural history, generally. I had thought of being a vet at one time, but I thought possibly it would be a more restricted lifestyle than forestry.

So you had a very early interest in natural history.

That's right, yes. I always have been.

You're not from Australia originally?

No, home was in England and I studied forestry in Edinburgh.

But you're not Scottish. Where did you come from in England?

I came from Surrey, near Epsom, and if you wanted to do forestry in those days ...

What period are we talking about?

This was in 1940. You had to go either to three universities as I remember: Oxford, Bangor in Wales or Edinburgh in Scotland. I couldn't get into Oxford which was, of course, the nearest. I think their quota was filled up, so I managed to get into Edinburgh.

Who were your teachers at Edinburgh? Were they prominent people in the forestry world?

The professor had spent most of his lifetime in the Indian forests, this Professor Stebbing.

Yes, I've heard that name.

The Principal Lecturer or one of them did most of his service in Britain and the other one in West Africa, I think. The emphasis in those days was still on Indian and colonial forestry because there wasn't much doing in Britain, really.

Not surprisingly. Amongst the colonial forestry, did that include Australia, at all?

Yes, there was very ... Of course, the Empire was so huge in those days that the Australian and New Zealand side of the world got a pretty scanty mention and that was partly because they were regarded as running their own shows and not such a big field for recruitment as the Crown colonies, as they were then. And then I went into the army, of course, in 1943. I just graduated in a

three year course in Edinburgh and I went into the army. When I came out of the army in 1947, the situation had changed radically and there was a little bit doing in Britain and I hoped to get employment in Britain but I found it – working with the Forestry Commission – almost everybody with whom I was working was on a temporary engagement and many of them had been for several years. So as I had family connections in New Zealand, I went out to New Zealand.

What year was that, Bob?

'47/48 I worked for a year with the Forestry Commission in Britain, as I was saying, and that was interesting work, too. It was on the census of woodlands. They wanted to see what was left after the war. Towards the end of 1948 I went out to New Zealand.

Just getting back to your war service, you hadn't been involved in forestry while you served with the army, had you?

No.

Were there no forestry units in the British army? There were in the Australian army, I know.

Yes, the Royal Engineers took on a whole very, very wide scope of services. I think they had – I'm not quite sure what their branch was – but I went into the Engineers. But when the second front was opened up, the army found that – as I read the situation as it appeared to us who were in the engineers and the artillery – they didn't meet the sort of resistance in France that called for a large section of support troops like engineers and artillery, and [thus] a whole swag of engineers and artillery were turned into infantry.

Including you.

I was amongst them, yes. We were trained in jungle warfare in Wales.

Where were these jungles in Wales?

There weren't many. We had to imagine them really. And then they dropped the atom bomb on Hiroshima and we were not sent to Burma as we all expected to be. We went out to the Middle East and Palestine and the situation that was evolving then – still evolving. It's exactly the same.

We'll move forward a bit to your emigration from the United Kingdom to New Zealand in 1949, I think you said.

End of '48 actually.

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You landed in New Zealand. Did you start working in forestry immediately?

Yes, I had been interviewed in London and was appointed actually before I went out to New Zealand. Like almost everybody who joins the staff of the New Zealand Forest Service, you spent your first year or so in the Rotorua district, whereas their principal forestry commitment is central north island.

Is that a native forest area?

No, there is a certain amount, but it was mainly the Kainura [?] Forest,¹ of course. It was one of the very, very big forest station projects.

What was your role?

They had a huge big team organised to assess the standing volume and growth rates of Kigaro [?] Forest² which was well over 100,000 acres – it's probably larger than that by now – at that time because they were contemplating building the Tasman Pulp and Paper Mill.³ While we were there they had consultants out from Canada looking into the industrial side of pulp and paper and then they had most of the forest service chaps like myself working on the ... trying to get a pretty accurate survey of the growth rates and standing volume of timber for the pulp project. That was interesting work. We were camping in the forest.

Did you have a family at this stage?

No, I wasn't married. Single chaps in the New Zealand Forest Service were liable to be shifted around a lot, which was very good actually because I was keen to see the country. It was a very happy time really – interesting.

I take it this pulp and paper mill never went ahead by the way you were talking.

Oh yes, the Tasman Pulp and Paper has grown out of it. It followed up, I think, pretty smartly really, considering what a big project it was.

How many foresters were there in the New Zealand Forest Service when you were there?

I really wouldn't like to say. It would only be a wild guess – a pretty small number of them – but they were recruiting all the time at the end of the war. A lot of people came out from Britain that had forest service.

¹ This can only refer to the Kaingaroa Forest, one of the largest plantation forests in the world.

² This must also refer to the Kaingaroa Forest.

³ The mill was built at Kawerau at the northern edge of the Kaingaroa Forest in order to process the forest timber.

Did New Zealand have its own forestry school?

No, for a very long time it did not have its own forestry school. In fact, most of the New Zealanders who train in forestry train either in Australia or in Oxford.

So you were in some ways a bit of an oddity, coming from Edinburgh, I suppose – from the Edinburgh school.

Yes, I did meet some who had preceded me. You met people from all over the world there. There were Danish and Dutch – people like that – foresters there, too.

Your position there was, I assume, at a fairly junior level because it was essentially your first job there.

Yes, I stayed with the Forest Service for twelve years in New Zealand. It was largely because I married an Australian when I was in New Zealand that I thought of shifting over to Australia.

When did you move over?

That happened in 1961.⁴

How long had you been married then?

I'd only been married about three years.

What brought you to Australia apart from marrying an Australian woman?

Well, we did have some thoughts that Australia was growing and it would provide a better future. It's hard to speculate really about those sorts of things. Really the personal considerations were more overriding than the financial ones then because I was happy in New Zealand and both my wife and myself liked living in New Zealand, but we thought the future was possibly a wee bit brighter in Australia as well.

My next question has to be: do you regret moving over?

No, no.

That's good.

We go back to New Zealand very, very frequently. I don't feel I'll cut my ties from the country.

4 He actually started with ACT Forests in 1960.

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Could I ask how old were you when you came to Australia in '61?

I must have been just under forty.

Did you come specifically to a forest job?

Yes. When I was on some annual leave from New Zealand, I visited Melbourne and looked around the forestry situation and through interviews I found that there was this vacancy in Canberra working for ACT Forests and so we took that.

What was the vacancy, Bob?

It was Assessment Officer for the ACT Forests, running the assessment of the standing timber here.

The pine forests, in other words.

The pine forests, yes – plantation forestry.

And you took that up in 1961 as soon as you came over?

That's right, yes. In some ways it was rather like going back to what I'd been doing before, most of the time, in New Zealand or quite a lot of the time in New Zealand.

I'm intrigued that you were an Edinburgh trained forester and you go to New Zealand, you have experience in New Zealand and then you come to the ACT. How did you find the Edinburgh and New Zealand background fitted in to the forestry work in the ACT? Did it fully prepare you for it or was it a bit of a shock?

No, not really. The general principles you learn still hold good, you know. The circumstances are very different, I suppose, from what they were in Scotland. Things like the growth rates are very much greater in Australia and New Zealand, and so in many ways forestry is much more rewarding, particularly plantation forestry, in Australia and New Zealand in that respect because in ten years you can see a tree become just about a commercially viable proposition in Australia and New Zealand, whereas you're still looking at a little sapling in northern Europe. It's terrific in that way, forestry. I've seen areas clear-felled and replanted and they're ready for being felled again in my lifetime. This just doesn't happen in northern Europe; things don't happen like that. In fact, I think a lot more experimentation because growth rates are different happened in the southern hemisphere. I think that's only in South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. And then Europeans, I think, just woke up to the fact that they could improve their options a bit by studying papers and

results obtained in the southern hemisphere.

Is that so?

I think so, yes.

When did they start to wake up to this sort of thing?

I think after the Second World War. And, of course, nowadays it's a funny thing that France, Spain and Portugal, they have big pulp and paper plantations based on eucalypt.

And some of those countries have also started following southern practices by introducing radiata pine, too.

Yes, that's right.

The countries you mentioned – Spain, Portugal and France – are essentially Mediterranean countries.

Yes, they've got a more suitable climate for it, admittedly.

So Australian forestry hasn't had so much of an impact on the northern European interests.

No, I think the British practices have smartened up a bit. I think they realised that they could be a bit more venturesome in that way.

In what way?

I think in their tending practices. They were very, very conservative in things like thinning out plantations to stimulate growth. I think that has happened since the war.

This is a direct result of forestry or their waking up to forestry practices in Australia, South Africa and New Zealand. How much of an impact do you think Australian forestry or how responsible do you think Australian forestry has been for this, and possibly even ACT forestry?

I wouldn't like to say. I'm not academically ... I haven't been qualified or in touch with the progress of things in Britain and northern Europe, really. What I'm saying is just a general impression. I couldn't really quote many examples.

That's okay. Anyway, you were Assessment Officer when you started with ACT Forests in '61. Were you Assessment Officer for all the forests under the ACT Forestry service's control at that time?

That's right, yes. These forests had been commenced around about the First World War, although the bulk of those plantations that were planted during

the end of the First World War were burned in 1952. So there were the old ... When I arrived I think the oldest stands were planted in 1926 and 1927 and 1928.

Whereabouts were they, Bob?

They were mostly in Stromlo and Kowen Forest and the early '30s, Uriarra, Pierces Creek Forest – the oldest stands there were planted in the early 1930s. In 1961 they would have been nearing maturity, so they were anxious to try and get a good idea of the growth rates and standing volume. Quite a lot of Canberra was booming in the 1960s and there was a good demand for timber and they wanted to know what could be safely cut.

What did your work entail? Can you give me an idea of what you would do from day to day in your work?

They base an assessment on a sampling of systems and because the trees are very – in most forests, of course, and it's true of the ACT – the trees go over a range of soil and site so that you need a very careful sampling system to base any estimates of volume on, particularly a tree like *Pinus radiata* which was big, and that was the principal species and that was the one that we were sampling. It reacts very sensitively to changes in productivity and site. You have sites such as Stromlo [where] generally it's a lower rainfall than Pierces Creek and Uriarra areas and the growth rates are much slower. So you have to have a sampling system that takes into consideration all these differences. Individual trees, of course, always – the standing volume of a particular tree is never the same as the volume of the tree next door to it, so you have to do a lot of detailed measurements; there's no getting away from it. We had a very good aerial survey photographic done in the – I think it was the middle 1950s – middle 1950s. That enabled us to classify the different sites with their productivity by measuring the standing height of the trees which would show up on the aerial photographs. They had a site productivity map based on that, which we could work on and that was very helpful. Apart from that what you have to do is to put gangs into the field, measuring up sample plots. That's a very monotonous job which is just something you had to face up to.

What were they measuring exactly, the number of trees?

You lay out your plot of a particular area and then you measure the number of trees growing on the plot, of course, and the basal area of the live trees on the plot by measuring the diameter and the standard height above the

Foresters carefully measuring trees in Stromlo forest in the 1970s. (Forests Branch, Department of the Capital Territory, *Forestry in the ACT*, c. 1978)

soil at ground level, and then you measure the height of the trees. And that would be all that were necessary if you knew that every tree was the same shape as the other but, of course, that's not the case. So you need to measure samples of the actual profile of a stem and that varies considerably. You have to make some record of the defect of the stems because you can't assume that every tree will be merchantable.

In other words, dead straight and without knots.

That's right.

How do you do this sort of sampling then?

The best thing is to actually fell sample trees and do detailed measurements of them and when you've got a sufficient sample to be statistically acceptable you can make up tables of volumes for trees and for that particular diameter. We worked a lot with the Division of Forestry Research in Yarralumla because they are interested in the same things and so was the ANU. There are tables being made up all the time and corrected, modified for the whole of Australia, of course, but Australia is such a big country that the trees grow in a very different pattern all over the country. We'd have to really make up our own tables, tables of trees – comparable tables. They would have, say, Tumut Forest which would probably come fairly close in many respects. But on the whole, forest in a district like Tumut are on a bit more fertile sites and so they have



these subtle differences. They are all commercially significant, those points in the management of a forest.

Did your assessment work occupy you year round?

Yes.

There were no seasonal variations in your work?

There is a seasonal variation insofar as you try and do – if you're remeasuring a plot – in order to obtain the volume of growth between measurements you try to do that in mid-winter when the growth has eased up and stopped. It's a funny thing though, if you go back to some of these plots to remeasure them, you'll sometimes find that smaller suppressed trees have actually shrunk. You think, oh, somebody's made a mistake with the tape, they misread the tape, but that does happen in periods of drought. They're just about ready to keel over and die. And the same thing with measuring the height of a tree. The chap who's measuring the height will give it to you and you look at the record of the previous year or two years back, whatever it was – the last record you had – and you see that they've given you a smaller height; so tops get blown out of some of these trees, it does happen. It's a funny business in that way.

You mentioned that when you came to Canberra that Canberra was booming and that there was a good market for timber here. The forests you said were ready to be cut, had they been already selling thinnings from the forests?

Yes, that's the case. Because very little in the way of clear-felling had started in the 1960s, I think the only clear-felling that had been done was for cases like clearing for public roads and things like that, not altogether in our hands. They reckoned that forty-year rotation was probably the desirable one for *radiata* in this district; and so if most of the older stands had been planted in and around the 1930s, they were still pretty – like ten years – too young in the early 1960s. So in actual fact they wanted to use the time available in the 1960s to make an estimate of the optimum cycle of felling and the best area to fell and what was the allowable cut. And that worked out pretty well because the bigger mills such as the Integrated Forests Products mill down on the Cooma Road were not there in the 1960s, but they were being planned. It was possible, using the results of the assessment, to open that mill. I think it opened in about 1971, I think, or something like that and that's when the clear-felling started in a big way.

That's interesting. So through the 1960s it was essentially thinnings from the forest that were providing timber for the local market.

That's right. The government sawmill was operating in the 1960s but it, I think, must have been some time around about – I wouldn't like to say exactly when it was – 'round the early '70s, I think, the government sawmill closed down because these bigger, private sawmills were available. The government sawmill in Kingston had been set up in the absence of sufficient private enterprises in the early days of Canberra. That had a capacity of sawing very big logs.

It kicked off sawing hardwood logs from the Brindabellas and neighbouring forests and it went over to the smaller pine logs and then it closed down. I think it must have been in the early '70s when Canberra really doubled its size from what it was in the '60s that not only the government sawmill closed but, I think, the government brickworks closed about then. Bigger, private enterprise took over in a bigger way, I think, in the early '70s.

You're almost suggesting that, in the absence of private enterprise, interest in milling the wood here that the government was virtually forced to set up its government mill to saw the wood that was available and it wasn't an economic proposition, at all.

I wouldn't say it wasn't an economic proposition, but I think it would be true to say that the government set it up so that the building industry in Canberra wouldn't be starved of timber in its early years. I suppose the same thing would probably apply to the brickworks.

When did the mill start, roughly, do you know?

I don't know. I would imagine, though, that in the 1960s when you were here that the amount of building in Canberra was such that the thinnings from the local forests would be quite insufficient to cater for the demand here. Yes, I think it was. I think Canberra has always received quite a big proportion of timber, whether its softwood or hardwood, coming in from New South Wales and South Australia and Victoria possibly, and New Zealand, too. And the Pacific coast of America, too; we're still getting a lot of Douglas fir in and Western Red Cedar and all this big specialty timbers from the Pacific coast. To say nothing of the tropical ones.

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When you'd been working for several years through the '60s with ACT Forests on your assessment work, was it in fact your work that confirmed the view that forty year rotation was the best for the pine forests around the ACT?

Yes, that's been adopted, although I think it's been whittled down a bit to thirty-five years in some cases.

Why is that, do you think?

I think because some of the better sites are that much more productive. I think possibly forty years is a conservative figure.

This might have been your northern European bias.

I didn't make those decisions, really. I just got the measurements and fed them into the people who were making the actual management decisions. In forestry, too, you're subject to the phenomena like bushfires and things like that that you can suddenly reduce half your gross stock. The situation can never be regarded as solid cast iron.

Yes, indeed, I can understand that.

... set irredeemably. It's always subject to review.

Anyway, about the beginning of the 1970s, a lot of the older forests were maturing and were ready to be cut and clear-felling, as you said, started in a big way around 1971, especially with the establishment of large-scale private mills. The government mill you said, I think, closed down at that period.

Yes, about the same time, I think, as the bigger mills, particularly the one on Cooma Road. It's changed its name a good deal. I always knew it as Integrated Forest Products and then it was called APM and what it is now, I'm not quite sure.

Were there any other older mills prior to the establishment of these large private ones in the early 1970s?

Yes, there were small private ones set up in Fyshwick, I suppose, almost as soon as Fyshwick was created as an industrial suburb, and they were very important customers for us because they would take smaller logs – handled smaller logs. And then there was a preservative plant in Queanbeyan and then – I'm not sure whether it was under the same management – it moved out to Cooma Road. Koppers preservative plant established out there in the early '70s, I think, too. So there were quite a lot of much smaller private concerns which were very valuable and a lot of them are still going, too.

When the clear-felling started in the '70s and they were, as you said, clear-felling in a big way, this must have reduced your work in assessment because there wouldn't have been so many trees around to assess. Is this a fair comment?

Not altogether because ... Actually I ceased to be working in assessment in 1968 and I went out to take charge of Uriarra Forests – bit of a change. There is, of course ... foresters have great interest in the permanent productivity of site and they like to go back to see whether their second generation of trees on a site is as good as or better than the initial one. So they introduced a permanent inventory system that was based on refining the sampling of the same site, same sample plots. As far as I know, that's still going on. It's all hitched into a computer and it's a good deal more sophisticated than the system I was running because we did use computer systems for the calculations, but as I remember they were the old punched tape formulae that I suppose are real museum pieces now.

Just going back a moment. When you first took up your position as Assessment Officer, what sort of assessment had been done before or were you a kind of pioneer in this assessment area?

No, I wasn't really pioneering because I was only using systems that had already been pretty well tried elsewhere and I think it was just that they came to be expanding the staff and felt they ought to have an assessment officer.

So there hadn't been one specifically?

There hadn't been one specifically, but the headquarters staff had instituted a system of permanent sample plots which covered the same ground but doesn't cover it in the same detail, or they realised it wasn't adequate for the range of conditions that they had. This partly evolved from the fact that ACT Forests in 1961 was part of the Forestry [and] Timber Bureau which is not the case now, of course, and the Bureau staff included a lot of researchers who subsequently became CSIRO staff on subjects such as growth rates and research into growth rates and [carried out] a lot of pretty high-powered academic research into the best formulae to use that sort of thing. It was those Bureau staff who had started these permanent plots, so I was able to take them over and use their results which, I think, some of them probably had records for nearly twenty years, which gave you a pretty good start, really.

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Yes, indeed. The Bureau was a federal government body which was controlling forestry throughout the Commonwealth?

That's right, yes, it was a federal thing. It was split up during the 1960s, I can't really remember exactly when, in the middle '60s, and the research part went to CSIRO and the Forestry School part went to the ANU; so there was almost nothing left because the territorial part became ACT Forests which were a section in the Lands Division of the Interior or became the Department of Capital Territory, so they changed their name every few years.

Who were you working for during the '60s when you working in the Forestry service?
Started off with Ron Green. He was the Supervising Forestry Officer, as they called him then, I think. And then Bill Bateman took over from him. And then, I suppose it was in the middle '60s that Mark Edgerley took over from Bill Bateman. They were called Directors of the section.

How did you find them?

They were great to work with, yes. Mark Edgerley had a very long innings and there was a quite succession of chaps who succeeded him. I'm not really game to try to put them in the right order.

Don't worry. I'll look at the official records for that. Just on a personal side, when you first came to Australia or to Canberra where did you and your wife live?

We lived in the Stromlo forestry settlements on the Cotter Road. Of course, there are about thirty houses there. It's quite a minor suburb. It's a small part of Duffy, but in those days it was the only bit of housing out there, what is now Duffy.

And how did you find living out there?

It was good, really. The nearest shops were Yarralumla. You used to have to go into Yarralumla or Manuka and Kingston for groceries and things like that.

How long did it take you to get over to Yarralumla or Manuka?

Not really long. It was remote by suburban standards, but not really remote by Australian standards, is it? And also, of course, it was not nearly as remote as the settlements out in Uriarra or Pierces Creek. We had a different remote allowance. They had a bigger remote allowance than the chaps living in Stromlo. And at that time there was a small settlement at Bulls Head as well. Actually, the number of houses and things in these outlying settlements contracted over the years.

What was the house like that you lived in there in the Stromlo settlement?

It was a standard Works Department house, I think. They were all on Works Department patterns. They were basic. You had a copper in the laundry and had an open fire, but you had a wood stove in the kitchen – I think it was a wood stove.

What about water? Was it tank water?

No, we were fed off the direct pipeline from the pumping station, so actually you had a terrific water pressure. You had to be careful you didn't split the hoses and things in the garden. Every now and then you'd see a break in the pipeline with a huge great fountain like Captain Cook's fountain coming up.

And you had electric power on, I suppose.

Yes, we were on electric power; so I'd lived in much more basic places in New Zealand, although my wife thought it was pretty basic. She came there with small children.

I was going to ask about your family, too.

The travelling pre-school used to visit us. They visited Stromlo Observatory and mothers could go up and join the Observatory mums and children at the Observatory, and vice versa – they'd come down when the pre-school was at Stromlo which was quite nice.

So the pre-school wasn't in one set place.

No, it was a Kombi van, I think, that shuttled all the necessary gear around these settlements. The same way as the library used to call, the library van.

This van didn't go up to places like Bulls Head and so on, too, did it?

No, I don't think so.

An amazing sidelight; I've never heard of this before.

Yes, it was very good.

How many rooms did the house have that you were living in?

It was a three-bedroom. It's still standing.

Did the house have three rooms or three bedrooms or just three rooms in all?

It was a standard dwelling house – standard cottage, as they called it. It was no better or no worse than the rest of the forest settlement's housing. We were lucky because after we'd been there, I think, about a year, we got a new house that was built and that was a very nice house, indeed. It was a good deal more

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modern in the settlement.

You also said that you had young children. Was that as soon as you moved into the original house at Stromlo?

Yes, we already had a family.

How many?

We had two and the youngest son was born while we were in Stromlo.

He would have been born in Canberra Hospital.

That's correct.

So you had two sons at that stage.

That's right. And later on they, of course, were looked after by this travelling crèche, if you like, which sounds quite good.

So they grew up to, I suppose, eight or ten years of age whilst you were still living in the Stromlo forestry settlement.

No, they didn't really because, I think, at the end of 1965 after we'd been at Stromlo for four years or a bit more than four years we bought a house in Curtin, a private purchase, and moved in there.

A bit more civilised.

Yes, it was ... Curtin's a very good suburb to live in and we've been there ever since.

Your wife, I imagine, appreciated that because ...

Yes, we could really settle down there a bit more than you can with a rented premise.

What were you paying in rent, just as a matter of interest, at the Stromlo settlement?

I couldn't remember. No, I would be wildly inaccurate probably. Certainly it was rent that allowed you to save because there was a big rent strike while we were there because the rent was suddenly just about doubled and there was a great deal of strife. That was not just for forestry houses, I think, it was for all rural rental properties such as conservation and agriculture staff, too.

So in other words, the government suddenly doubled the rent.

The strife arose from the fact that they were unrealistically low and instead of putting them up by stages they put them up in one huge great sort of hundred per cent rise and it caused a lot of bitterness at the time.



Uriarra settlement about 1980. (J. Drysdale)

What year was this, do you remember – roughly?

I wouldn't like to say.

You said it amounted to a rent strike so did you all ...

I think the union members took the case to the TUC and the TUC supported the strike action. It went on for several days. It wasn't just a refusal to pay rent. I think it was a stop work as a result of the ...

What was the outcome of this industrial action?

I think they agreed to phase it in over a longer period. I just forget but I know that there was a great deal of trouble on that particular issue and I think it was in the late 1960s or early '70s, but that's a bit vague.⁵ I'm sorry about that.

You said earlier that in 1968 you'd basically changed your job and you moved to Uriarra at that point. What position were you occupying when you moved there to Uriarra?

Just the officer in charge of the forest, which is a sort of jack of all trades, really.

How many staff did you have under you?

At that time I think there were about twenty-five or thirty people employed at Uriarra. Certainly all the housing there was full up and there were also

⁵ It actually occurred in the late 1970s [GMcK-S].

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cottages and houses – buildings occupied by contractors, too. You were responsible for the whole lot of those, so it was rather like being a mayor of the place which was a sort of a big distraction, I guess, from the forestry work. There were always troubles with housing and there always are, I think, everywhere. Dogs causing complaints and water supply failing and all those sort of things.

Had you bargained on this sort of thing?

Yes, I was expecting it, really.

What were your main tasks in forestry as such when you were at Uriarra? Apart from all these distractions, I mean.

We had a lot of contracts to supervise. There were logging contractors and then there were also contractors on tending operations such as pruning trees and planting contracts. And then there was road building and minor surveys of new areas that were planted. There was a lot of liaison with research bodies from forestry research folk who used the forest for their experiments. Then you also had quite a lot of work to do with the Forestry Training School, too. They used the forest for their training operations. That became the ANU Forestry School. You had to liaise with them if they had any operations that they wanted to carry or survey.

Did you have any role in the growth of the forests as a recreational outlet for Canberra?

Yes, that's a very time consuming business, too, because ACT Forests was very well disposed towards recreational use and you had to try and fit that into the running of the forest without any damage to anybody. That was not always easy, particularly with things like the car rallies and motor rallies that still go on there. You had logging traffic and things using the same roads as the rally drivers wanted to use. And then you also had the Duntroon cadets and people wanting to hold odd field operations in your area, and search and rescue people wanting training in those areas. And as Canberra grew, of course, the number and size of all those sort of public relations things grew with it.

How did you feel about that because they wouldn't have been generating any income for the forest? They might have been generating some goodwill.

That's right. Well, that was what makes it all very difficult because you couldn't claim on that sort of work at all and it took up a lot of time and

sometimes you had to put other people on to liaising with it. You had to mark boundaries for different things and have people watching what goes on. Yes, there were a lot of unexpected calls, really, on your time. You even had people like ... a lot of overseas visitors would be diverted out on to your track and you had to show them round. That's all time consuming, too. Very interesting it could be, too, but time consuming.

You said ACT Forests was well disposed towards the recreational uses of the forests. I just wonder how that came about, particularly if, as we said, these uses weren't generating any income and in fact were, as you also said, quite time consuming.

I think that was just a recognition of the fact that that has to be the case in the world that we live in, really – probably going with the current; and it makes life difficult but you have to agree. If it's a policy that's adopted by the management there's no point in really trying to oppose it except in any instances that arise where you have to – safety issues or something like that. There would be some things arise that you'd say, well, no, we definitely can't fit them into this particular forest. Generally speaking it could be done. You've got the same issue all the time with the trail bike riders and that's still the current issue. We couldn't put trail bike riders on the Cotter catchment because we'd be breaching the water catchment regulations, so they were put on Stromlo Forest outside of the catchment, and they're not welcomed there by the Observatory for various reasons and [by] other people. But because trail bike riders are not welcomed anywhere, somebody's having to lean over backwards to try and create a corner where they can operate legally. That's only one.

Did you get many accidents or injuries from these sort of recreational uses and I'm thinking particularly of trail bike riding and rally car driving – that sort of thing or, indeed, anything else?

There have been from time to time and I suppose there always will be. There was an unfortunate incident some years ago when a girl – I think it was a child – was killed by a rally car. I can think of at least one incident when an illegal trail bike rider in Uriarra Forest broke his leg. There must have been lots of other minor accidents which we never heard about.

What about the forestry workers themselves? What sort of injuries did they get?

They got the full range of forestry injuries from broken legs, logs rolling on them because we did have our own logging crew, because there were certain

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jobs which were not suitable for putting on to logging contracts – cutting special sizes or special species and things – and we had our share of logging injuries. I don't think we had a bad record but inevitably there were some injuries.

How were most of them caused?

I wouldn't be able to ... Forestry has ... one of the headquarters' staff is a safety officer and they kept records. I think really that back injury was the commonest cause and that can be caused by anything from lifting to stumbling on steep ground, but I wouldn't be sure but I should say the safety officer's records could be very interesting, actually, because they've been kept for many years. It's one of the diversions, of course, with your own staff; particularly if they were injured, you had to run them into the Commonwealth Medical Officer in town or else into the emergency casualty ward in hospital.

If somebody was seriously injured, how long would it take you to get them into town, for example, from Uriarra?

Very short time, I think. Of course, nowadays they can call on a helicopter and within the forest there are helicopter landing places cleared and a very big comprehensive network of roads within all the forests, so it's usually pretty quick.

I suppose you had first aid available and people trained in first aid.

That's right, yes.

Was that a prerequisite of the job or was it required of some people that they must have first aid certificates so that they could render first aid if necessary?

I'm not sure what the position is at the moment. Originally we were not able to do that. What the position has been since I retired, I don't know, really. As I remember it, the ambulance staff would give regular lectures in training in first aid and, of course, all vehicles and working parties had to carry first aid boxes, but beyond that I wouldn't like to say.

Were there many injuries caused in cutting the trees down?

Quite a few, but I don't think they were above what would be expected, really. Any injury is always one too many.

You said a little while ago that when you were at Uriarra you had a lot to do with putting out contracts and dealing with contractors and so on, and I noticed you

said that you had contractors doing the pruning work and planting and so on. I just wonder why ACT Forestry staff themselves didn't do that work.

The staff would do some of that work, but areas that were suitable for completion by contract as a general principle were let out to contract. That would, of course, also have depended on the finance being available which sometimes was the case and sometimes was not the case. When there was a relative abundance of funds for private contracts there was a distinct advantage in getting work done by private contract because you could get more operating at once. Forestry is very much dependent on seasonal conditions and you could, particularly in the planting which is in winter, you could get dry, dry conditions such as occurring now.

You'd have a whole lot of plants ready for planting, but you'd be holding off planting because the conditions are too dry. Then that might prevail for the first half of winter and you can't really start your planting program till half the planting season is over and, if you can double up the number of people planting by bringing in private contractors, you can reach the target instead of failing to reach the target. That also applies to quite a few other jobs – more spectacularly, I suppose, for planting than any other operation.

How did you find dealing with the contractors?

It varied immensely. A lot of them would not have done much of that work before and they would come to your office and say, 'Can I have a progress payment? I think I've worked over ten acres now. And you'd go out and measure up and found they'd worked over three. And, when you told them that, they'd be a bit disgusted and sometimes, quite frequently, walk off the job. Of course, those were the times when they could get other work and they'd underestimated the job badly, which very often happened, particularly on steep ground where your acreages are taken on the plane survey and on a flat projection on a map, and three acres as measured on the map looks more like six acres on steep ground. You had that sort of situation arising very frequently with contractors.

So they didn't understand this when they took the contract?

No.

What about the logging contractors, how did you get on with them?

Pretty well, I think. If they knew they were being watched closely, they didn't create many problems, and you had the Logging Officer in Civic who

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was administering the whole lot of the logging contracts; so you had more supervisory staff available coming out from your head office where logging contractors were concerned. There were inevitably problems coming up all the time, particularly in connection with the weather when you knew you had to try and produce so many loads; and then if the weather was very bad because of ground conditions they'd stop logging or the roads couldn't stand up to it. So there were always a lot of problems connected with logging.

Did they ever try to put one over you?

Yes, you had to assume that that was liable to happen all the time.

What sort of things did they get up to?

They always liked to make up a quick load putting in logs which were not always cut to specification. I suppose that was the biggest one. Sometimes they'd cut trees which were not marked for felling; that sort of thing. Sometimes they'd cut logs short of the specified length or too long for the specified length which was wasteful. And those were always difficult things to check up on.

Who checked up on this sort of thing?

You had one or two log measurers operating all the time as part of the workforce. Mostly you had chaps who were very good arithmetically and wrote very clearly on their records that you could rely on. They'd keep you in touch with what was going on.

What happened to the logs that were cut short or too long?

They'd get thrown aside at the mill door and then the mill owner would put in a big complaint to the logging officer in town and ask him to come out and have a look at them. They'd have to work out some kind of move to pacify them.

Were the logs simply discarded?

No, not normally. Sometimes they could recut them – mostly had to recut them to a lower grade of log. The lower grade, of course, would give the Commonwealth a lower royalty.

Was much wood ever used for pulping from the ACT forests?

Not a lot because we're, unfortunately, so far from any pulp mills. But where pulp mills are available or did have a demand that they couldn't fill locally, we would be able to sell pulp logs from time to time. I've got fairly hazy

recollections of what proportion went out as pulp mill and so I think you'd have to ask somebody else about that.

I would assume though that it would be the absolute lowest grade of felled timber. That's right, yes.

Where would they be sent to?

Some of them would go down to Nowra, I think. Some of them might nowadays go down to Wagga, but I think you'd have to ask somebody in the marketing head office. The situation as I remember it is what happened about ten, twelve or more years ago.

On the other side, did you have anything to do with hardwoods at all in your period in the forests?

Very little, because the policy towards the hardwood forests was changing very rapidly in the 1960s. In the early '60s hardwoods were still being supplied to the government mill from the Brindabellas, from Uriarra Forest. That was phased out, but ACT Forests never lost interest in the possibility of re-opening commercial management of hardwood forests because it can be done in particular areas without causing soil degradation or extra turbidity in the water supply. I think every forester has that in the back of his mind, really, in this situation.

Why do you think that is?

Because there's been too many generalisations, I think, made about commercial utilisation of eucalypt forests and I think there are always particular cases where particular conditions make it possible to be very successful and useful. It seems a pity to me that, if there's a bushfire or something like that a whole lot of eucalypt timber is killed, that that timber should not be harvested. If we talk about conservation of the resources, there doesn't seem to be a lot of logic in sitting back and watching timber that's within a few yards, possibly, of roads rotting on the stump.

So would that in general be your criterion for utilising hardwood forests – eucalypts that had already been killed by fire or what have you?

That would be one set of circumstances, but there are a lot of others where they could be managed just like any other hardwood forest, depending on the topography and other environmental conditions. It's a natural resource that's been provided for Australia, they might as well take regard to it. It's just funny

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to see the eucalypts being managed with such great success overseas.

And being cut for commercial use.

And being cut for a whole of other uses, yes.

Do you think it's possible, given the political climate in Australia, that this would happen here?

I think it's got to, yes. I don't oppose conservation of forests, but I think there's been too many unsound generalisations made about eucalypt forests, really. But I'm not a eucalypt specialist. I'm only talking about what little I've seen around in this part of the country.

Why was the management of hardwoods phased out in the 1960s by ACT Forests?

I think they felt that it was necessary for the preservation of the Cotter catchment. But generally I don't know why else, really.

Going back to your personal career, you were moved to Uriarra in 1968 and you stayed with Forests through the '70s, I assume.

Yes. No, I went in 1974, I think it was, to Civic office to work on management plans from there.

How did you find that – being away from the forests themselves?

That was quite good. It had its pros and cons. On the whole it's not so satisfying as seeing the whole picture as you do if you're in charge of a forest. It's like being in charge of a ship, really. It's a little world on its own. If you're just looking after one branch in a head office, it's not quite the same and you haven't got the responsibility. Your responsibilities are all abstract, really, rather than concrete.

Well, that says something about the work you were doing there, but can you tell me a little more about what the work in the Civic office involved.

Just mainly picking up the contracts other than logging contracts for all the forests together, and trying to organise them according to what funds were available because the forester in charge of Uriarra or Pierces Creek would tell you what areas and the sum total of contracts he might want to be funded and organised for a particular year, and you'd have to work out the priorities between them. That was largely what it involved, as well as looking after the planting programs and land acquisition and land disposals. Of course, ACT Forests were always having chunks carved off it by the expansion of Canberra as it grew, so there were always a lot of management considerations trying to

keep a register of the land and forest assets and the building and permanent assets, and trying to separate the temporary assets from the permanent assets so that it all could be tied into the accountancy's statement of assets. That was a real nightmare on its own.

What do you mean by temporary assets?

There could be internal fences and things like that which were created to protect a newly planted area and you knew that those fences would only last ... might only be needed for five years and might not last forever, anyway. And then you'd have boundary fences which would become permanent assets. But so far as the fencing gang went, they'd just be another fence. On the routine costing, of course, traditionally it would just be a cost against fencing. But the Department wanted to know what money was spent on permanent assets and what on temporary assets. There was a whole swag of definitions required which were extraordinarily complicated at times.

You said a moment ago that ACT Forests were always having bits hacked off them as Canberra grew. Did this have any major commercial impact on the forests or even an effect on morale in the forests, amongst the Forestry staff?

I suppose it does to a certain extent. It's good, I think, for the morale if the staff can see the forests growing. Certainly in the time I've been in the ACT, I think the losses just about compensated for the gains. Certainly over recent, over probably the last twenty years, there's very little new land acquired for afforestation, and I think it's bound to be bad for morale in a way because it's very nice to think that you're creating an asset which will bring necessary building timber and what not into the local mills and employ people, and the land is being made to yield something useful where it probably only grew a little bit of grass for sheep before. I think over the long run I think everybody who is employed in ACT Forests is aware of that even though they might not think about it very much in the course of their working day. They all take a bit of pride in it or used to. Then you had an area like Long Gully Pines which is now Isaacs, which was resumed, I think, in 1975, sometime around then. That's an unfortunate case because we were told it was going to be resumed and it was clear-felled and then the building didn't go ahead on it for many, many years. The Commonwealth would have made a lot more money if it had been allowed to grow on until their actual engineering establishment - roads and everything like that, buildings - were started.

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Were those trees not really ready for harvesting when they were clear-felled?

No, I think another four or five years would have probably doubled the value of them. They were planted in 1953 or something like that. A tree that's felled when it's about seventeen or eighteen years of age is a very much – from a commercial point of view – smaller tree than one that's twenty-two or twenty-three years of age.

Did you lose many other trees through natural disasters like bushfires and winds and that sort of thing?

ACT Forests has over the years has lost ... I suppose the 1952 fires, ten years before I came to Canberra, would be the biggest incident.

What about during your time?

Very little occurs; I don't think any comparable to the 1952 fires. The 1974 wind throw, I think that flattened something like 1000 acres of commercial timber, mostly in Uriarra, some in Pierces Creek. That would, I think, be the next biggest loss.

This followed a strong wind storm.

That's right. But that wasn't a complete loss, of course.

Because you could salvage some of the loss.

Yes, I think it was very largely salvaged, although a salvage operation is never as commercially profitable as a routine one.

But there weren't any other major problems with the timber in your period?

Not that I can recall offhand.

You wouldn't want to have them, anyway.

Wouldn't want to have them. There are a few cases like species other than *Pinus radiata* that were also planted and we've tried to log them – sell them commercially: the American Western Yellow Pine, the *Pinus ponderosa*, was quite a big, sizeable percentage. The plantings of the early 1930s was in that species and although that particular tree grew in a very healthy manner, it hasn't produced timber comparable or commercially successful, which has been a disappointment to us.

Why isn't it as commercially successful or as good, in general?

I think it must be something to do with the climatic factors in this part of the world, as opposed to what they are in western USA where the Ponderosa

Pine has a huge range up and down the Rocky Mountains from Mexico into Canada. I think it grows in much more severe climate. Possibly the milder climate in Australia, the timber is not as dry and, as soon as you cut it, it starts warping and though the tree is healthy and grows well enough they've generally been an unsuccessful plantation species.

Where was it planted mostly?

I think there was more planted in Uriarra than any of the other forests, but there has been a little bit planted in all four forests.

It had been planted in the 1930s, so I imagine it was felled in the early 1970s.

Very largely, but it's tended to linger on because the pressure of work and the lack of sales for a thing – it poses a bit of a problem.

What other species were grown and were logged?

The European Black Pine from the Mediterranean, *Pinus nigra*, there was quite a bit of that grown also planted and that grew very slowly by local standards, but produced quite a good timber which has been cut and used. I don't think there's any of that left, though. You have a marketing problem with all those minor species because they're not known in Australia and it's like putting a new kind of meat on the market, trying to sell – tell people it's good eating. The miller doesn't know, he's not keen to take it.

What were ponderosa and nigra used for?

They tried to use it for tile battens, I think, because the logs were fairly small.

That's what, both of them or ponderosa?

I think both of them and for framing-grade timbers as they were both pretty knotty. But in neither of those roles did they perform as well as *radiata* – the sort of main course.

How long did you stay in the Civic office for?

I saw my time out there, retired in March 1983. I did a short spell relieving at Stromlo Forest in 1975, but otherwise I saw out my time in Civic.

Doing that planning sort of work that you were doing?

Management, yes.

How did you enjoy your time working for Forests all that period – twenty-two years?

Good. I suppose it's like all jobs, full of frustrations but it's good insofar as ... I think forestry provides you with a good blend of field work and office work.

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In fact when I was in New Zealand where there were a lot higher rainfalls than you have here, the field work was interrupted a lot more by wet weather and you had to retire from the field with all your notes, and everything got soggy, and maps and field books. You couldn't work in the sort of rain they got out in the field and you'd retire and do all the plotting and maps and calculations from your field data. In Australia that sort of balance doesn't come automatically because you don't really get enough rain. I used to find in assessment a lot of the office work would fall behind because the weather was right to be out in the field and you were never ahead of your field work, so there was always an inducement to get out and do it. That meant that you might more or less be up to date with your field work, but you'd never be up to date with your office work.

Looking back, what do you think were the major changes you saw in the period when you started from 1961 through to your retirement in 1983?

I think the major change is the great awful terrible rise in costs that you were aware of when you started. But you were also aware of the fact that the gangs in each forest in 1961 were large gangs and in spite of the fact that it was hard to get hold of people to work for ordinary award wages – the country was booming and nobody wanted to work for government award wages and the only way you could attract labour was to offer them a forestry house – you still managed to get a big gang on each forest. As the years went by, you were told that your gangs were too big, overstaffed. You had consultants coming in all the time telling you that you were overstaffed; the staff were run down and the houses closed, a lot of the older ones demolished, all the camps demolished. You had outlying camps not only at Bulls Head, but scattered all over the forests which contractors could use as well because they wanted to get a roof over their head on the forest. Since that time everything was steadily contracted. You got less men, but you probably got a much bigger wages bill.

How do you think it has affected the forest work itself? – the diminishing staff.

I don't think it's been a good thing at all, actually, because you have ... Well, let's say, out at Uriarra you had a settlement, you had a school. You had enough people there to keep at least one teacher in charge of that school. What the situation is there now, I don't know but I don't suppose it's all that good. The settlements – houses – are lot of them are not occupied by Forestry staff.



A forestry worker expertly and safely fells a pine tree just where he wants it to fall.
(Forests Branch, Department of the Capital Territory, *Forestry in the ACT*, c. 1978)

What about any changes in forest management practices themselves? You said that one thing was that the rotation period has been shortened, but any other important changes you think you've seen?

I don't think so, no, not really. I think forestry is the sort of enterprise that imposes its own discipline and routine on anyone. It's like somebody ... if a farmer's growing wheat today, he's got to do more or less the same thing as his father was doing thirty years before. I don't think, really, there can be all that ... circumstances change and force a lot of minor changes, but you've got primary considerations like protection of the forests and standing it, readying for access and things like that. Logging techniques can change and they all force changes from year to year, but there again I don't think they're fundamental sort of changes. I think you can't run a forest without enough

people on the ground to supervise it and protect it. Sooner or later the balloon will go up and the place will be burnt to the ground or something like that.

Let's hope that doesn't happen.

I hope that doesn't happen but, I mean, I think you've got that situation with national parks. They're so big and extensive that it's very, very hard to protect them with the existing staff.

I suppose one of the major changes would have been in the growth of recreational uses and particularly things like school visits and the interest shown by school children and other recreational uses, too. I was wondering if you could expand on that a bit.

School visits seem to become very popular in the early 1970s, as I remember, and I hope and I think with some certainty that they have been of some lasting value to school kids.

At any rate they always seemed to enjoy a visit if one could only pick a suitable event for them to watch, and it soon became very evident that tree felling was the thing that really fascinated them. I always tried to tell them that there was more to forestry than killing trees, but there's no getting away from it that, particularly with primary school kids, the felling of a tree, particularly a good big pine, well over a hundred feet tall, was a great thrill to them.

I would ask the contractor who happened to be working in such parts of the forest as were accessible to a school in a school bus, which of course is not every part of the forest, if one of his fallers would drop a tree on a particular spot, and I'd mark it with an old hat or something like that and then get the faller to do his stuff with the chainsaw. As I remember it, a hundred per cent of the time that tree would come down right on the spot where the hat was and that would really get a big cheer. In fact any kind of thump on the ground which marked a tree coming down would get a big cheer out of the kids and they'd go away as pleased as punch.

But before they got back into the bus I'd always find that the teachers were anxious to know a lot more about forestry and explain it to the kids, and we'd invariably be able to find stands of timber at different stages of growth which would be of interest to them within one quite small area of the forest. And you'd also be able to point out a lot of other plants that were growing there. And very frequently, of course, you'd find wombat holes in the compartments

that you were walking through and you could point them out and they'd throw cones down the wombat holes to see whether any wombats were at home; and they'd generally have a pretty good morning. The teachers, on the whole, would enjoy it. I think they found it a bit harrowing to try and keep the kids all together; they'd scatter like chaff as soon as they got out of the bus and needed a bit of rounding up usually. But that was a very rewarding part of looking after a forest was to have kids come out and see what went on.

It's interesting you say that. I'm just wondering what you feel were the other most rewarding bits of working in ACT Forests for twenty-odd years.

I don't know, really. I feel it's quite rewarding to see the log truck come down the Cotter Road with a good load of logs on to show that we've got a primary industry that's lurching along, not come to a complete halt, while the rest of the economy is taking a lot of knocks and a lot of industries are closing down, a lot of people losing their jobs. I always feel that ACT Forests is one of the few primary industries in this part of the country ...

Agriculture when I came out here in 1961 has certainly retreated. I remember a whole big proportion of the Isabella Plains and what is now Woden Valley carrying a lot of wheat, and Bushfire Council crews coming out from the forests to tend stubble fires, and wheat harvesting in that part of what is now almost central Canberra; and that bit of primary industry is pretty well finished. Even sheep are pretty few and far between. And as I say, it's nice to see logs coming out of pine forests which are keeping the mills going and the houses being built and the average citizen getting a bit of employment out of it.

So there's a real sense of achievement and productivity in what you did those years. I think so, yes. I feel it myself and I think most people in ACT Forests would feel the same.

It interests me though, we were talking just a moment ago about school children and the interest their teachers particularly, showed in forests, but it doesn't seem to me that people in the ACT in general are aware or appreciate the commercial, aesthetic and even the recreational value of the forests that exist here and I'm just wondering whether you'd like to comment on that, at all.

I agree with you. Forestry has been under attack politically and economically. It shouldn't have been under attack economically but it seems to be somehow and I think that's unfortunate and, I think, the community as a whole will

suffer from it. I think in the ACT we've got about fifty per cent or more of the ACT territory given over to Namadgi National Park which is a far greater percentage than occurs in national park status of other states and territories and, I think, partly as a result of that, plantation forestry has been very much on the defensive. I don't think the population is really aware of the fact that there are only about 15,000 hectares, which is a minute percentage of the ACT area, is allowed to continue as a productive forest. I think it's the same in all countries that forestry is always the poor relation when land resources are handed out. In a lot of places forestry can only acquire land if nobody else wants it for anything. The number of countries in the world that haven't taken this attitude are few and far between, and mankind is really suffering as a result. I think we ought to take a careful look at countries like Finland and Sweden where forestry is regarded as a great resource and industry is built around it. The Swedes produce their own logging equipment machinery and they get a good standard of living from managing a forest resource under much harder conditions than you'd ever find in Australia. The same in Finland and in countries like Switzerland, too. I hope it's only a swing of the pendulum.

What was the basis for the criticism on economic grounds of ACT pine forests you were alluding to a couple of moments ago?

I think there is a valid criticism that productivity ... the environment in the ACT is not as good relatively as it is in other parts of New South Wales relatively close. I think that's a valid criticism, but I think even growing pine in less than ideal conditions at a time when a lot of other commodities are also in over supply could still be economic.

There is no doubt that somebody coming from New Zealand, for instance, looking at the rainfall patterns in the ACT, might wonder why we ever went in for plantation forestry. On the other hand, there are not very many options really readily apparent at this time that I can see.

What do you think is the future for ACT Forests?

I don't know. I hope they never get beaten back any smaller.

Do you advocate further plantations in what are or were native hardwood areas or things of that nature or do you favour ... I think you said before you were interested in the logging of native eucalypts in appropriate areas?

I think there are certain areas in the ACT where commercial forestation ... into which it could be extended.



Bob Cruttwell in retirement in his flourishing garden.
(J. Cruttwell)

Such as?

There are parts of both the Tidbinbilla Ranges and the Brindabella Ranges where further forestation by pines could be very economical and also where some management of hardwoods would also be economical. I'd acknowledge that they are limited areas, but I think we should look at that. We're a small territory with small resources and we need to look at every square yard.

Do you have any ideas about changed management practices?

No, not really.

I think we've probably done our bit today. It's been a long way from Edinburgh via military training in Welsh jungles and New Zealand to ACT Forests for Mr Bob Cruttwell but it's been an interesting journey. I'd like to thank him very much for coming along and talking to us today.

Well, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to.

Not at all.

Anthony ('Tony') Fearnside, OAM

Interview with Tony Fearnside recorded in the sound studio of the Australian War Memorial on 29 September 1994



Tony Fearnside in 2009.
(A. Fearnside).

Tony Fearnside was born in the industrial city of Bradford in Yorkshire, England, in June 1934. Around the age of 15, he decided that he would like to become a forester, largely to escape a future of living and working in an urban manufacturing centre. After completing his National Service, he studied forestry at the University of North Wales in Bangor, graduating a Bachelor of Science in 1959. With an interest in working overseas, he promptly accepted a forestry position in South Australia, thinking that he 'might as well go to South Australia as anywhere else.'

He worked in South Australian forests for over five years before securing a position in Canberra in late 1965. In the ACT, he started out as the forester in charge of Mt Stromlo forest and, in 1971, was promoted to control operations in all of the forests. He was also the Chief Fire Control Officer for the ACT for the period 1967–74. In 1975, he attained a Master of Science degree in forestry management from ANU and went on to become the Assistant Director (Operations) in the ACT Forests Section.

For several years commencing in the mid-1970s, he spent two extended periods away working on forestry projects in Nepal. On his return to Canberra

Tony Fearnside

in 1981, he became Director of Forestry in the ACT. However, a major reorganisation in the mid-1980s saw him leave to take up a senior position in the Forestry Department of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation in Rome. He came back to occupy a position in the City Parks Administration in 1988, but retired from the Public Service in April the following year.

This 'retirement' really meant a complete transition to the life of a busy consultant forester both in Australia and overseas. Indeed, for a time, he served as president of the Association of Consulting Foresters of Australia. He became active in community affairs, as well, and in the general field of forestry was one of the founders of the Friends of ACT Arboreta after the 2003 bushfires. Health problems eventually forced his real retirement in 2012. In January 2015, Tony received an Order of Australia for his services to the community in the ACT.

I'd like to welcome Mr Tony Fearnside to this interview and the first question that obviously occurs to me is that you are not from Australia originally, I take it.

No, I was born in Yorkshire and in those days we had to do national service and so I spent two years doing national service, some of it in Singapore, and after that I went to university to do forestry.

Which university was that?

This was called the University College of North Wales in those days, part of the University of Wales. And I think quite a few other people that came to Australia at that time were Bangor graduates. The University College is at Bangor in North Wales. But I wanted to do forestry from a very early age ... I think at about fifteen or nearly sixteen when I first wanted to do forestry, and I've been lucky enough to be able to work in forestry ever since. The Singapore thing was important because it made me feel that I didn't want to work in England and so then, all the time that I was doing my forestry training, I was hell-bent on working overseas, if you look at it from an English person's perspective.

Yes. The Singapore interlude, I assume, was when you were doing your national service.

Yes.

This would have been in the mid-1950s or something like that.

Yes, '53 to '55.

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And you went back to the UK then and how long was it before you decided to come to Australia?

Almost straight away. After graduating I hung around for about six months before I got on the boat and came to South Australia.

Why did you particularly choose Australia?

Well, first choice was actually Canada, but in those days when I finally graduated the Canadian market was in recession and also the Hungarian Forestry School had been taken *en masse*, after the Hungarian revolution, to Canada. So there were 200 of them looking for jobs. And then somebody put a letter on the Forestry noticeboard saying, 'If you're interested in working in South Australia, see me'. So I saw him and signed up. I didn't really care where I went, so long as I went somewhere. So I went to work in the south-east of South Australia.

And how long did you stay in the South Australian Forestry Service?

I arrived there in 1960, January 1960, and worked there until ... it was early December 1965 when we came here.

What prompted the move to Canberra?

I got fed up with the South Australian Woods and Forestry Department.

Why?

Well, they didn't seem to be doing forestry as I thought it should be done. It was very much sticking pine trees in the ground and clearing native forests and no recognition given to anything else except production, and it wasn't a really very happy service in those days, either.

So I can assume from what you said that forestry was done in a way – in the ACT – that didn't take into account purely production aspects of ...

Well, that was the opportunity as I saw it. Not to write down the Woods and Forestry Department in those days because I think their practices as far as what they were doing were very good and there weren't any better practices in Australia. But anyway, one way and another I came here.

What position did you fill when you first arrived?

That's a bit complicated, too. In fact I got the job ... As a basis, I went to an Institute of Foresters conference in Hobart and, during a break in the proceedings, I went to the men's toilets and was asking one of the older people in the profession what it was like to work in Papua New Guinea because I'd

just seen a job advertised there, and somebody else overheard and said, 'Look, don't go to Papua New Guinea, I've got a better job for you in the ACT.' So that was the way it all started, really.

That must have been the most interesting interview you've ever had, I think.

I guess that was a pre-interview, to be fair. And also I had had applied originally for a job with the Forestry and Timber Bureau and I was actually appointed to that one day and promoted the next day to another job, so I had two entries or three entries in a *Commonwealth Gazette* in successive weeks. Anyway, I came to Stromlo. What I really wanted to do was run a small forest of my own and the inducement was to come to run Stromlo Forest, but Stromlo Forest always had the Bushfire Council linked with it, so the jobs went hand in hand.

Who was it actually that recruited you?

This was Mark Edgerley. This was the conversation in the men's toilet. He was the Supervising Forestry Officer I was talking to, Kelly McGrath, who foresters will remember.

So you came to Canberra in 1965 and you became immediately manager of Stromlo. Yes, the ACT Forests, as it's now known, had been reorganised. They had had a review and a Cabinet submission in 1964 and I think, as a result of that, Mark Edgerley was appointed as a director. He was appointed because they could see they had all these pine trees but they weren't being used for anything. So they wanted someone to come and develop an industry to use the wood that was growing here. I think that was the telling factor in his appointment. So then he had the job of recruiting people. He had a new staff structure and the chance to replace some of the people that were leaving and to fill some new positions.

From what you were saying it sounds like this was a distinct move into a more production-based use of the forests rather than aesthetic or water catchment management or something like that.

Certainly in those days we had two main roles, particularly if you were based at Stromlo, and that was fire protection – and we looked after everything in the rural side of the ACT – and then basically timber production. And in those days we used to lock up the forest. Fences were round the outside of the forests and they were all locked up.

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So what did you find when you first arrived at Stromlo? What things did you feel should be done and weren't being done?

In those days we still didn't have the full staff that was being recruited, so I actually looked after Pierces Creek and Uriarra Forests, as well as Stromlo Forest. So in the early days I just ran around and got ready for the planting program. And then I didn't really take over the Bush Fire Council job for another year. A person called Ian Lamb ran it for the next two fire seasons, I suppose. It was 1967 when I became the Chief Fire Control Officer.

And was Edgerley in charge of all of this?

Yes, Edgerley was in charge of ACT Forests from about 1964 right up to when he left; I think it was 1981 when he left.

How did things go for you, particularly in Stromlo Forest in the years ... ?

In the very early days it was a sort of 'sweetheart' and I was the 'new kid on the block' – that sort of sweetheart deal. There was plenty to do and I had plenty of ideas from South Australia. The experience I had in running a pine plantation there was very applicable to the sort of things we were doing here.

What sort of staff did you have to work for you?

I guess the most important person – the person, who, I think, influenced my life in many ways, was Maurice Franklin who was the overseer and also a Deputy Fire Control Officer. He was a mountain man really, and had worked at Bulls Head Forest and then not long before I arrived, he'd come to Stromlo Forest.

He's one of the people that I'm going to interview later as Maurice is on the list.¹

Yes, Maurice, if you can get him yarning is a particularly good person and he always had a very keen memory for when things happened.

I'll look forward to talking to him as well.

Give him my regards when you do, please.

I'll do that, certainly. You mentioned you were also in charge of Uriarra and Pierces Creek when you first started. How long did that arrangement last for?

That lasted probably several months until we recruited John Pearson, also from South Australia.

¹ Unfortunately, no interview could be arranged with Maurice Franklin.

How did you find the forestry practices in those forest areas?

They were reasonable, I think. The big difference between what I'd been doing in South Australia and here was in the roading that had to be done, particularly at Pierces Creek and Uriarra, because in South Australia it's all very flat, sandy, 'dunny' kind of country, so we never paid very much attention to roading, whereas here roads had to be constructed before the plantations. The logging, I thought, was a little bit amateurish compared to what we'd been doing in South Australia.

The logging was being carried out by contractors, I imagine.

Yes, and I think in those days we still had one horse working in the ACT.

Why were the logging practices amateurish?

I think it's all to do with the size of the industry and what's going on, and so, in South Australia, we had three big sawmills to supply and when I came here there were just a number of very small sawmills, so there was never any great incentive to perform. In fact if you did perform, you tended to choke up the sawmills with too many logs.

Did that change, though, when the smaller, older sawmills closed down?

Well, in fact they didn't close down. They were allowed to continue, but they did bring in this bigger sawmill at Hume – this is Integrated Forests Products, as its name was. And then of course that changed and we had to get more serious and have more serious logging plans and things. So when I came here we were growing a lot more timber than we were selling, and it wasn't until IFP came along that we were able to sell as much timber as we were growing.

I'm interested – just getting back to the small sawmills – I thought they were basically driven out of business or closed down just before the big sawmill opened, but you're saying they continued on operating in some sort of fashion for quite some time. Is that ... ?

Yes, in fact the agreement was that none of them had to close down. I'm not quite sure whether that was written on paper but it was certainly a verbal agreement, so all the little fellows were able to keep on. And then, of course, it was just a question of scale and market and people getting older or, in one or two cases, poor management and they left as they went to the wall.

How did you get on with the logging contractors? How did you find them?

I got on quite well with them. I've always had a belief with contractors that

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there are some basic rules that they have to follow. Once they've followed that, you don't make life difficult for them. Really, particularly in logging as it was carried out in those days – and probably nowadays, for all I know – you can make a contractor's life very, very difficult if you read in between the lines and apply the letter of the law harshly; it makes a lot of difference to the way he operates and probably influences profits.

Whereas I felt I should not go out of my way to make it easy for them, but at least to be consistent in things. Like, if you're marking trees, we always used to spray silver paint on the trees and if you put them all on the same side, at the same height, the person who's felling the trees can find them easily. But if they're on the different side he's got to go all around looking; and when you're working hard and you're looking for the next tree and how you're going to fell it, it does make a bit of difference.

Who were the contractors when you were there?

Oh, now you're asking me ... There were quite a lot of Italians. There was the Rosin family who are still around. They were one of the three and there were two other, and then later on Hansen came in as a logging contractor, too. Sorry, I don't remember the names of the others.

You were saying also that when you came the ACT Forest service was growing a lot more timber than it was actually using, so what was the surplus timber doing? Was it just not being cut?

Yes, just standing on the stump.

And if it's left, what happens?

Well, you can store timber on the stump to some extent, but if it's not thinned there's a lot of competition for the available moisture and you get a lot of the dominant trees are surviving, but the other trees in the stand are weakened and not so thrifty.

So eventually they'll die. You won't be able to use them or cut them to take them to the mill or anything like that.

You could in the next few years, yes, you could that, and some of the Stromlo plantings that were made in the 1940s were like that.

So when you and the 'new guard' I'll call it came in, the whole system changed around so that you were now supplying more timber than you could actually keep pace with demand. Is that what happened?

Yeah, the problem then became to make sure we didn't over-cut.

Where was the demand coming from? Was this purely from the ACT or elsewhere?
Yes, this was once they started this Integrated Forests Products mill, IFP.

Yeah, which was supplying just to Canberra market or they were supplying ... ?

No, it was always something that people like me couldn't understand. Canberra market was supplied from Victoria and South Australia and, the way things were sold, our timber used to go up to Queensland. But it did have the advantage, and the manager of the IFP mill told me on many occasions, that it kept the market honest because if they were able to bring logs here and they had to sell them at a price or the sawn timber had to be sold at the same price as it could be produced here. And, I just guess, the way large organisations market their timber and possibly set up some sort of cartel, informally maybe without a written or even a spoken agreement, they just generally work in a certain way.

It doesn't seem particularly efficient to truck in the logs from Victoria, but timber that's grown in the ACT itself is shipped off to Queensland. It seems a very peculiar way to run an industry.

Yes, as I say, it always puzzled me. But I suppose if a small mill were operating in the Canberra area and decided to sell its products locally against someone who was already established here, they could be subject to price wars and things like that. So I guess it was company marketing policy to sell the stuff somewhere else.

Does this system still operate?

I don't know.

My feeling is it doesn't but ...

Probably not, I think, because there's more timber being produced in Queensland now. But if you look at the way Queensland is operating, places like Cairns are expanding very, very rapidly and I can't see where they're getting the timber from, particularly as the logging in the rainforests has been closed down.

In 1967 you became President, is it? – of the Bushfire Council.

No, the Bushfire Council was a council, actually, and then it employed a Chief Fire Control Officer and a Deputy and eventually we increased it to

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Smoke haze envelops an ACT Bush Fire Control Council firetruck during a controlled burn in the forests in 1968. (National Archives of Australia, A1200, item L71204)

two deputies; so I was the Chief Fire Control Officer. Now, a person called John Kellow had been the Chief Fire Control Officer for four years. He left to take up a job in fire research with what was then called the Forest Research Institute, and Ian Lamb sat in the chair, not as chairman of the council, for a year and then I took over.

Was this position simply looking over fire control in ACT Forests or was its brief much wider than that?

No, all the rural areas of the ACT.

So what did your duties entail in that position?

I suppose, there's two or three steps in fire protection. There's pre-suppression measures, publicity and then there's the actual suppression of fires and then making sure they don't flare up again afterwards. So, particularly the pre-suppression activities, making sure the equipment was ready, the crews

were trained, fire towers were operated, and the thing that we used to run successfully in South Australia, which I introduced here, was a readiness according to the day's fire danger. And then we had an automatic standby roster depending on what was the forecast fire danger for the day; so that was one thing we brought in.

Another thing I used to do was go around to the small rural brigades and attend their meetings and see what sort of equipment needs they had and make sure they appointed fire controllers and deputy fire controllers. See, under the Bushfires Act – this is called the Careless Use of Fires Ordinance – a person like me would have complete charge of any operations on a going fire. Or if I wasn't here the Deputy Chief would have the same role, or if he wasn't here the Controller of Forests with their separate fire districts, and if he wasn't there a Deputy Controller. So in the ordinance there's a sort of pecking order of who would be in charge.

Did you have any major fires to contend with in your period?

I did the job for seven years and it was frustrating for, maybe, four of those seven years – three at least – were very mild seasons.

Frustrating!

Yeah, we'd get ready for a fire and all that would happen would be rain. I guess two of them were severe fire seasons and the others would be sort of average.

Did you have any major losses in the forests with fires?

No, people used to tell me I was very lucky. I'm never sure whether to agree with them or not. I guess it was a certain amount of luck but there was a lot of preparedness and if you did have a fire, you'd plan what to do next, how to move in and make sure you had enough resources deployed to the fire, and then you'd move around the other, so that you covered up any gaps.

Did you feel that the equipment that was available both to you and to the bushfire brigades was adequate to the task?

No, it wasn't, and I think everybody realised that. I was told long afterwards that they felt they never got any equipment until I came onto the scene which I think was probably fortuitous. I did make a mistake. When I took over, there was a lot of equipment that hadn't been purchased for one reason or another and, somehow, the annual appropriation of funds was twice what it should have been. It had two years appropriation but I didn't ever spot that, so, when

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I did the next year's one, I just put the same figure in, so we got a doubling of what was going on. So, that gave us a lot more knapsack sprays and, as we retired the old vehicles, we passed them on to the rural brigades, and they were always very happy with that sort of approach.

Yes, that's the sort of mistake you want to make often. Who was funding the equipment, because I imagine it was pretty expensive?

That was all funded from Treasury to Bush Fire Council's vote.

Yes. You were Chief Fire Control Officer up until in 1974. Were you still during this period managing Stromlo or had you moved on?

I moved on during that period. So I was in charge of Stromlo – I don't know – for five years perhaps and then they reorganised the ACT Forests. It was called Forests Branch in those days or Forest Section. They always changed from one to another. And then they created, I think, the Field Services position which got me a promotion and put me in charge of planting operations. And by that time we were responsible for management of the Cotter catchment and a little bit of research that we were doing. Also, by that time, we'd got more in to allow the forest to be used for recreation.

Yes, I was going to come to that. We might as well keep on with that. How did you feel about this major change in the use of the forests? They'd more or less been locked away and then in the later part of the 1960s, I think it was, the people started flooding in.

I don't know if they started flooding in but they started coming ... Stromlo was a place that they started to use and is the obvious place. We got some funds allocated to us to tidy it up and put barbecues in the forest which was sort of anathema to the old guard. They felt very strongly that any increase in public use would bring in a lot more fires, but I never felt the same sort of fear. We experimented and opened the gates and devised what we called 'the forest drive' which went from the Cotter Road through Stromlo Forest to where the Museum of Australia is, around about there, to about Glenloch Interchange.

Did the public use of the forests affect management in any other ways that you can think of?

Yes, the big thing was that we tended to spend more time on grading the tracks and roads. So you only had to do it once a year at the very most to keep them in reasonable condition for normal forest traffic, but we found that we had to do

them a bit more often.

And the fire hazard that the old guard felt may occur, that never eventuated?

I don't think so. I think it eventuated more from the increase of population anyway. There were more people around and kids would go away and be naughty and light fires in the pines and on Black Mountain. Aranda [was built] close to Black Mountain and things like that. Surely, there'd be a few but not very many, not as many as might have been expected.

How did you feel about this recreational use of the forest? Do you think it was a good thing for the image of the Forests Branch or Forest service?

Yes, I think it was.

I get the impression it had been more or less hidden away and ...

Yeah, it was never a policy that came from the top. We never had a Secretary of the Department saying, 'Open your forests and I'll come and have a drive in it.' I've been to Europe and I've seen how people use European forests. It came from beneath and therefore fund allocation and policies and things were never very clear. That doesn't mean to say we didn't do it without other people's knowledge because we certainly made sure that the people who were in charge at a higher level than the Branch knew what was going on.

You also mentioned that you were carrying out some research work, I think in the early 1970s. What did this entail and what was the purpose of the research?

We looked at recreation use and how that was affecting the forest. And the other half of it was to do with silviculture, and so we had quite a clever thinning trial that we put in Kowen Forest, and also some work on fertilisers. You see, there was the big split that I suppose – was that 1965 or 1964 or thereabouts? – forestry in the Commonwealth was under one organisation, the Forestry and Timber Bureau, and then it was decided to carve that up into four: so the Forestry School became the Forestry Department of the ANU and the FRI was moved out into a second separate organisation and eventually became the Division of Forest Research in CSIRO, and the policy-making group was taken into the Department of Primary Industries and Energy, as it now is, and ACT Forests was put into Department of the Interior. I guess the others were a part of the Department of the Interior and they started to leave eventually.

So why were you doing your own research rather than getting CSIRO to?

Because we needed to get results. This was applied research and so we needed

to get our results quickly. No one in the FRI was interested if it wasn't part of their program and, although some of their programs influenced what we were doing, we couldn't get them to directly work for us and there was no way in those days of funding them to do the research. And also, with a university and a forestry research organisation, you really needed someone to go around and pick the brains; all these fine students who wanted to do projects and fine scientists were interested to do work, so there was a lot of coordination anyway. So, traditionally, ACT Forests had been getting its research done by another part of the old organisation and that continued to some extent. But to pick up some of the things that we were doing that they weren't doing and it was necessary to get someone and we had a person called John Wood come and work with us. Also working with him was John Hicks. That was quite a nice period as we had a lot of problems to solve and we made a lot of progress in the early stages.

What were the problems that you set out to solve?

To know more about recreation use. So we looked at things like when they had car trials, how it'd affect the roads that they worked on, visitor surveys and what people thought about the forest, what they liked about the forest.

What did that show up?

It showed that a lot of people like to come to the forest because they have a natural feeling. In fact a lot of people said they liked the forest because they're 'natural' and, of course, they couldn't be less natural.

Because they're an imported species.

I guess what they were trying to say was that they could get away from the city and the built environment and get easily into a smaller less spoilt environment. I think people have changed. I think the population has changed since then and I think people, if they want to get away, wouldn't go into the pine forest to the same extent; they would go more into the hills nowadays. I guess there was a smaller population and it was more of an adventure to get up into the hills.

And then we found out all the other activities that people were doing: walking dogs, which is still a very popular thing; jogging; collecting firewood. And we were always surprised to find out how many people were overnighing in the forest. We always found two or three people who had spent the night in the forest, which we never knew about and we certainly didn't encourage. It really wasn't quite legal that they should camp in the forest or sleep in their cars or anything like that.

The car rallies that were being held in the forests and their effect on the roads, what did your survey find in relation to that?

Not much, it tended to shift the soil from one side of the track to another but that wasn't particularly bad. I think it would be different if the rallies were run in wet conditions, but we always told them that if there was very heavy rain they would have to cancel their rallies.

Were these rallies being held in all of the forests or just in a few?

No, they were held in all four forests.

The clever thinning trial that you mentioned in Kowen, what did this consist of and what was the aim of the project?

It was to try and find ... what we had decided to do was to do a non-commercial thinning, so we never ever had a market for small timber except a very specialised one for posts and poles. So we always had to try and grow our trees as quickly as we could, so we could meet a sawmill market. But if you plant *radiata* pine with wide spacing, it will grow quickly in diameter but also its branches will be very heavy. So what we were trying to do was find the balance between wide spacing with heavy branching or narrow spacing with light branching. The idea was to have a series of plots thinned to different intensities, starting from no thinning at all where it would be planted at eight feet by eight feet spacing and then thinning it down to, I don't know, perhaps twenty by twenty for example. And then a range of thinnings so that there's one strip which started off unthinned and went in a series of plots to heavily thinned. There was a whole series in the middle and then it went down the other way on the other side, and so the middle one was half-way between what we were looking at. It fairly quickly gave us an idea of what we should be thinning to.

These results became the standard by which you then planted and thinned?

Yes, and that sort of work made us expand our spacing so we didn't plant so closely together and gave us a good idea of how to do this non-commercial thinning and pruning. And when people didn't do it properly – someone who should better remain nameless – did it in Kowen forest. Later on we actually had to clear-fell the forest earlier when we planted because it was getting too branchy.

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From what you were saying there, that the planting was actually carried out by contractors, too, not by full-time employees of the Forestry Branch, or ACT Forests as they were called?

There'd be a mixture. But really when the planting season comes on you really want to get your trees planted as quickly as you can, and that's a good example of a contracting situation, if you can get contractors who will do the job reliably. In the early days they used to let the forest workers take leave and do contracts and then somebody said that's not correct; you can't work on a contract basis for your own boss. We lost a very valuable way [?] of people who had a vested interest in planting. If they planted a tree and they all died, fingers would be pointed. We had some very competent planters, I thought, and it was a pity when that happened. Then because we'd always had a contract planting system it's persisted right to this day, I think, whereas other organisations which didn't do that have gone into mechanised planting with planting machines, whereas ACT Forests even now calls contracts.

Yes. I think you said you were in charge of plantings from about the early 1970s, so you would have been in charge of letting contracts to the planters and so on. No problems with them, generally speaking or perhaps the occasional ... ?

No. You always have the hassles of the plants haven't been delivered to the right place on time or if somebody got tired and hid all his plants in a rabbit hole or something like that. I think it's true that the ACT Forests did have a habit of planting its trees well and that, I think, had come from the very early days.

During your time with ACT Forests were you only dealing with radiata or you were dealing with other pine species, as well?

Marginally with other species. We looked at them. When we had the recreation use developing we did try to plant a few other species to soften the impact of so much *radiata*, but it was quite marginal.

And not commercially viable?

Well, some of the species that had been planted, particularly in the wet areas, have been commercially viable, but *radiata* grows so well compared to all the others that they tend to get forgotten.

What were these other species, just as a matter of record?

There's Mexican pine, *Pinus patula*, which really requires a summer rainfall, whereas *radiata* requires a winter rainfall. So up in the hills it [*Pinus patula*]

did quite well but often looks very miserable down on the plains. So that was one. We had a terrible legacy from earlier days of having *Pinus ponderosa*. Has anybody else talked about that?

Several people, with mixed feelings. Some have said it was okay if it were planted in the right spot and treated well, but I think you've given your quite distinctive impression of it.

The story I heard about planting *ponderosa* ... When you're introducing a tree species it's terribly important to get the best one and nowadays there are computers and you get matching of climates and very careful collections. But in the 1920s when this was introduced – and there's statements, if you look in the annual reports from the Forest and Timber Bureau, they said, 'We're not planting this common *radiata* pine, we're planting really good western yellow pine, this *Pinus ponderosa*.' So the story is that they paid somebody to go and collect seed. And in those days that was a big deal because New Zealand were involved as well as Australia. This guy was sent out to where this *Pinus ponderosa* grew and when he got there, so the story goes, he looked out of his hotel and saw acres and acres and acres of this, lots and lots of it. So he thought, well, I don't really need to get too involved in this, so he stayed in the pub and drank and had a good time, whatever. And the day before he left or round about then he thought he'd better gather his pine seeds. So he got it from the nearest small trees and what happened was they'd just brought a bad strain of *ponderosa* in here. If you look in the arboreta you can find the same species from different places which have grown really well, but they just got this bad lot. It probably grew better than *radiata* would on the wet patches they planted it on, but there's always been a bit of problem to ... Do we push it down and burn it? If so, what do we do with the mess afterwards, or do we try and find someone to buy it? It's always been a bit of a problem.

You've shed a different light on that. I wasn't aware of this bad strain coming in and being used; it's quite interesting. I was also going to ask you about the arboreta. Did you have much to do with them in your period with the Forests?

Not early on, more recently I've done a little bit with the arboreta and in fact I'm interested now in developing some sort of heritage values. So, the answer is no, in the early stages. In the early stages they will still be looked after by the Forest Research Institute, anyway, and it wasn't till later on they were handed back to the ACT.

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When was that?

That, I guess, would have been in the late '70s. I had several breaks in my ACT Forests career and the first one was in 1972-73 - 1972, I suppose or thereabouts anyway - when I had a nine-months leave of absence to study at the ANU; and then I also had leave of absence from 1974 to 1976 to work in Nepal on the forestation project they had. And then I came back here and worked for two years again and then went back to Nepal and worked for FAO, which is the United Nations organisation, on a project then; and then came back from that in 1981 and worked for about four years and then took up a contract with FAO from 1985 to 1988. And then came back, but came back to City Parks and then they had this first round of early retirements, 'golden handshakes', so I took that.

And never looked back.

I don't know if I have, if it's true or not. But I'd always wanted to branch out on my own. Well, not always; I was planning to do it anyway, so when this came along it was a good opportunity.

You've had quite a few breaks from ACT Forests over the period. So the arboreta weren't terribly important to ACT Forests in the time you were there?

From the management point of view. Management was done by somebody else.

From any other point of view were they ... ?

And then, when they handed them, of course, they didn't really hand them over with a pot of money to look after them, so that made it a little bit of a problem. It's not an easy thing to do because they really need to be thinned; otherwise they get overcrowded and unhealthy. But logging these days is done on a fairly large scale and these are all small plots, so it's very difficult to get the logging contractors to thin them.

Did you find them of any value at all? Apart from their heritage value, I mean.

From the heritage value. I think at least, well, three or four of them are excellent arboreta and are world quality. If you want to go and study conifers that will grow in this climate, there's nothing else like them. Because their role, their scientific role, was finished many, many years ago when they were looking for alternatives to *radiata* and you know roughly what the alternatives are and how you might expect them to perform. After that, unless somebody

comes up with new species, which doesn't happen very often these days, their role is a little bit different. So, it's more an education role, a slight scientific role and something that's there which has been created for a purpose which is no longer so pressing.

How are you going to develop the heritage values of the arboreta? What are you doing on that front?

Oh well, talking at the moment, but the trouble is I'm away so often. I had intentions of applying for a heritage grant but they had to be in while I was away and I just didn't have time to get my act together, and it really does involve talking to ACT Forests. I think a bit of awareness raising is still needed. So that's I think our next step would be to try and arouse awareness of what's there and how wonderful they are and then, hopefully, we can devise a system to manage them on a slightly different way and perhaps even get some grants so we can get a system running from, say, an ecotourism grant or something like that.

I think to some extent you may have been beaten to the punch because a colleague of mine, Matthew Higgins, is carrying out some historic work on them, including some interviews, but we might talk about that later, anyhow.

Yes, that's the problem of being away so much.

Another thing I wanted to ask you about is native forests. When you were with ACT Forests was there any logging of native forests?

Yes, when I first came there was a little bit of logging.

That would have gone on till 1967, I suppose. Where was that?

There may have been a little bit coming from the Bulls Head area, I'm not sure about that, but most of it would have been coming from Tidbinbilla or the area they were clearing to plant pines, because still in those days they were clearing the native forests to plant trees; and so any 'loggable' material was brought and sold to the government sawmill.

Not a great deal of it, though, you don't think – and it stopped in 1967.

Enough to keep the government sawmill running.

Around this period ACT Forests lost control of Tidbinbilla, if I remember correctly. Was this a ... It may have been just before your time, I think.

Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve must have started about then, it may have been just before. I'm not sure why you say 'lost control of it', but the management

of the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, as it became known, was passed on to the Agriculture and Stock Section, which eventually became ... As it developed, it became Parks and Conservation Service and all the parts thereof.

Had ACT Forests had visions of putting in further pine plantations in the Tidbinbilla area?

It may have done, I don't know for certain. I don't think it ever had. What we had to do ... You see, that Cabinet decision of 1964 was very important because it reaffirmed the policy of establishing 40,000 hectares.² The earlier decision was to plant 20,000 [acres] and they doubled it. But they said, 'You can go on to your target but what's the point of planting all these trees, if you're not going to fell them?' So the target was reaffirmed: so 40,000 hectares (*sic*) provided you established an industry to use the wood that you were going to grow. So that's been the benchmark for the pine plantation activities; 40,000 hectares [acres] translates to 16,250 hectares, and that's what people talk about these days.

So they're following the 1964 Cabinet decision. You come in and this whole new guard come in. Who else was in it by the way? – the new people that came in at this time.

The people who came in at that time were Ian Gordon, Ian McLeod, John Pearson; I think those were the main ones. People that came in at the Class 2 level, so that people like Ron Murray and John Pearson and myself; and then the people that came at the Class 1 level were Ian Gordon and Ian McLeod; and there was another Ian, Ian Currie, who was based at Uriarra.

Were most of these people Australian graduates or was there a sprinkling of overseas graduates like yourself?

I think John Pearson and ... Bob Cruttwell was already here. Bob was an Edinburgh graduate, I think. John Pearson and I were both from Bangor. John was a bit older than I was.

Okay, during this period ...

Just to think about the plantation area, the big thing then was to get NCDC to agree to an area to plant; and once they'd found the hectares for us that became our plan.

² Actually 40,000 acres or 16,000 hectares.



Firefighters with the ACT Bush Fire Control Council fighting a fire in one of the ACT's forests in 1968. (National Archives of Australia, A1500, item K18690)

Which areas did they ... ?

Previously they'd done a survey at Boboyan and they concluded that there was 2,000 or whatever hectares down there that were suitable for planting and they continued on the Tidbinbilla side. When they did involve NCDC, the NCDC came up with more areas around Stromlo, so the planting along the Cotter Road, for instance, and some at the back of Stromlo was added to the Stromlo Forest; more area to the east of Kowen was also located. Once that happened we had a planting target of land to aim for, and the land near Tharwa also came in that period.

How long did it take for ACT Forests to move from its 20,000 up to 40,000 target?
I guess that was an overnight decision, but to achieve its target? To achieve its target, that's a good question. I suppose it would be the late 1970s when it finally got there and then reached a steady state where any planting would be

done on land which had already had one or possibly more than crops of pines on it.

So you're looking at about twelve or more years before the whole.

Yes, so we had a fairly big planting program at that stage, for us anyway.

It would work out at a few thousand hectares per year?

Yes.

That's quite a bit. And there were no great problems with these plantings? There were no setbacks? I think you mentioned at one point that somebody planted the pines too close together.

That was historic, I think. In the early days *radiata* was planted at a ten by ten or twelve by twelve foot spacing. Then they appointed Cyril Cole to be the Supervising Forestry Officer and he was a South Australian and he brought South Australian practice which was an eight by eight spacing. So, when he came, which was around about 1930, I suppose, then there was a change in spacing, so all the older plantation you could see, that were planted in the late 1920s were nice and wide. After that, they became eight by eight spacing and then after that we got a little bit interested in what was going on.

And this precipitated that research project of thinning.

Yes, and previous to that we'd somebody called John Way who'd been to New Zealand and had a look and he came back and said, 'We'll have to plant wider and do non-commercial thinning.'

What was the eight by eight spacing based on in South Australia? Was that purely South Australian conditions or was there some other reason for it, do you think?

No, I think they found that they grew ... again the balance between too close and too wide and, of course, they were able to develop a pulp mill, a paper mill, so it didn't matter so much for that.

Just to continue on, during your period with Forests, Tony, did you suffer any major disasters from ... well, we've touched on fires already and you've said nothing major occurred at least while you were Chief Fire Controller, but fires or severe winds or any other problems of that nature that led to significant loss of timber.

Maybe we should go back over the fires just briefly. There were two notable fires: one was the Warks Camp fire, and that was way up in the Cotter and we never really established how it started. It probably was an electrical line fault.

When was this, by the way?

If you're looking at severe fire seasons, they run in thirteen-year cycles, so 1965 is about that fire season – 1978 – so there's one in between, so it wasn't in that particular cycle. I don't know, 1969 perhaps, around about there.³ That was a tricky fire because it really had the ... I think while I was Chief Fire Controller Officer it was the only what you might call a 'campaign fire' which was going to go on for days and take a lot of people. I think we were lucky that we had had some disaster preparedness training and we were prepared for a big fire, and I think we were very lucky to hold it, and we certainly held it on a day of extreme fire danger; but we were assisted because it was on the lee side of the hill. Afterwards, Alan McArthur, who was the 'guru' of firefighting research, said this was one of the few fires that had been held. Normally, if they started up there in those conditions, they finished up out of the ACT on the coast, so I felt really pleased with the results there; but also had to acknowledge we were lucky that it was on that side of the hill.

The other one was a fire which would have been after that in Jervis Bay which burnt a lot of the native forest in Jervis Bay and threatened the – when the wind changed I went down there – and threatened the botanic gardens annex down there. We were just sitting there and suddenly Fred McCarroll who was the overseer down there said, 'The winds changed, we'd better do something about it.' So we raced off and I had a vehicle, so I got there first. I had these fuses which are matches with a longer and rather bigger head than the ordinary match. We just strike them and throw them on the ground. So I walked along the little track just outside the botanic gardens annex lighting what was in fact a backburn because flames came up and they just burnt each other out. Possibly I saved the annex, I don't know. That was two major fire stories. There was a Kowen Gorge fire as well.

When was the Jervis Bay one?

That would have been after the Warks Camp fire, I suppose.⁴ I think the big disaster we had was the wind blow and there again I can't remember the dates.

I think that was 1974.

1974, yes, exactly, because I left to work in Nepal in November 1974, so they had the wind blow and didn't seem to be doing much about it when I left.

³ It actually occurred in December 1972.

⁴ This occurred in early 1973.

But by the time I came back it was all history. And that was a lesson for how to attack forests in a wind-prone area. They say it's unusual conditions, of course, because it had rained and those soils puddle up and there's nothing for the ... it just goes like porridge and there's nothing for the roots to hang on to. What we'd done, we'd started felling on the windward side, so you get a block of trees, they form their own protection. So what you should start is on the leeward side and that was basically the mistake there. But in the end they salvaged most of the timber and that's to their credit, I think, that they managed to do it. The sawmills had a bit of a bonanza because they got bigger trees than they normally would and it's easier to get a profit out of a big tree than small one. So I was on the periphery of it when it started and went away to avoid all the hard work and came back to find it was just about salvaged.

Did you ever have any major injuries or even fatalities with people working in the forests or even people using it for recreational purposes?

I don't recall any recreational accidents, certainly not in my period; although in the early stages a lot of – not a lot of people – before we opened the forests they were used for suicides and car stripping. There were certainly a couple of suicides in Stromlo Forest. Our accidents record in ACT Forests wasn't very good in those days and in what? – the early 1980s – we seriously looked at – and Gary Croston was a person who was very influential in this – looked at our accident record and had a long term approach to improving our safety record. And they did very successfully but it took rather longer than I expected.

What was the problem? Why was the rate of accidents so high?

I think it was just working habits, and I think it looked worse than it was because people would go on 'compo'⁵ quite easily and recognise the ... I think one of the problems really was that we had a generation of gangers who weren't safety conscious. The early people didn't need to be safety conscious because they were boys that were born and bred in the bush and they knew all about saws and trees falling down and things like that. When we expanded our work force, we got people coming from the city and they didn't have the same feeling for what's going on. There was one particular bad one where somebody was felling a tree and it fell backwards onto him and instead of stepping aside and letting it fall he tried to stop it and collapsed his spine; and

5 Workers' compensation.

Tony Fearnside

that was a bit of a problem from then, particularly as the guy wanted to keep on working. If he'd been happy to go and spend the rest of his days at home, it probably wouldn't have been quite so obvious. I don't remember any deaths. I do remember somebody dying of a seizure – would it be a seizure? He had a clot on the brain – a stroke. He was in the Kowen fire tower at the time and that was fairly unnerving.

I think somebody else talked about that, and had quite a problem evacuating him from the tower.

That's the sort of thing. There's a history of strokes in his family and I think he realised that probably that would be the way he'd die. His voice on the radio had just said, 'I'm feeling sick' and drained off, and then we rushed up to see what had happened. I think in that situation if you get somebody to hospital to a specialist who knows exactly what to do within minutes life can be saved, but otherwise it's not possible.

You mentioned a few minutes ago in relation to fires that the bad bushfire seasons were occurring in thirteen year cycles. Was that just a coincidental ... ?

I think if you look at it nowadays people can relate dry periods in this part of Australia to the El Niño effect, but in those days we didn't know about that. And it's true that, I think, 1913 was a bad fire season and 1926 was and 1939 certainly was, and then the next one after that would be 1952.

That was a bad fire season. That was the year that part of Stromlo Forest was burnt down. That was 5 February 1952.

And then 1965 was a drought year. We didn't have a bad fire season in the ACT in terms of losses. By the time the 1978 one came around I'd stopped being a Fire Control Officer, anyway, but if memory is correct then that was the year that Cliff Parsons, who was then the Fire Control Officer, had a lot of problems.

That's interesting that thirteen-year cycle. I wonder how far into the past you could extend it.

I think it gets a little vague if you go back beyond 1900 and 1887; it starts to be a little bit vague after that. But certainly through the first half of this century it seemed to hold true.

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A large group of firefighters in front of an ACT Bush Fire Council Truck, probably in the 1980s. (J. Drysdale)

That's very interesting, indeed. The reason I'm interested is I read one Lindsay Pryor's early articles on bushfires in this region and he did a study on snow gums and was able to trace bad fire seasons back to the 1860s, I think, from memory. John Banks is someone who has worked on the same sort of things.

During your period obviously you had no real major disasters apart from the wind blow which was the 1974 wind blow, so harvesting went on fairly smoothly. What sort of area or what sort of quantity of timber were you felling per year? Can you recall?

Well, the quantity of timber, we were logging, I think, about 180,000 cubic metres which is about the same as 180,000 tonnes, half of which would go to IFP; and of that a third would go into the veneer mill and then the rest would go into the various small mills, but particularly when it was making tile battens owned by Monier that was the second biggest purchaser.

What was the veneer mill?

That was at IFP, and so they had a plywood factory there – made industrial grade ply.

The pines that were planted when you first started there, when the expansion occurred from twenty to forty thousand hectares [actually acres], would they be coming up to harvesting time now?

Certainly. Nowadays, of course, we don't particularly have an age ... say when

they get to an age we must clear-fall them. We tend to see how much timber is going to be harvested for a year and work out which area is going to be thinned and which area is going to be clear-felled to meet that target, so sometimes it can be as young as twenty-five. Particularly in the wetter parts of the ACT we tend to have shorter rotations than in the drier parts.

So, some of the pines that were planted when you first started would have been felled in the last few years, from about 1990 onward.

Yes, some of the ones that were planted in the middle and late 1960s at Tidbinbilla and a little bit at Uriarra would now be clear-felled. In particular we started the Boboyan planting scheme; I think 1966 or 1967 we started down there and they never lived up to expectations. I think one of the mistakes they made, they'd assumed that the rainfall was much higher down there than it is really is and, of course, it's colder and drier, and also, at least in some areas, there were problems with boron deficiency which, I think, is a big thing in ACT Forests. And then there was a decision to just grow the pines until they could be harvested and return it to conservation purposes, natural forests, which now is about to happen, I think. So I think that was interesting that we started down there and worked down there. I think people got talked out of them a little bit easily. I think if you're going to decide at the end of the rotation that you're going to quit, you don't then do nothing to the pines. I think it's still a good thing to do your non-commercial thinning and your pruning and, above all, we should have been treating them with boron, I think, and I think we'd have got a better return out of it. So I don't think, I must say, the best series of decisions were taken in that case.

In the first few years that you were with Forests were you obtaining logs mainly by thinning or was clear-felling being carried out or a mixture?

In the early years before IFP started, I think it would be mainly thinnings. I don't remember any clear-felling, but that would have been on Uriarra and Pierces Creek forests which by that time was more John Pearson's area of responsibility.

How did you find the quality of the existing pine plantations? You mentioned before, we talked before about they were planted too close together in the early days, but what was the quality of the timber produced by the ... ?

We've always felt the quality was good because it's fairly harsh climate and they get a little bit denser wood in this sort of situation. So we've always told

people and believe that our *radiata* pine was a bit stronger and a bit better than other peoples and I've never seen anything to suggest that that's wrong. I believe the myth, anyway, if it is a myth.

I was going to ask you how did you know?

It makes sense scientifically. It's very difficult to prove it. You've got to go and weigh samples of timber and things like that.

In a way it makes it all the more strange that you import stuff from Victoria and New South Wales and send the local stuff up to Queensland.

Sure, that sort of thing is all about corporate marketing.

Another thing you mentioned and I really haven't touched on this at all in the interview so far is Jervis Bay. It's rated a mention here and there, but I would just like to find out what you had to do with the Jervis Bay area and how you felt about it in general.

I think my big feeling about Jervis Bay is its historical importance, and the same applies to ACT Forests and this is something that isn't terribly well known. I guess in the 1920s *radiata* pine had been planted around Australia and there was a big backlash against it because some of the plantations in Victoria and New South Wales hadn't succeeded very well; they were planted on the wrong sites, particularly northern New South Wales where they don't have the winter rainfall. South Australia and the ACT continued with *radiata* pine plantings and they felt convinced that *radiata* pine was important, and if you look nowadays at how many hectares – we've got a million hectares of plantations in Australia now, three quarters of which is *radiata* pine – is correct. And so historically because they could continue their planting in the ACT it proved a point that *radiata* could be successful and that contribution is something which isn't well known.

There's a rather similar state of affairs at Jervis Bay where on those coastal sands some people had grown trees and they'd failed and they found a way or locations at Jervis Bay of growing *radiata* pine successfully. It grew rather faster than here; it had a milder climate. In some places where the soils weren't suitable, of course, it didn't grow at all but, generally speaking, we had a nice little operation going down there. But it was never matched by any successful plantations nearby and didn't then become part of a resource for that part of the world which is, I think, a little bit obvious now if you ... Any timber for house building in that part of New South Wales has got to be imported

rather than being grown locally. There was an opportunity to establish a timber industry there which went begging, perhaps because the private operators couldn't take it up. And then of course the decision was to quit those plantations, too. You couldn't really argue with the logic of it because there was no real industry; the plantations weren't part of an industry at all – stuck out on their own and likely to be not very profitable because of their small scale.

What sort of area was planted with pine in Jervis Bay?

I'd have to guess that. It would be just a few thousand hectares – two or three thousand.

Which part of Jervis Bay?

There are two areas. There's Hole in the Wall area and then the other one I'm not sure of. I'd have to go down there and remember everything.

But I take it there would have been no mill or anything nearby?

There was a small mill at, I think, it's Bomaderry and it was possible to get some of our logs milled there, although in the end that mill was closed down. And all the other mills were hardwood mills, so they brought most of the logs to the ACT.

Why were the pines first planted there?

That again was a similar sort of situation – to prove it could be done and that was the important pine; that if you picked your sites carefully, you could in fact grow pines on those.

And what period was this that these plantings occurred?

I guess it started late 1940s or early 1950s would be when they started.

Were they ever cut in any sort of way or even thinned?

I think there was a little bit of thinning. Yes, I'm sure there was a little bit of thinning and then it was decided to quit. Well, I think then there would have been clear-felling.

Right, so they're no longer there, at all.

As far as I know they're all felled now and it's been returned to native forest.

I wasn't aware of what had occurred down there. When actually was it decided to get out of Jervis Bay?

I think that must have been one of the periods when I wasn't here, so that

could have been in the late 1980s.

You've mentioned that you went to Nepal. How did your experience in ACT Forests fit you for work in Nepal or indeed other parts of the world?

I think probably with the Bushfire Council I got in the habit of dealing with people. Most foresters live in their own forest and deal with their own workforce and their own contractors and don't need to speak to the public. The Bushfire Council was quite different because it had to cooperate with local farmers. I think that helped me, and, of course, the Nepal project in those days was an afforestation project even though we were dealing with growing eucalypts in tubes, polythene tubes, and all our work here is *radiata* pine in what we call open-rooted situations. Afforestation is afforestation, so that was the sort of thing. I think the other thing that helped me was not the ACT Forests, but the natural forests there, of course, are Indo-European and there are similar types to what I'd been used to in England.

So there was no Pinus radiata?

No, we tried it and Nepal has got a summer rainfall and it failed quite markedly.

One other thing I wanted to ask was about pests, for example rabbits and pigs and so on in the forests. Did you have much a problem with these sort of introduced animal species?

Well, we tried certainly to reduce the pig population on the Cotter catchment with pig traps. We felt that we reduced the population. Goats we had and we shot those from an aerial platform – that's another word for a helicopter.

Were there that many feral goats in the area?

Yes, I think a population in hundreds and that upset the Canberra bow hunters who liked to go out and hunt them for themselves which could be rather fun. Horses, we had a few feral horses. I don't know whether you I'd call them brumbies or not, certainly the horse lovers did.

Which areas were they in, Tony?

There were some up in the head of the Cotter and some near Gibraltar Flats. People used to like to go and see what they thought of as wild horses at Gibraltar. Then after the Namadgi Park was declared, day to day management was done by the Parks and Conservation Service and its predecessors rather than by the Forests Branch or Section. So they were the main things. Rabbits,

during the period that I worked with ACT Forests, myxomatosis had been very successful in clearing out the rabbits, so we never really had a rabbit problem in those days.

What did you do with the pigs? Did you just shoot them or ... ?

Pigs we trapped and there were other people who would go and hunt them. The Uriarra forestry workers would have good pig dogs which would go and catch a pig and hold it by its ear until you could catch it. So that was always a bit of a sport for ...

Were they a big problem, the wild pigs?

In localised areas because they tend to eat the underground parts of plants they like which would grow around swamps. So if you're looking at a catchment management or a conservation program, then they can destroy the swamp vegetation and change the kind of hydrology and the under-vegetation. And horses could do that, too. They would trample around these upland swamps and, of course, that was the start of this: where all the water used to come from and once you'd changed that you'd perhaps get a quicker run-off in the lower reaches of the stream and they'd cut down their beds because the water was running faster.

This relates to the management of the Cotter, in particular.

Yes.

What other management problems were there with the Cotter?

There's always discussion about whether people could enter and use it for recreation. What we did, we introduced a permit system for going in because in those days the Health people said that we should keep it as a closed catchment and we believed that, although if you look at, the risk is very, very low. Waterborne diseases, you can say, in theory somebody could come to one of the overseas embassies and go recreating in the Cotter and bring typhoid or whatever into the ACT. It's not very likely I don't think, but anyway that was the strategy that we followed and it was on the advice of what is now the ACT Electricity and Water people that we followed that policy. Our official strategy policy was a closed catchment, but in reality we never prevented people from going there. So again it was a policy which wasn't a good policy and therefore wasn't enforced.

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By the time you were involved with the Cotter, I suppose the catchment areas had been forested and there wasn't the earlier problem of run-off of soil and so on into the stream.

Before I came here the problem was sedimentation into the Cotter river because in those days the Cotter Dam was the only source of water for Canberra, and they did bring a watershed management expert from America to have a look at it and he said something which, I guess, in hindsight is very obvious: it was the roads that were creating most of the sediment. And that's true in most situations now – that most of the sediment from logging or forestry comes off the roads and tracks. And so once they got the roads and tracks properly under control it was much reduced.

And what did that entail? How did they get them under control?

It was a question of changing the way you maintain the roads mainly, and the construction to higher standards.

I didn't realise they were so important to ...

Yes, the Cotter did have a bad reputation for water quality, and partly because of the surrounding geology; it's not particularly good from the point of view of water quality aspects. So the plantations got a bad name for spoiling the water quality. But when you realise that it was only part of the plantations, roads rather than the trees themselves, then you could at least minimise the fact that it was spoiling the water quality.

Just taking an overall view of your period with ACT Forests, what do you consider where the major changes that occurred in your career with the Forests?

Changes in the ACT Forests?

Changes in management practices and changes in the forests themselves.

Yeah, I guess the milestone would have been that 1964 Cabinet decision and when we successfully got an industrial complex at Hume, which was one of the very earliest things in Hume. In those days it used to stand out just like a sort of oasis. No doubt that changed the whole arrangement. I think ACT Forests had a golden era when we were responsible for bushfires and catchment management and we had recreation and we were aware of landscape responsibilities as well as running a logging operation. So, I think we, in those days, had a broad-based forestry and I think it's unfortunate that Australian society seems to think that the only people who can manage

forests commercially for timber production are foresters and therefore they argue the converse: that the only thing foresters can do is manage forests for timber production. I think the forestry profession allowed itself to be – and particularly because the spokespeople were the heads of forest services – got themselves boxed in. And that syndrome has even now affecting forestry in New South Wales where the New South Wales Forestry Commission adopted a siege mentality and won its political battles, but never succeeded or even, as far as I can see, tried to win the hearts and minds of the people, so that a lot of people think of the New South Wales Forestry Commission as an enemy of conservation which is unfortunate because the people in it are certainly not enemies of conservation, not all of them. I think the ACT Forests never got tarred with the same brush and I once spoke to somebody from the Australian Conservation Foundation and I said, ‘Why is it that we’re not the target of your campaigns.’ And they said, ‘Well, for one thing, if we ask you a question, we can get an answer,’ and I think that’s credit to people like Ian Gordon and, I suppose, myself that we never took a point of view where we would not give information.

It could also be that you’re not logging native forest, too.

Of course, by that time we’d stopped clearing native forests for planting and we weren’t logging native forests. We were wholly and solely on the pines.

So you see the transformation into a narrower view of what foresters do as marking the close of a golden age in, to use your own phrase, ACT forestry. Can you date that to a certain period?

I guess the nail in the coffin was when Namadgi was declared and that gave the Parks and Conservation Service a big step forward, so that the catchment management aspect of our work was lost from that time onwards gradually. I think the move to put the Bush Fire Council into a group that deals with emergency services, whilst it’s very logical from some respects, I don’t think it was done efficiently in the early stages and it certainly took the service that we provided away from the Forests.

You see ACT Forests now as essentially being a financial or commercial operation with few other roles to perform?

It’s being pushed into that. As I said, it has to be a commercial organisation which runs profitably and that, unfortunately, ignores a lot of the reasons for planting the trees. A lot of them were planted as soil conservation and

landscape. Stromlo Forest, for instance, if you really wanted to have a profitable forest venture you wouldn't stick a single tree on it, not on that sort of land. And Kowen Forest is an example where another ten inches of rain would make all the difference between an operation which is profitable and one which would be very profitable. So a lot of the time you have to think of why the forests were created and part of it was soil conservation, part of it was aesthetic appearance, part of it was the political thing to prove that it could grow this pine and only as part of all those objectives was the financial side of it important. And then you come along and say, 'Well, it's supposed to be a commercial forest operation, now you must behave commercially,' and it's suddenly difficult to do that.

You could almost say that the 1964 Cabinet decision was the trigger that set all this in motion in the long term.

It may well have been because then you get a lot of: 'Here, my prejudices are stuffed.' You get a lot of bureaucrats coming along and saying: 'You're supposed to be commercial, be commercial,' and that's very difficult to do when actually you're not commercial and without really knowing what commercial is anyway.

Do you see the future of ACT Forests as more of the same or do you think there are prospects for some changes and a return to more broadly based forest practices?

I think possibly. Possibly, in that that's the organisation here which is good at broad-scale afforestation. Apart from Greening Australia no-one is particularly good at afforestation, and they do the small-scale stuff. So things like broad-scale planting around new suburbs would be best done by ACT Forests, I think. So it all depends a bit on how the politicians and the upper echelons of the ACT public service see the forests.

They've still got a pretty major role in managing the recreational use of ACT Forests; that's not going to go away.

I don't get much of a chance to judge what they're doing these days, but the impression I get is they're doing quite well.

Partly, as this project shows, there's an interest in the history and the heritage of forests. I wonder if in the period when you were there whether there was much interest in, for example, Aboriginal sites or historic sites that existed in ...

No, not much. I, at least, give credit to Ian Gordon for realising the importance

of this and doing something about it. Till quite recently the ACT Forests seemed to have no real direction, and Ian was the one sort of person who'd pushed the idea of proper plans for, say, Stromlo Forest, including the recreation basis. He had arranged a market survey on visitor use and he had arranged a survey of heritage and it's due to his efforts – you can't say it wouldn't have happened without him – but I think it was due to his efforts that they happened. Now, I think they've got a strong push to be even more profitable and I think that's the direction that the present director – whatever they call him these days – Graham McKenzie-Smith is doing. I take my hat off to Graham. He is aware of all these other facets of forestry, too.

When did you finally move out of ACT Forests, and you were away for certain periods?

When I went to Rome in September 1985. It was leave without pay, but on the understanding that they could fill my position, which, I think, helped the Department because there was three of us for two positions and I think they were quite relieved when I left. That left Ron Murray to become the Director of Forests and Brian Pratt could become Director of the Parks and Conservation Service, and I was number three. I think I was always number three in that sort of situation and when I went away it made things a bit easier.

Why did you go to Rome, just as a matter of interest?

I just said at the beginning, I've always had an interest in forests in developing countries and that was just ... I could see that the opportunities here were narrowing, or what I wanted to do was narrowing because I really wanted to stay in forestry, and then an opportunity came up to go there, so I took it.

And you've had no real work interest ... You've done no real work with ACT Forests since then.

No, not really. I've done a couple of little contracts. One was looking at arboreta. The other one was drawing up a draft management plan for Stromlo. But apart from that I've had very little involvement with them.

Looking back over your career again with ACT Forests work can you single some of the things that you would regard as your principal achievements with ACT Forests?
Yeah, I think the early stages: pressing on with recreation use of Stromlo even though we did it, I guess, rather crudely; I think that was good. I think most of the time with Bushfire Council I was successful. And I think getting a research

capability in ACT Forests was good at the time that we did it; and then that was lost and then we re-created it to solve some of our problems. I think the other thing I did that was good was when I came here there were four fire towers in the ACT, all in a straight line, on Mount Coree, McDonald, Stromlo and Kowen. They're more or less in the same straight line so that if you have a fire on that line you don't have a good triangulation. I think doing a survey [in] which we got students, during the summer holidays, to draw transects on the contour maps and finding the 'seen areas' of different parts in the ACT and then building a fire tower on the top of Mount Tennant; I think that was a significant thing. So from now on any fires have a got a good triangulation. It also gave a chance to spot fires in the south. I think that was an achievement. The other thing too, I worked with Mark Edgerley and I always had a very good relationship with him and he was perhaps too good a boss, so I could work with him. I think while I was working with Mark as his 2IC, generally we were successful.

Sometimes when I was away things seemed to get off the rails and that's perhaps a highly prejudiced opinion, but some of his decisions weren't all that sound. But a lot of his work, he turned it from being a sort of ... I don't know, it's not very serious sort of forestry into something which was good. I think at its best, ACT Forests had nothing to be ashamed against the background of forestry in Australia at the time.

Are there any other outstanding personalities that you worked with in Forests?

I always had a lot of time for David Fisher who worked more or less the same period that I worked with ACT Forests and more or less made the logging operations a success.

What was his position?

ACT Forests more or less had a split underneath the director – a split into three – so there was what you called the plantations, Field Services, which I looked after at one stage, and then there was the management which is to do with field planning and yield plots which Ian Gordon looked after, and then there was the harvesting operation – harvesting and marketing – which David looked after. I think he ran a very good operation.

How did you get on with the forest overseers [inaudible]?

I think I got on with them quite well. Maurie Franklin [has] got a strong personality and it will be interesting to see what he says when you ask him

the same question. But by and large quite well. The Kowen people are always a little bit different, being an isolated community and being part of Queanbeyan rather than part of Canberra. But I think I got on well with the Ebsworth people there, and Bill Bates; and Gerald Ritherdon was the Pierces Creek one; I think I did quite well with them. And, of course, Fred McCarroll was the overseer at Jarvis Bay and I've got good memories of dealings with him.

How did you like living in Canberra during all this period?

Canberra was ... I liked it better in the '60s than I like it now because I like small towns and in those days the population was what? - 60,000 or was it 30,000? In that size of town there's just enough going on to find people who've got the same interests that you have and to be able to pursue those interests without the disbenefits of living in a big city where ... Well, nowadays if I go to the airport, I never see anybody I know; whereas on the infrequent events, the times, that I went there before, there'd always be somebody that I would know would be arriving; it seems strange. So it was fine. As I said over tea, my wife who came to the ACT with me was a girl from Karoonda in South Australia, which was a very small town, and then we'd lived on these forest reserves in South Australia which were even more remote; so coming to Stromlo was like a move to the 'big smoke' for us.

You were actually living in Stromlo, were you?

Yes, we did.

How did you find that?

That was fine.

Good quarters to live in?

Yes, then we thought they were. By today's standards we might feel a bit small but I thought I was a bit lucky, at least the two elder of the three children could remember and grew up in a rural situation. The younger one was only five when we left there, so he wouldn't have the same memories, but his two sisters, I think ... It was nice to see them growing up in a country environment.

You mean Stromlo rather than country.

Yes.

They had no problems with friends or with ...

No, they went to pre-school at Yarralumla and primary school at Yarralumla. And they'd go in ... when they went to [school] either their mother would take

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them in by car or they'd go on ... there was a little bus that used to take them down.

The accommodation was all part of the job deal when you came to the ... ?

Yes.

You paid rent for the property or something like that?

Yeah, a nominal sort of rent.

How long did you stay there for?

Well, we built a house in 1974, so in fact we moved out of Stromlo and lived in the new house for about six weeks before we went off to Nepal.

What did the Stromlo house consist of? You said it was quite small but could you just outline the sort of rooms it had and the facilities that were available?

I guess, think of it as an 'H'. On one side of the 'H' is the living room and there's a kitchen and laundry. The crossbar of the 'H' is a passageway and part of the kitchen; and then the laundry itself is part of the left-hand side of the 'H' and then there's three bedrooms and a bathroom; and then there was a garage and a rough shed behind that.

Had this been purpose-designed or it had grown to this shape?

No, it was a properly designed house, a government house.

There was electricity and water or tank water or ... ?

Oh yes, we were quite pleased to have real water, town supply water instead of rain water tanks and things like that.

How many cottages were there in this Stromlo settlement?

There'd be ten or twelve, I suppose.

All housing foresters or forestry workers.

Yeah, all with forestry workers; it was a little forestry settlement.

And their families.

Yeah.

How many people all up, can you ... ?

If you take an average of five per house – would that be right? Perhaps not. No, I think, say, four per house would get it more ... say, you'd be looking at thirty-five to forty people.

Tony Fearnside



Tony Fearnside in January 2009. (A. Fearnside)

Did they intermingle much or was it just like an outlying suburb of Canberra and they'd get into a Canberra a lot? How much of a small community did it constitute in itself?

Perhaps I was on the fringes of it as a sort of boss and perhaps being interested in different things to what the rest of the people there were interested in ... I think it was a good group and I look back on the Stromlo days and I like to feel that I was part of it. They were friendly people and happy days, I think. I'm not sure how the people there would regard me. I think they tended to have a 'we and they', a boss and workers sort of thing, and I never felt that, but I think somehow they often did.

Yes, I could imagine in a small community it would be difficult to throw off the hierarchy of the work.

When it comes down to it, it's a company town or a settlement.

Was there any sort of community hall or pre-school there, or any facilities like that?

No, we were near enough to go to Canberra, whereas at Uriarra and Pierces Creek they had a Uriarra school – a little primary school and things like that – so they would tend to have their bush dances because the surrounding rural area would come in. So that was much more of a community than Stromlo.

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Okay, is there anything else of note that you'd like to mention regarding your career with the Forests?

I'd like to claim fame for inventing the name 'ACT Forests'.

Good on you.

And we drew a little logo which is still used. I think it's been developed since then, but Bill Crowle was our surveyor draughtsman and Bill's been working for many years with ACT Forests. He drew it up and we used that.

Good. I'd like to thank you very much, Tony, for coming along and passing on your information, your experiences and impressions, and I daresay when the history of the ACT forests and forestry is being written that we'll get back to you with other questions.

Yes, thank you.

Thank you.

Terence John ('Terry') Connolly

Interview with Terry Connolly recorded in the sound studio of the Australian War Memorial on 16 March 1995



Terry Connolly in the 1950s.
(K. Mykytowicz)

Terry Connolly was born in Sydney in January 1930 and grew up in the distinctly non-forested environment of suburban Randwick. Over the period 1947–49, he studied science at the University of Sydney, graduating as a Bachelor of Science. Choosing forestry as his career, he then spent two years undertaking his specialist forestry training at the Australian Forestry School in Canberra. After obtaining his Diploma of Forestry, he worked in various parts of Australia. While living and working in Orange NSW, he married Bernadette Iffland there in February 1956.

The couple ended up having four children.

Possessed of a natural head for business and a talent for management, Terry soon found his niche in running large-scale timber mills, turning the raw logs from the forest into marketable timber products. It was his experience in this sphere that brought him back to Canberra in 1973 to run the Integrated Forest Products mill at Hume. After running the mill for fifteen years, he retired to the north coast of NSW in 1988. Terry died in Brisbane in October 2015.

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I'd like to welcome Terry Connolly back to Canberra after he spent so many years here. I'd just like to start off by asking whereabouts you came from originally, Terry, before you came to Canberra? You weren't born here?

I was born at Coogee and I was reared at Randwick. I got a cadetship just after the war because there were three offered at the time by the State. One was soil erosion, one was veterinary science and one was forestry and by default I took forestry.

So it wasn't your first choice?

No, I didn't want anything to do with horses, I'd lost enough money down at Randwick Racecourse, so I knew all about horses; and I didn't want to make mud pies, and it was a free trip to get a university education. After the war it was also difficult because preference was always given to the ex-servicemen at training, and being the eldest of four there wasn't that much money in the house; so it was very handy to get a cadetship and have the education free, plus an allowance. In those days we did two years of science at Sydney University and I was in the very first year that was given a year in the bush. From there I went all over the place. We went down to Batemans Bay in the beginning and we went right up the north coast, went out to the Pilliga Scrub. We went to Taree and we went to Tumut-Batlow.

Naturally, we went to the cold climates in winter and we went to the warm climates in summer. I think that must have been a deliberate test at the time. And then after that we came to Canberra. So I came here in 1950/51 and did the two years at the Forestry School which, of course as you know, is now part of the ANU.

These trips you were doing from Sydney University, were these to the forest areas?

No, we had a whole year in the bush and we were assigned, like slave labour, to wherever we went.

To forestry operations.

Yes, we were under the control of the local district forester, but we went straight out into the bush; it was no desk job. We were out with a mattock and a hammer and a saw and we planted pines. I planted pines in 1949 in Tumut-Batlow. It's very sobering to go back and see the second rotations there. In fact I saw that years ago; I saw that in the 1980s. A man in his lifetime, if he lives a reasonable age, can go about through four rotations of *Pinus radiata*.

That's certainly one way of looking at it.

You're flat out to do one rotation of *Eucalyptus pilularis* or Blackbutt. So then we came back to Canberra and we did umpteen subjects there; and then at the end of it, having successfully passed the diploma course, Sydney University then gave you the science course and you couldn't get one without the other, so that's why you see us write up, B.Sc. (For.), Dip. For. And you never met the other students that we did at the school till we got there because they came from Western Australia and all the other States; whereas now everyone goes to the ANU from day one, and so a lot of my friends, five in particular, we went together that year out in the bush and one of them ended up being the Assistant Commissioner of New South Wales, so he didn't do too badly. I only lasted fifteen years in the fold; five as a student and ten as an operating forester.

What did you think of Canberra when you were here, studying in those early years?
It was a very small town. It was only about 12,000 people.

From the Forestry School out in what was called Westridge then, there was only a gravel road up to the Prime Minister's house. The Prime Minister's house had a very low fence, barely two feet high. The Prime Minister, of course, was Menzies. Often on a Saturday afternoon, as I'd virtually go through his backyard at the top of the hill – and you could – he'd be out walking the dog and he'd give you an imperceptible nod and you'd say, 'Good afternoon, Sir,' and keep on your way to the Wellington pub. The cathedral of St Christopher's was only half built in those days. There were the only two big grey triangle buildings over at Civic, and O'Connor, I think, was just being established as a suburb, but it was a route march to get out there on a bike. And to get out to Duntroon – well, forget about it; it was that far away. We only had pedal power being students. But as I say, there were only 12,000 people in the place. It was about that time that Menzies made up his mind that Canberra would roar ahead. So I never came back to Canberra again till 1973, out here, out in the suburb of Hume and by that time it was 170,000 people and it was growing at eleven per cent per annum. Now, I'm not sure, I think it must be about – including Queanbeyan – about 260,000 people in the area. At least, I think. I haven't seen a count for about twelve months. So I was the first forester, I think, out of Randwick.

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Yes, it's a pretty strange background to enter forestry from.

Not really, because my father was one of eleven and they all come from the country and he was the only one that ever came to the city.

Whereabouts did they come from?

Around Moree, Nowendoc, Wingham and down to Goulburn. My dear old grandfather, he was a saddler of all things; he was a leatherworker. And so he used to travel around the stations for six weeks at a time in the old sulky and doing up all the saddlery in days gone.

None of them into forestry in any way, though?

No, I was the only one. In other words I went back bush, sort of affair. None of my brothers did. My two brothers are firmly entrenched in Sydney and my sister, she's overseas.

When you were a student here, what sort of forestry work did you do as part of your course? – I mean practical work. Were you out in the forests?

Yes, we planted pines during the winter at Kowen and we used to work around Stromlo, climbing trees, collecting seed. We used to work in the nursery at the back of the Forestry School – that was while we were living in Canberra. But then we used to do trips away and the big trips were: one to Mathoura to study the Murray River Red Gum; one down to Batemans Bay to study the eucalypts in the close vicinity to Batemans Bay. We went to Tassie for a trip. We were always very pleased about that. I did like Tassie because I subsequently went back there and worked and lived there for eight years. We dipped out on a trip to Western Australia and I have never in a part of all my travelling – and that includes around the world a couple of times – I have never been to WA, so it's a funny thing that. We went to South Australia for the pine. Spent six weeks there straight. We were just used as labourers just about wherever we went.

And in the local area, in the ACT forests, you ... ?

Yes, various trips we'd go out to ... We planted pines at Kowen. We'd be up at the back of Uriarra, up in the Brindabellas, working in the hardwood, and then we'd come down to other places and help in the thinning. And, of course, it goes without saying, we measured tree after tree after tree and had to go back and do working plans and mensuration formulas and, well, that's what we were there to be taught, anyway.

Terry Connolly

What did you do for a leisure activity in Canberra in those days?

We never had much money. There wasn't much to do anyway.

I was going to suggest that.

There were three ports of call. One was down to the Wellington pub, but then you had to get home. If you missed the bus you were a bit unlucky. There was the picture show. There were only two in town. There was only the one at Manuka and one over at Civic, that's all, and we never went anywhere near Civic, it seemed a heck of a long way away. A lot of the boys seemed to find their way over to the nurses' home at the hospital, but I never had enough money to stretch that far.

What about sport and so on?

Oh sport, we played football. I played two seasons of football and we were the only year ever to win the Canberra Cup which we were always very proud about.

So the Forestry School had its own ...

We had a team.

What sort of football were you playing, Terry?

Rugby Union. You could play Rugby League if you wanted to, there was no objection, because League was always played on the Sunday and Union was played on the Saturday. There were about six teams. There was Royals and there were Norths. Easts never came in till the following year after I left and there [were] so few players at the school then ... because we were two very big years; there were eighty students there the whole time for my two years, so we managed to field two teams, a first and reserve grade. But the year after I left, there were insufficient and they had to go and team up with Easts, like you heard Ron Murray talking about. Ron came in those days and Ron played over with Easts and then, of course, since the students went to the university they had to play for the university side. So we played in the famous side that won.

Our greatest adversary, of course, was Duntroon, I forgot to mention. A game against Duntroon, there was no love lost there. They always considered it a battlefield and if they didn't win they were CB, they were confined to barracks, so we used to delight in tipping them up. They used to come out to some of our parties at the school, which were rather hilarious, and they'd generally wipe themselves and then us foresters had to get them back into the

barracks, which was a real manoeuvring job to get them in there, but they used to appreciate it. They'd come out the next day and thank us, except one fellow didn't. He had a rather natty little moustache – I can always remember the darn thing – we had him propped up in bed and we locked him in it. We wrapped him in it to make sure he didn't wander around too far. He had a name similar to another friend of mine and the girl came into the dance we had at the school and 'Is Mr Stewart here?' Well, there were two Mr Stewarts. There was one from Duntroon and there was one from Forestry School. He got in a bit of a drinking session and he had to go to sleep till about three o'clock in the morning. But during that we took his 'mo' off and we taped it to the end of the bed and, of course, the first thing he saw when he woke up is his mo on either side. We did pile him in the car and get him all back to Duntroon without the sentries intercepting us.

They had an extraordinary system at Duntroon: they had grandfather, father and son; so when you came to Duntroon you were given a number and I think the number a hundred less was your father and working in the hundreds, the grandfather. The grandfather had all rights. If the grandfather came along and said, 'I'm going out tonight and I want your suit,' you had to part with the suit. And, of course, this fellow crashed badly during the night and the suit didn't look any too good, and I was very concerned about what the grandson was going to say when he sighted this suit next morning. But they were just the pranks we played. We got up to a couple of tricks: we did Boadicea, the armless statue of the Goddess of War, that was at the end of Commonwealth Bridge – this is before the lake went in, you must remember, there's no lake – and someone decided we'd go down and put a bra on her. The humorous thing is they went all around town, over Civic, trying to get her size but she was 'ginormous'. It's a bit embarrassing, especially in those days, walking up to a counter and asking the woman for a bra and you couldn't exactly kid it was for your mother or your aunt. Anyway, they got over there and she's there right at the end of Commonwealth Avenue, just along from Albert Hall she was. She's not there anymore today, but that's where she was.

The bridge was a wooden bridge, a clattering, clanking, old bridge; you could always hear things coming across it because, as I keep saying, there was no lake, it was just a dribble of water running through – the Molonglo. When the bra was no good, someone had brought some emery paper and, of course, she was a copper green colour so they started to shine her up in the obvious

spots and that got interrupted several times with cars coming across and the headlights always used to come up and shine on these two 'boobs' getting shined up. Everyone got very nervous about it and someone came out with a pot of paint and they painted it, the two protuberances, and away we went into the night.

Next day in Parliament, boy, did Question Time go to town and they wanted to know who the perpetrators were and who was going to fix it. We all dived for cover and no one knew a thing about it, everyone had been in bed for hours and didn't know what they were talking about. Dr Jacobs got up and he used to raise these imaginary eyebrows, we used to talk ... 'Look this, boys,' he says, 'There'll be no more of this.' He wasn't saying we did it, but he just said there'll be no more. Finally, the workmen, they were embarrassed, they had to come down with a three ton truck and lift her and put her on the truck and take her away to some workshop and grind the paint off in relative privacy. That got us to some notice, otherwise we kept pretty quiet.

The next one, someone got the bright idea where Robbie Burns was, down near the Wellington ... Robbie sits there on a seat, so we built a sort of a toilet out of hessian and mounted that over Robbie and stuck the paper in his hand. The Burns Club wanted to fight all and sundry, so we gave the gags away for a while. There was only 12,000 people which is like a big country town and it was that scattered, of course, nothing much was together. I mean, from Westridge right up the hill on the northern side, those suburbs were not built to '52/53. And the Swedish Embassy had just been built when we got there, opposite the Prime Minister's house; that was the state of the pole [?]. The other side, that Embassy Motel, that was all a grass paddock. I have seen changes in Canberra because when I come to live here in '73, I lived in Hawkesbury Crescent and that was the southernmost street in Canberra at the time. Nothing had been built down into the Kambah and Wanniasa - nothing. I used to walk the dog of a morning up on top and I looked straight down to the Isabella Plains; there were sheep in the paddock. Kambah was only started in 1973/74 and now Hawkesbury Crescent is almost the geographical centre of Canberra. You look at a map and look how far - draw a line on Hawkesbury Crescent. I've seen the changes in Canberra.

Whereabouts were you living when you were a student here?

We lived out a Westridge, just down in front of the Forestry School. The Forestry School doubled up as Marist Brothers, Darlinghurst. When Marist

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Brothers, Darlinghurst, closed down – you remember years ago – when the Brothers came to town they used the old Forestry School, because the foresters are over at ANU, and that became the Marist Brothers, Canberra, until they then moved on to where they are at the present time, down near Melrose High.

I didn't know that.

That's right. And the years, the Brothers at Darling ... , of course, 'Darlo' was our great adversary at school, being a Randwick boy. That was where Ray Lindwall came from and a few others and we didn't muck about when we played Darlo.

It's a bit of history for you. They used it temporarily as a school until they built the school. I don't know why they had to move out of Darlinghurst so quickly, but the fact was they ended up finding themselves here in Canberra and the Forestry School doubled up for a while. The Forestry School, it was a library sort of a thing.

What happened when you graduated from the Forestry School? Where did you go after that?

I got posted to Urunga. I was a State employee. Most of us had a cadetship from our State, but some had a cadetship from the Commonwealth, and with the Commonwealth you either got a job here in Canberra or Darwin or more likely Papua New Guinea. But if the States were short or students had failed or whatever, they could invite a Commonwealth graduate to come and work for the State; so we had quite a few Commonwealth students go and work with us. In my year there were five of us when we graduated, but I know two or three Commonwealth students also got jobs with us in the first year, that's 1952.

You were on a bond of some kind.

Yes, on a bond of £500. That's astonishing, you know. I stuck it out. Two mates didn't. They got out after two years and paid the remains of the bond. A rather funny fellow I worked with, one I played football with, and he told them he wouldn't pay it at all, and he won. And me, from halfway through the bond, I was looking for a way of getting out of the Commission. I didn't want to leave the timber industry, but I thought I'd like to be on the other side of the fence, on the utilisation rather than the growing. So yes, I went to Urunga.

The bond was four years, wasn't it?

Five. One had gone because I'd done a year in the bush and when we came out we were on second year seniority. They compensated us because instead of getting foresters first year pay, we got foresters second year pay.

Just as a matter of interest, you said in the years you were at the Forestry School there were about eighty students ...

Forty in a class and a lot of them were the ex-servicemen who'd come. Yes, we were nearly fifty/fifty. There were characters like me that were only fifteen when the war ended, so when I was in Canberra I was just twenty; and then there were a lot of fellows there twenty-eight plus, and so we were an unusual mixture because their studies had been interrupted. Maybe if they hadn't gone to the war, they mightn't have gone into forestry, but nevertheless some of them took the course and stuck it all the way through and some of them were very bright fellows. I remember a bloke called Doug Johnson – he worked here for a year in CSIRO – he was a brilliant mind and he cleaned up every medal that was going, whether it was at the uni or the Forestry School and he was just one of those sort of characters – modest, mild sort of fellow, but one of those wows of a brain.

Were these ex-service blokes on a bond, too?

No, I don't think they were. They were on the CRTS, the Commonwealth Retraining Scheme. Some of them, bits of larrikins at the uni, they only put in the year and then disappeared but they never got through to Canberra. The fair dinkum ones, they came through to Canberra and they didn't do the year in the bush. So some of them that I started off with in first year in the uni, they were in the year ahead of me when I got to Canberra. But when I went out in the field we were on the same rate of pay – if you can understand the Irish of all that.

Did they get preference in jobs?

No, they didn't preference in jobs. They got a preference in a cadetship. If it was you or them, they got the preference for the cadetship. It was funny, myself, I ended up eleventh and my father, in his wisdom, he says, 'Go and start at first term, I'll stake you for the first term at the uni because,' he said, 'I rather fancy someone will drop out and then you'll be able to ...,' and that's exactly what happened. One of the ex-servicemen, due to health reasons, I think, dropped out and then the Forestry Commission of New South Wales,

as it was called then, invited me to take up the place, so my father was a bit shrewd. So from there on in I was working for the Commission.

When you finished the training at Forestry School and you were posted to Urunga, what happened to the ex-servicemen? Were they posted as well?

Yes, they were posted all over the shop.

Neither of you had any say in the matter?

No, you weren't asked where you wanted to go, they told you.

You had to be careful where you came from and, of course, I guess I was an enigma because I came from Randwick. But apart from that there were a lot of fellows that came from North Sydney. North Sydney High seemed to breed foresters like – I don't know why – like a dog breeds fleas. Every second bloke, 'Where did you come from?' 'North Sydney High.' A fellow came from Taree, Jack Stewart, and Jack went on to be Assistant Commissioner in New South Wales – he's retired at Port Macquarie at the moment – and he and I went through the whole five years together, so we were pretty good cobbers. But Jack, he was posted immediately down to Tumut. So [despite] the fact that he'd come from Taree and the hardwood, he went to Tumut. Another fellow I knew, ex-serviceman, they sent him straight out to Glen Innes and he started to have to put pines in at Glen Innes. My poor mate, Paul O'Neill, he came from out West Wyalong and that's where he went back to, out west into the cypress.

I think whoever was doing the allocation must have thought, send them somewhere they like, but me, I went to Urunga and that was great because in those days all the action was on the north coast. It was a boom period. I was very fortunate with the Commission, wherever there was a boom I went, because after I worked there for a while and did sawmilling studies and those other work I mentioned, I went to Orange and pine was the boom; and then they dragged me back to Woolgoolga and by that time I'd had it. From Urunga, and I was single, I went to Macksville and it was much the same area. There was Urunga, Macksville and Kempsey, all in the Kempsey District management area.

Kempsey was interesting because I ran into the cedar boys, the Haydon fellows up in the bush. The Haydons are characters because they're that mad about red cedar. They had two race horses in Sydney, one was called 'Red Cedar' and the other was 'Cedrella'; well, of course, *Cedrella australis* is red cedar. I was there when the old fellow, the brother, he went out into the

bush and never got found again. What they used to do, they'd go up in the bush up around Carroway,¹ on the top of the Macleay River – and you can look across and in the wintertime the cedar changes colours – so they'd spot them and they'd track all the way into it and record it on a rough map; and then the following summer back they'd come with the tractors and go in and chase it. They were mad, Brendan. I've seen them with one tractor lowering another tractor down the hill to hook onto the tree to bring it back up again. I remember the church at Nambucca, Star of the Sea, it's full of red cedar. If you ever go past it, go and have a look. I was in Macksville when that happened, a bloke called Joe Cooper got that. All I was responsible for was collecting the royalty. I didn't have to tell him where the cedar was. The typical thing with Joe was, he'd get in the tractor in the morning and he'd go all day, six miles in those days – we weren't talking French then – went all the way up, camped the night, went down, chopped the tree down, got it snigged up by midday and came half-way home; and then the third day he came out – one log.

That's pretty keen.

It's worth a lot of money. I know where there's a red cedar up above me in Woolgoolga, only twenty minutes away from the house, it's a monster. It's nearly a metre and a half through and it's ten metres high. It must be worth about twenty or thirty thousand dollars royalty for one stick.

All the time I worked there I never knew it was there until I went back in retirement and found it. I didn't find it, a fellow pointed it out to me. Amazing. So that was Urunga.

You spent quite a few years on the north coast and then you went over to Orange.

About three, one year in Urunga, one year in Macksville, one year Kempsey, and then I got out of the pure forestry bit and I went on what they call 'snigging studies'. Snigging is the term for when you pull a log out with a track from the stump to the landing, to load onto a truck, that's snigging; you know the term, don't you? Well, I did snigging studies and also I did sawmill studies at the time.

I was attached to the Economics and Marketing Branch in Head Office for the calculation of royalty. And being from Randwick, of course, I said this snigging is just the same as the racehorse – you've got the different tracks on,

1 Probably Carrai.

different conditions, you got different operators like a jockey and you've got a different horse underneath you – a tractor – because they were all shapes and sizes. So I started to analyse it like that. I would have loved to have had a computer in those days to do it. I did run out a system for them and I added points for the jockey, the operator, the tractor and the track and steepness of slope, rocky, muddy. It was used quite often. It was amazing, first practical thing I ever did.

So nobody had ever done this kind of analysis of snigging before.

No, it was just guess. It was awful. In fact it was a way of rigging the royalty – I've seen that done a couple of times. Some of the district foresters already knew what the royalty was or what they thought it should be, so they worked it backwards; it wasn't real ethical because the catch was the investigating foresters had to go out and put ... There was a form starting from price in Sydney, rail freight and then falling, snigging, logging, all the rest – boom! – and if it came out the wrong answer, he'd just alter it and put another one in. I refused to sign it one day and the joke was, I said, 'Well, if you were hopping out three times up and down that hill, [but] I'm getting jack of it, so if you want to sign it, you sign it.' He wasn't going to bluff me on it because it's a fair hunk of money. But nevertheless the whole system was unsatisfactory and even the auction system that they practise in Queensland was also no good because the mills would rig it between themselves: you have this and I'll have that, and the bidding was all fixed before it got going. And they were only offering out tiddlywink bits of volume. But now when you've got things like big chunks of pine like the Commission offered at Bathurst the other day, 400,000 cube, well, you've got to sit down and do your sums properly and put in a tender because you've got to put in the infrastructure and you've got to build mills and you're going to employ a couple of hundred people; makes honest men of them all. In the old days with bits and pieces, it was really a haggling game.

It wasn't very scientific. It wasn't what we were taught at Canberra. And then after that I asked to get out, be relieved of that, so they said, 'Right, we'll send you out to Orange,' and at Orange it was the most interesting of the lot because I had two lots of pine out there. I had [The] Mullion to the north of Orange that had been planted 1919 to 1935, and remember I'm in there in 1955, so here's a chance of doing a management plan for an area that is coming on for its rotation, because even the oldest, 1935, allowing thirty years in 1965,

the whole rotation had been finished. In 1919, I was there in 1955, what's that? That's about thirty-six years, so I had a whole heap, all the 1919/20 could be clear-felled. And the idea, of course, is you do a first thinning, a second thinning, maybe or maybe not a third thinning and then you do the clear-falling. Roughly you started at fifteen to eighteen years and then twenty-two to twenty-five and then somewhere between thirty to thirty-five you clear-fall it. The whole trick with it – and this, I suppose, is the art of forestry – is that the volume, unlike the bank where you can put money in the bank if you want to for thirty years and you can draw it out, you can always separate the interest from the capital ...

The volume, unlike the bank where you can put money in the bank, if you want to for thirty years and you can draw it out, you can always separate the interest from the capital without any pain, but it's a little hard to separate from each tree the growth that's gone on over that period of time. So what you do, you calculate what the growth was, I believe the interest, on your growing crop and you make it the summation of the cleared-fall volume and the thinning volumes and that equals it, and that's the art of it. It's so much easier in plantations where you've got a homogeneous stand and the faults are all the same as compared to a mixed hardwood bush on the north coast. So that was that.

On the other hand, the operation we had around Canobolas – the forestry office was only about three years old when I got out there. Funny, I always got sent to where there was a bit of fun. What they'd been doing there, they'd been buying up all the old cockies' farms till they'd accrued in acreage terms, 12,000 acres, which wasn't bad. That was about 7,000 hectares. No, it's less than that. The funny part was, as we got to the last of the owners – generally the funny part was the worst of the farms with blackberries and everything imaginable on them which were going to cost a lot of money to clean up – the price, of course, went up because they knew all about their mates were getting, because the first bloke to sell out, he was very niggly by the time the tenth fellow sold out. Anyway, that was a bit of a circus going on and that was unusual foresters going out and buying land. And then we started to plant it and we planted in big jags; we were planting 1,000 acres a year which was a lot because we even got up to 2,000 acres a year.

The employment, it was always hard to get labour except our old friends

Email helped us out.² Email had the big factory in Orange – white goods – and they sacked everyone during the winter because no one wanted to buy fridges in winter time, and we'd put them back on again. I can always remember taking them out of a morning – talk about all shapes and sizes, they were a funny crew – and you'd say, 'This is a pine tree and you must be careful to have this up and the roots down.' You had to give it as literal as that, just pretend you were talking to twelve year old kids. And then in those days the way you dug it was two fellows, one had the mattock and he went ahead and took a couple of blows and loosened the soil, and then the second fellow came along and he had a chisel-shaped shovel which he wedged to and fro and he slipped the pine in and then either side, closed up the gap. Sounds simple but you can imagine how complicated they can make it. One morning, after giving this, because every time there'd be new faces each morning, so you'd have to go through the spiel all over again. I got a bit careless and I said one morning, 'And whatever you do, don't plant it that way, it just takes a little longer to grow.' And boy, the District Forester is right behind me and I didn't know he was there. He nearly blasted me clean out of my socks; I got an awful dressing down for that.

What sort of pines were they planting up there?

Radiata. The difference is that on the high cold country with about thirty-five inch rainfall and well drained area, you put *radiata* in. When you get down on the coast near the salt water, flat, tends to be a bit swampy but also a high rainfall and a very high temperature, you put the slash pine. Because in America where the *radiata* comes from is the Monterey coast in California where they don't look too hot either, by the way, but however that's where they come from and they do wonders out here. The slash, of course, is on the eastern coast, Alabama, Georgia, round New Orleans, Louisiana, that belt through there. We've tried to copy the 'climagrams' as they call them of the other countries and then match it with species. It was one of the other things taught at the school about how to put new species. Fortunately, by the time I got out, everything had been checked out pretty right of which species to put where.

² This was Email Limited, a company that manufactured electricity meters and electrical appliances.

So you went on to slash pine establishment up in the north coast after Orange.

Yes, I was there about three years at Orange and I was only the Assistant Forester throughout all these operations and suddenly they decided they'd throw me to the wolves and they put me in charge, and so they sent me back to Woolgoolga; Barcoongere is the name of the plantation that's to the north of Woolgoolga. I'd got married by that time, so away we went back to the north coast again which I liked. I haven't had to work inland much in my life except that bit in Orange and the time I worked here in Canberra. When I went back to Woolgoolga I had a combination of a hardwood area to look after and I had sixty people working on the pine establishing it and it had been started in 1947. But when I looked at the pines I just couldn't believe how bad they were. I know comparisons are odious and I know there's two different rotations for *radiata* and slash, but the slash was bare. It was poor country we'd put it on. Not me, I hadn't started planting it. They'd put it on *Eucalyptus planchoniana* country and it's the ugliest looking tree you'd ever see. It doesn't even make good firewood. It's such a poor site that I couldn't imagine why they did it.

It might have been political. It was pretty flat country and they'd whacked in about 4,000 acres of it. I found out how bad it was because we had to go and clean any regrowth that came up. The slash pine is called *Pinus elliotii* and I noticed on the compartment of records that this was the third time we'd gone in to slash the eucalypt; it kept coming back and getting higher than the pine. And then we had some *Pinus taeda* which is loblolly pine, which is amongst the southern pine brackets, and I went down and looked at it one day and I got a shock. Sure, it was only eighteen year old, [but] here it's dying in the top. So here was a plantation coming to the end of its physical rotation, long before it looked like getting to an economic rotation.

So I rang up my noble leader in Coffs Harbour and said, 'You better come down and have a look at this.' One thing led to another and in the finish he wasn't game to tell head office it was no good. But I wrote a letter and he was one of these typical blokes and he'd just stamp it'd [been] seen and copy for your information. I think it bounced up and down. I said to him, 'Look, we've got to stop the charade. We're wasting taxpayers' money.' And even today there's nothing bigger than that come off it - this is 1995.

It's still going?

No, it works on a seventy-year rotation. All I'm saying is the '47 pines, I doubt if they've all been harvested even now in 1995 because seventy gets you to 2017.

But all the stuff goes up to a plant at Lowana above Coffs [Harbour] there, and they mainly cut it up into making crates for packing glass and that sort of thing. AGI owned the factory at one stage.

Anyway, I said, 'Look, if you don't want to stop it, at least when we got into block so-and-so let's thin out the pine and let the blackbutt come through,' and it was that remark that spurred him. Up they came and they walked all over it again, but of course they realised that ... so that stopped it. I had to put two years of planning in there, but it just got right up my nose that much that I had to protest that it was ...

So even though you didn't like it you still had to put the ...

Yes, I had to put it in. But then again it all got dismantled and work for sixty blokes suddenly disappeared. I always remember it, it was the time the West Indians had that famous draw.

That's right, 1960/61.

That year we were about to put the match in because everything had been cleared and lying on the ground for about three months and we were about to torch it and burn it before you ... And then the [cricket] match got that interesting, we were really late that day torching it and when we did let her go we spent nearly into the night putting it out again; it threatened to go everywhere. I always remember that part of it.

You must have been at Woolgoolga for a few years.

1958 to 1962. It's in the CV, you'll catch it on there. And then by that time I'd been looking for a job out of the Commission because funnily enough they were going to send me back to Urunga again, I was starting to do the ... in charge but ... In those days it was expensive to get shifted because the allowance when you got shifted wasn't much, and housing was very difficult to come by and it was also very difficult to sell. In small towns it would be that tight; there was only 900 people in Woolgoolga when I went there, so there weren't too many stray houses and the road back to Coffs was very, very rugged. You were isolated. There was no railway station in Woolgoolga. Woolgoolga is a funny town because Coffs and it fight that much that, way back at the turn of the century, they built five tunnels all the way to Glenreagh to make sure they didn't have to put the railway up the coast road through Woolgoolga. Woolgoolga should be in the next, the Ulmarra shire; there's tremendous rivalry. It's funny because when I first went up there in '49 - that

was as a student – Dorrigo was the big town and you know all the fuss at Dorrigo. Dorrigo was it. Dorrigo was the shire and Coffs and ‘Woopy’³ were just two villages.

Coffs was a little bigger than Woopy and then they had to build a harbour. The harbour could have gone at Woolgoolga as well but they didn’t. Sir Earl Christmas Page made sure it went in at Coffs Harbour because we had him just to the north of Grafton, the old Sir Earl. That was when I was a young fellow.

What was the year actually you got married, Terry?
1956.

Did you have any kids by the time you were at Woolgoolga?

Yes, one was born at Woolgoolga. We had four, two boys and two girls.

So this would have made moving around a bit more difficult, too, especially if you weren’t getting a good allowance.

Yes, Bronwyn had just been born in Orange and we had to shift her as a baby to Coffs; and the only way I could get out of it was [that] I paid the difference between the train fare and the air fare to fly them up to make it quickly because they were only three kids under four. But the Commission, NSW didn’t seem to mind much; they weren’t very sympathetic.

When I got to tidy up Woolgoolga for them and even reduce the staff and everything and had it running pretty well, you no sooner sit back and you’re going to have a blow and they wanted to shift you again, but there was no extra money coming. There was no extra pay from going there to the next place.

So even though they were going to put you in charge of Urunga there was no promotion. They just had another headache and they wanted me to go and do it. Whereas that other bloke that spent nine or ten years in the one town, that was good as money in your pocket, it really was in those days. We weren’t overpaid in those days.

Were they going to send you to Urunga because they thought you were a bit of Mr Fix-it by this stage?

Yes, that’s where they were going to send it. I said what about some more money and they said, ‘No, forget it.’

3 Colloquial term for Woolgoolga.

So this is why you got out.

Yes, I was getting poor, too. I was getting to be about three weeks behind with my expenses and, well any time, but particularly in those days public servants couldn't have another job and you couldn't get a reputation for owing money or anything like that around town. I was paying all my bills but I knew I was steadily going backwards. So I finally got a job in Kauri in the north-west of Tasmania,⁴ and they gave me a nice car and they gave me a house and they gave me more money than the Commission ever did. The only difference is, if I failed they'd sack me; whereas the public service it takes a long time to give you the bullet short of doing something drastic, and then if you're a bit hopeless they tend to keep you and let someone else get in your way. So I went down there in the middle of winter again and, of course, living up Woopy the kids only had shorts and shirts and no warm clothes and no blankets, and even today I don't have a fireplace in the house at Woolgoolga, that's how mild the winter is. Suddenly we took them down there – oh boy. However, the company was good and they built me a brand new house there and we could build it whatever design we wanted and my wife liked it and I had money in the bank for the first time because I sold the house I had in Woolgoolga. I was nearly a plutocrat.

Whereabouts in Tasmania was it, Terry?

Smithton, right in the north-west. It's fifty miles west of Burnie. Stanley is the next little place, on The Nut.

Yes, I know Stanley quite well.

I know Stanley well because Stanley is older than Melbourne and Melbournians hate you to tell them that. There's a pub in Stanley that was up as a pub before they even brought licensing in. If you're ever there, go down and ask to see in the cellar, and just see the structure of it underneath there. Because it was Sydney, Hobart and then they went over to Stanley and then they came across to Georgetown and they couldn't make up their mind between Georgetown and Launceston. They finally settled on Launceston, and it is 'Lonceston' not 'Lawnceston' and it's 'Durby', not 'Darby', which is rather a conflict by ... I can never understand that with Tasmanians. I went down there

4 The job was actually with the Kauri Timber Company which had originally been formed to exploit the native kauri forests in New Zealand. In Tasmania, the company did not cut kauri, but rather native Tasmanian hardwoods, most likely Tasmanian oak (GMCK-S).

and the big thing there was, the fellow says, 'Do you know anything about sawing it up?' I said, 'No, only out of a book; what they told me at Forestry School.' 'Well,' he said, 'You're the bloke I want.'

That sounds pretty unusual, but go on.

He wanted someone without any preconceived ideas because he was a bit of a ... and he was one of the Ingrams. Now, the history of the Ingrams I don't know, we're talking about history everything bar here, really, but however ...

The Ingrams came from New Zealand in 1910 to Powelltown, just outside Melbourne, about sixty mile north of Melbourne, and it was a railway company and they went up into the big alpine ash there and set up a magnificent sawmill, all steam-driven – everything was driven by steam – a wonderful mill, beautiful power. It didn't achieve great fame until about 1939 when the big fire went through and a half of Powelltown got burnt to death because they got trapped in those trenches they used to dig at the time to dive into. The trouble was they only dug the trenches straight; they never put a loop in it. When you build them, you've got to put like a Z and you come up and you go in it and the other way. If it's straight the fire will just come through and exhaust all the oxygen and you won't get burnt, you'll just get asphyxiated, like what happened to Dresden in the bombing. They were talking about it recently. They never got burnt, they got asphyxiated.

He had a brother called Keith who established the *radiata* industry in South Australia. He started it all up at Penola. There was a family on that and another fellow, he was up at Alexandria. Bruce used to specialise in installing – he was an engineer by trade – he installed kilns and layouts. He was a great old theorist, this Bruce, but he conned me, anyway, so he got me in. He told me all the theories and they seemed reasonable, so away I went and started to put them into practice. And the reason I got away with it was about threefold. First of all, the company down there were very conservative at the top and they thought the only way to dry timber was to put it in strips and leave it outside till it dried. The first year I was there it rained 300 days out of the 365, so nothing was going to dry. They knew nothing about kilns and this big pre-dryer we built. So the first thing was this mystery thing and because I was the new bloke – I was only a Taswegian, I wasn't a Tasmanian – I wasn't too welcome because they wanted to know why one of their people hadn't got the job. The boys on the job kept asking me how the thing worked and then I woke up I had the edge because they didn't know I didn't know. But I learnt

very quickly and I studied it up until finally we had this huge building with sixteen lines going in it and it held nearly three-quarters of a million super feet – in other words, about two and a bit thousand cubic metres of wood at a time, dead green. We dried it in twenty-eight days.

This was a big new ...

This was a new concept for Tasmania.

Go on, the other thing was?

And they let me just spend money. I just used to build it and sign the chit but I never had any approval; like later when I went and worked for other companies, they'd put you through the cleaning house: you had to have a proposition, it had to be countersigned by 5,000 people and the tea lady and then you might proceed and then you had to get progressive reports. None of that happened down there. I spent 200,000 pounds there which is a lot of money – I'm talking about 1963. No-one asked me to account for anything. I just signed everything. I checked it was right and no-one ever showed me ... All I did was sign and order stuff. I had an order book. I made sure I ordered everything that went on the job, accounted for it that it was there, but no-one's asking me and no-one told me what I had to build it for either.

Was the place making money?

A bit but it really made some money because all the stock that was outside, once I had the pre-dryer, instead of it being out there from anything from eight months to eighteen months, I was turning it around in twenty-eight days, and all the stock suddenly vanished and all that cash and interest that was getting paid on it suddenly was in the pocket.

And there was a big market for the ...

Oh yes, we had no trouble selling it. In the terminology of the time, we sold four, five and six by one in flooring and we used to sell overseas, too: Taxex, we sent it to the west coast of America, to San Francisco. We sent it to Belgium, to Germany and France.

And it was all kauri.

All kauri.⁵ And then I controlled it from the bush to when it went on the boat, which was an interesting job. Because of my background as a forester I knew

⁵ See previous footnote no. 4.

how to handle the contracts [inaudible]. The sawmills ... I didn't know how to cut the timber up, but I knew how to measure it and say whether it was good, bad or indifferent. I established quality control rules quick and lively. I got on with them pretty well so they didn't mind me because I didn't tell them how to do it; I just told them what I wanted and I'd go around and I used to chat them every day. And then out I'd go to the drying plant and we'd be pre-drying it down from whatever it was – 120 per cent down to thirty per cent.

And then it went down to Stanley where the kilns were and we dried it right down to ten per cent. Out of the kilns we went into the planing sheds and we had these huge Canadian planers that moved 300 feet a minute – they didn't muck about. They didn't know about them, so we bought them and we put them in size there again and a period of change. And it's the best thing because when confusion is rife and you know what you're doing, you can travel fast because no-one is game to ... and no-one has got a preconceived idea about what's going to happen; and so I made a lot of money except for the one hiccough. Kauri in their wisdom were run by a couple of – nearly said rogues – characters over in Melbourne who are long since gone and they mortgaged all the stocks right over to Western Australia. They had the biggest sawmill in Western Australia. Kauri were huge at one stage. They started in 1880 in New Zealand. These two characters, they knew how to wind it down. They did the real 'Bondy' trick on this place.⁶ What they did, everything was mortgaged, and my boss said to me on one of the few occasions, 'Terry, you can't use any timber unless it's replaced.' Well, I also knew the spirit of it was that you didn't go using the older stuff in the yard because it was dried and had added value on it as compared to stuff green, just come out that day. No-one would give it to me in writing. What they wanted me to do was to take the dry stuff off one end and put the green up the other. But when Ingram told me that we could dry from the green I thought I've never struck a better time, so I filled them all up with green. When I went out to pick my friend, Ingram, off the plane – he used to fly across about once a fortnight – well, we were halfway back over the Sisters Hills and he says, 'What are you doing?' I said, 'You'll be real pleased. I'm putting your drying the green to the test.' He went white. He had visions of all this timber being utterly ruined.

Anyway, he got in and he had this beautiful blue suit with white pinstripes

6 A reference to the late Western Australian business tycoon, Alan Bond (1938–2015).

and a tie and a hat. Well, the hat got flown off and the cigarette out of his mouth and he even forgot to take his coat off and he walked up and down every line of this and came out in a lather of sweat and grinning and he says, 'It's going to work.' I say, 'You said it was going to work.' And that's how we did drying from the green – it worked. And then we went and built a big band mill there and I built immunising chambers and reconditioning chambers. I'd never done any of this in my life, but I suppose I always had an engineering yen about me even though I can't figure out the calculations. As I often said to people, you don't have to be a doctor of music to know when a bum pianist is playing. I always had a feel for it and what it should do and I used to talk a lot to the fellows on the floor, the fellows that did it and it's amazing how much information and practical stuff they had, but they could never coordinate it and bring it together, and I guess that's where I was lucky. I used to pull it all together and say this is it, and also I'd take the bump. No-one wanted to take the bump and I said, 'All right, my headache,' and away we'd go. But in return for that they used to give me great loyalty and cooperation and we got the thing done. So there was a big break forward and people came from everywhere to see that pre-dryer then. Then we doubled it, we built it bigger. Built another one on the other side.

Who was handling the contracts, too? – negotiating the contracts for the sale of this stuff. Was that you?

No, I didn't have to do the marketing. All I had to do was make sure that the logs got to the mills so that the mills had plenty of logs. I coordinated what came out of the mill even though I didn't control the guy in the mill. The guy in the mill ... but I was really above him and I could chat him up about quality if it wasn't right; and if anything went wrong and I'd be back and chew his ear about it, but normally I left them alone. I said, 'You know how to do it better than me, all I'm telling you is this is exactly what we want'; and I used to make gauges and everything for them so they could measure it. 'You don't need me here, you can police yourselves.' I used to sit out mainly at the dryer all the time and the odd time I'd go down to Stanley. Of course, the kiln drying was easy then. I used to let the marketing bloke ... he'd tell me what sizes he wanted and the order they came because in the finish when I dried from the green, if I stuck it in there and I stuck the wrong size in, he was unlucky because twenty-eight days later that was going to come out and he'd have to handle it. If he couldn't use it, well, he'd have to wait a long time for the next

lot to come on. In the finish we had a great big blackboard and we had week-by-week, everything that was green, partly dried, dried, undressed, dressed; and every Monday morning he and I used to sit in front of it and I'd say, 'This is it' – what happens this week – 'and this is what is going to happen for the next six.' And out of that we got control.

Very well organised.

Except some salesman in Melbourne would ring up and want something and then I'd do the nut and tell him, 'Well, you can't have it. You can't have it before such and such.' 'I've got to.' 'Well, you go to the Managing Director.' The Managing Director would ring up my boss at Smithton, he came out and 'Got to do it.' I said, 'I don't know when you blokes are going to work out what we're doing here. You're quite happy taking all the money as it comes through, but to do that we've got to do certain things at certain times.'

The guy has just got to know his market. 'Tell him to go out and buy it off someone else.' 'Oh yeah, he could do that, couldn't he?' 'Of course he could, couldn't he?' I said, 'I'm not talking about not satisfying the customer. Just don't wreck what we've got going when the odd-bod turns ... It's better to go down the street and buy it off someone else and then bring it back, put your label on it and give it to him. The fellow is only after service. He's not fussy where it comes from. He wouldn't even know where it comes from.'

I suppose while the place was being reorganised and all these changes were taking place, the demand was growing for the product, too.

On and off. Every ten years of my life, when I first went out to forestry to Urunga, the first job I had was to sack ten people before I'd even collected my first salary. I wasn't real pleased about that. I never liked my boss for giving me that as a job. Here I was green, straight out of Forestry school, never had a salary in my life and the first job he gives me is to go out and give people notice. That was the recession in the early '50s. Then when I went to Tassie in 1963, they were just coming back to work after only working a three-day working week, so that was the second recession. In the '70s, of course, I was here in Canberra with dear old Gough and he fixed that and he threw us all out. And so every ten years and in fact in the '80s or the '90s – the '90s have been two in a hurry – generally there's only one every ten years, but the '90s have been not too good. So there we were, that was Tassie and I had five very fulfilling years there. But then I ran into trouble with education because the

schooling wasn't so good down there and we'd sent the young bloke up to the Marist Fathers at Burnie and he was only in fifth or sixth class and that was unfair to him, so we said ...

That's not good.

Not good. And then the girls were coming next. I said, 'Blimey, there'll only be you and I at home and all the kids will be in boarding school.' It wasn't a matter of the money even though that would have been difficult but I could have handled it. I just said, 'No, that's not what it's all about.' So I looked for another job then and I got a job up in Benalla in Victoria in the Kelly country. Oh yeah, it's the Kelly country and how. I met some of the Kellys.

This move to Victoria, we'll hear all about that in a few minutes. When we get there.

Exactly. Terry, we're just about to move you to Victoria. You couldn't get a proper education for your kids, not without difficulty in Tasmania, so you've moved up to Victoria, to Benalla.

We like to see them at the table every night which was not an unfair request. So, like I showed you in the CV there, it was only a firm that not only had a sawmill and kilns and planers, but it started off in life as a joinery works because the founder, old Jack Terrett himself,⁷ he came from Albury and he was a joiner by trade, and somehow or other, during the war effort of World War 2 he managed to get a quota from the Victorian Forestry Commission which was twofold: he got ordinary scantling type logs out of a mixed bush, just around the foothills outside Benalla; but when you went over and started to climb up into the mountains, then he got the Victorian ash which extends all the way back and of course over the side down to Orbost. In a nutshell, within a very short time I realised he didn't know it, but he was out of wood because they just thought it went on and on up the mountain. But I climbed up there one day and looked down the other side and here's all the mob from East Gippsland coming up the [other side]. And then they thought they'd go north to Wangaratta, but they could forget that because Dunstons at Wodonga had cleaned that up. And of course Dunstons who'd been there for yonks, they bit the dust also and they had to turn over and start cutting pine.

They did what happened in Oberon. They had to change the nature of

7 J.A. Terrett and Company Pty Ltd.

the mill from hardwood to softwood and finally Dunstons got swallowed up by Australian Newsprint when they started up the big plant in the Albury-Wodonga [area].

So all these little fellows, they just vanished. But at that time there was a takeover going on down in Tasmania. Tasmanian Board Mills, who were run by the Holymans – and the Holymans are quite historical people, they go back to having shipping lines which they've still got. In fact they were the original owners of what became Ansett Airlines because Ansett took Holyman's Airlines and bought it and it became Ansett.

I always thought Bob Ansett started it himself in a Victorian country town.

You go back, that's the origin of the ANA, it was Holyman's. Anyway, when they found they lost control of Tasmanian Board Mills to a fellow called Steel who was backed up by a Scottish firm, a shipping company – the name eludes me – but they provided the capital to take it over; and I think the chairman of Cadburys became the chairman of Tas Board Mills and a few things like that. And we pulled the same trick with the pre-dryer. He didn't have pre-dryers either. It was identical to the problem down at Kauri; so for the second time we dried a massive volume of timber and for the first time in twenty-one years Board Mills showed a profit.

Just a slight aside with Board Mills. Their name didn't mean board such as in flooring boards; it meant wide boards like in particle boards. And the company originally had twenty-five or thirty-five – I can't think – they were a whole heap of little mills in the north-east and up on the lake country and down around Geist [?] and those parts in Tassie; all bits and pieces. And finally they got a bright idea, I think it was about 1956, to make this Board Mills.

They sent a fellow to England and somehow he got conned because what he went to buy he didn't buy, and what he came home with was in direct confrontation with a company called APM. They put up this huge building which is still in existence in Launceston which we call 'the straight six' because it looked like looking down Flemington straight. And when you go all over it, there's a huge boiler on the place which you woke up that no sawmill needed, but it was for a board mill. Well, the upshot was that they went broke in a very quick time because the price war started up and APM just blasted them out of the market. APM in their goodness came over and offered to gut the place and buy some of the machinery which, funnily enough, subsequently turned up in Canberra at IFP because I went round and I kicked it one day and I said,

'You look familiar.' So it's a small world again how these things happen. But that was Board Mills and we made the money. I think they made a million-odd bucks the first year and they'd been in the doldrums for twenty-one years.

So this is when you went back to Tasmania in 1970.

1970, yes. I'd had two years at Terretts and just when I was worrying what I was going to do next because I knew Terretts was for the chop, this fellow rang me up and asked me if I'd like to come back and run Board Mills. Of course, when I got back I found he had neither accountants, sawmilling superintendent or anything; so I had to ring around all my mates and bring in a new crew for him which worked rather well because, again, we had people with no preconceived ideas and we all strangers except not to one another, but to the rest; and we moved very quickly, very fast again. But anyway, after a couple of years Tasmanian Board Mills was being put out of business by Australian Paper Mills. No, sorry, Australian Paper Mills put the board mill part of it. So here we are with the shell of a giant board mill and then they woke up, 'We'll go back to sawmilling' because they had about 100,000 cube logs [and] sawmills, all these little bitty mills. So we rationalised the mills down to about five and then we built a very big mill out at Western Junction which is near the airport at Launceston. We built a very big, modern bandsaw mill. I felt pretty good about it, but again I went out to the bush and I found out she's missing.

No resource, right.

So I went out and I talked to Paul Unwin who was the Commissioner of Tasmania whom I knew very well because most foresters know most foresters, and I said to him, 'We're running short.' He says, 'As a matter of fact, I'm going to cut the quotas thirty per cent next year, not only you but the whole lot of you,' which he did. And then I knew he was going to cut another thirty per cent the following year; so people like Kauri, APPM, Tas Board Mills and Risbeys all suffered – the wood was gone. So with most of those companies operating on an average input of 100,000 cubes to suddenly have it halved, their economic feasibility was shot, so they had to get into bed with one another. So Kauri and APPM, they became one and it's still a viable, feasible show in the north-west. As a matter of fact it was one of my consultancy jobs that I worked for Jaakko Pöyry.

That's when I went down. And Boral went and bought Tas Board Mills

which in turn bought out Risbeys, so that shuffled it down to two companies. There's only Boral of any consequence in Tasmania on the east coast, and APPM or Kauri, whatever you like to call them, on the west coast.

And the rest of them of course are pulp people, like ANM⁸ – they had the big show at Boyer. So how times change and that was in less than twenty years. I left there in 1973 and from there up till the start of the 1980s Board Mills staggered on, but then they ran into trouble because it really started to bite. You couldn't have all that infrastructure and capital working and then have your input halved.

So is that why you left because you could see that the resource was running out and that they were cutting the quotas and you couldn't ... ?

And because I didn't get on with the managing director. We had a philosophical difference about where we had to go and, in situations like that, the general manager never wins against a managing director, you can forget it. So I had a friend of mine, Evan Shields, who was down there working with Northern Woodchips – they'd just put the two big chipping companies in on the Tamar River – and he said, 'Why don't you go up to Canberra? They're having a bit of fun up there with the new integrated plant.' I said, 'Yes, I saw it last February.' Because when we were building the mill at Canberra [sic], we went around and had a look at all the new mills getting built on the mainland and, of course, one of the mills getting built was the one out there at Hume. So I put in an application. I understand there were fifty applications and whether I was lucky or unlucky I succeeded.

I remember Mr Schultz from APM telling me, 'You realise fifty applied for this job and we picked you.' I say, 'Well, sometimes it doesn't pay to be lucky.'

Why do you think they picked you?

A couple of reasons. I had the background and I was quite friendly with Duncans, and Duncans were a twenty-two and a half per cent holder of IFP. By that time I was relatively well known in the industry and they knew I was fifty-fifty in that I was part forester; and we'd put some scores on the board with handling big volumes of timber in Tasmania. And personally, I wanted to go back and see a game of Rugby League. I'd had eight years of Australian Rules and I'd only suffered one game and I had withdrawal symptoms and I

8 Australian Newsprint Mills.

never went near the place again; so I was determined that I had to see Rugby League.

One aside, I did coach a Rugby Union side in Launceston among the kids and they came from the orphanage and God knows where, but one of my great achievements in my life was they went out and thrashed Grammar one day, and I couldn't get over how these kids, how I drilled them and I never had time to coach during the week, so I used to coach them an hour before the game and I had them absolutely running hot and by the time they ran on the paddock they were so pleased to get away from training and that they annihilated everything in front of them. They conducted themselves so well that I always remember the captain was a little Aboriginal boy from Flinders Island called Saunders and he had to live out at the orphanage as accommodation to go to the local high school where my kids were going. Anyway, it was one of those things. But it was a great day in their lives when they beat Grammar; it was hilarious. So I came to Canberra again thinking when I left in 1951 I would never see the place again as ever as long as I lived.

What did you find at the mill when you got here?

Pretty chaotic. I wasn't worried about the sawmill so much because I'd seen it and I knew what was wrong with the sawmill and I figured I could fix that relatively quickly.

I figured Hancocks, since they'd been in the business since 1850, they'd know all about the ply mill, so I shouldn't have too much trouble there. And I thought, 'Mother' - that's APM - 'being so big things couldn't be that bad.' However, you know what thought did. When I got into it, the place wouldn't run for twenty minutes without stopping. It was incredible. It was a combination of many things.

What sort of things?

The concept of the place was a bit cockeyed because Edgerley, Mark, deceased now, the poor fellow ...

He was head of ACT Forests at this time or whatever it was called.

Yes, he had engineered the whole show. He had prepared the agreement, he put out tenders and he'd done all the dealing with APM and Hancocks and Duncans. Remember, I'd come eighteen months later and they'd lost a million bucks.



At the Integrated Forest Products mill, logs are lowered into a vat of steaming hot water to soak for up to six hours in order to make peeling easier for the large Finnish-made veneer lathe.

(Forests Branch, Department of the Capital Territory, *Forestry in the ACT*, c. 1978).

Eighteen months after the mill started?

Yes, I wasn't here day one. The original manager who was provided by APM had been dismissed. He still lives here in Canberra. His wife is Elizabeth Grant. She used to be on the council in the early days here. You mightn't have heard of her ... She has probably given it away now but she was very high up in the local ... in the ACT Government. That was before they formed this current ACT government. The point was Howard built the place and then he was there to run it. But he built it to a price and, well, he hadn't got it right because we needed to spend another two million dollars on it that I worked out when I got here and that frightened the partners terribly. So I had problems all round. I had three bosses who rang me up incessantly.

These were the three partners, the three firms. What were the three partners, again? Duncans, twenty-two and a half, Hancocks, twenty-two and a half, and APM, fifty-five per cent.

But APM had a share of all the others – of one of the other two partners.

Oh yeah, APM had forty per cent of Duncan so that meant they had another eight or nine per cent. Let's go back and take them one by one.

APM got in on it because they wanted chips. They weren't interested in timber nor plywood. They wanted chips because Botany – the APM plant at Botany [NSW] – was going to be expanded and a new paper line was going to be put in. Unfortunately they had a strike which lasted a couple of months and so upset the directors in Melbourne that – boom! – Botany stood no chance of getting any more. In fact Botany was [inaudible] from there on in. It was going to become very much less in importance. So all the money went into Maryvale [Victoria] and they put up a big recovery boiler and then they built the new paper line. But in the interim they didn't need any chips. So here I am with an input of – we'll talk cubic – roughly 110,000 cube of which I was going to get forty-odd thousand ton of chips. Even though I had seventy-four acres [at the Hume IFP site], there was no way you weren't going to get buried under 40,000 ton of chips unless you got rid of it, and it wouldn't take a year to bury you, either. Every day running ... I mean, if three days running went with no removal of chips, things got very, very uncomfortable. So that was a problem. APM really, I suppose, could have just stepped out at that point; and would have liked to have stepped out because they really didn't need the chips.

Hancocks wanted to expand because, although they were the biggest in Queensland and had plants at Ipswich and Cairns and also they had one down at Wauchope in New South Wales, they liked to be in on it because this plant when it got going, which it finally did, produced more plywood than the whole state of Queensland at the time. Now relatively speaking that was big-time, but on a world-wide scale we weren't so very big at all.

And then Duncans – Duncans wanted to sell the pine because they were mainly hardwood people from way back and they had no other pine; it was always hardwood. But Fred, the grand old man, he was a great salesman and all he wanted to do was sell the stuff. And for a while they made some money. They had the timber agency, Hancocks had the plywood agency and poor old APM signed the bills, so that monthly board meetings were very uncomfortable because, although two of them took some money away, APM took nothing away. And when I hit there it was a million dollars a year was the loss. Someone said, 'Are you going to buy a house?' and I says, 'No.' The definition I told you of an optimist, last night, at IFP was anyone [who] took a

cut lunch to work.

Because they mightn't have a job at lunchtime, yes?

Other things happening to people for the most part and by the time I got there, in their wisdom, they were starting to work the veneer mill three shifts a day, twenty-four hours, which was crazy. And the ply mill, that's actually fabricating plywood out of veneer, it worked two shifts a day and it was just chaotic. The people weren't used to shift work because it became about the biggest single commercial operation, I think. Except for the government laundry, I think it was the only thing that was bigger.

In Canberra, yes?

In Canberra at the time. And they didn't have a clue. They meant well. They were the weirdest workforce I ever struck in my life. They wandered in and out all the time. We had three gangs. One gang coming, one gang going, one gang working. So much so that I had to have a personnel officer which I'd never had on a plant in my life. For 200 people it seemed ridiculous. And then all sorts of problems. The log yard was non-existent. They hadn't bothered building or consolidating and when it rained around here it just bogged down. And the whole mill was put in back to front: the log yard was on the top side so all the mud just trickled straight down through the whole plant, instead of being on the bottom side and taking it up. The de-barker was totally inefficient and even to the day I left they still made me keep that damned de-barker.

The boiler, of course, was the worst blue: 25,000 pounds of steam, and I've got to use those figures because I don't know them in metric, and you needed 19,000 pounds alone to work the veneer dryer. You needed another two or three to work the hot presses, so there was nothing over for the kilns. So we used to push it. Boilers have additional capacity in them for safety reasons, but we pushed it. But of course we ended up with the famous black steam that went into the air and then that area, like a lot of Canberra, is an inversion area and you can see it: the hot air goes up of a morning and it strikes the inversion layer and it comes out like a gigantic anvil – oh boy. And, of course, in those days we were lucky because I lived in the southernmost street in Canberra and all the Tuggeranong Valley hadn't been thought of. But you can imagine what it was like when it did come into existence and all that traffic roared up past and looked at that stack. There'd been no provision for getting rid of the effluent and we used phenol formaldehyde cooler, and phenol has certain

Canberra's Foresters and Forestry Workers



A worker pushes buttons on a console to operate the veneer lathe at the IFP mill. (Forests Branch, Department of the Capital Territory, *Forestry in the ACT*, c. 1978)

ratings of so many parts per million which aren't too many and you can't count them on that hand – they're less than that. And that was just going out and leaving the plant.

Where was it going to?

Across the highway and down through Miss Campbell's and then across back over towards where there is a septic system down there, a pump, on the junction where you go to Queanbeyan to your right and straight into Manuka on your left. It's a bit hard there, but it's just the junction where that freeway comes in at the moment, except it was a little road at the time, and that crossed around and, of course, it went heading off for Lake Burley Griffin. And then, of course, the waste ... there was nowhere to put anything. When the lathe peeled and when you're rounding up the log to get it perfect symmetrical, well, what comes off is called 'round-up', the first bit, that was actually falling down to the bottom on the floor and a fellow had a wheelbarrow there and was

taking it away. Well again, at 35,000 tons of log going through the veneer mill [per week?] you could allow something like fourteen per cent for 'round-up'. So there's 4,000 tons [of logs] on a daily basis [and] twenty tons [of 'round-up'] a day, and a fellow's got to take it away with a wheelbarrow. And that went up to the back paddock because we were in a very big block; we were seventy-four acres. And on a suitable day or night the procedure was – remember, I'd come in fifteen months after the joint started – they'd light a big fire on a Friday night when they hoped all Canberra had gone down to Batemans Bay for the weekend. But occasionally they goofed because it wouldn't burn right and the smoke would go straight through and put old Canberra airport out of action and oh ... All this was laid on even in three days of sitting in the seat.

I thought the seat was wired when I got there. I thought I had voltage about to come through it and that's why I told that funny story last night about Miss Campbell coming. She still lives out there as far as I know, and boy, she wasn't kidding when she came and demanded to see the manager ...

Because of the black water going into her property.

It was black all right. I knew in a flash what had gone wrong as soon as I saw it. So I had no chance of settling in. I was on the hop from day one. So I blocked off the drain and I dug a big dam right outside the thing as a preliminary to hold it; and then I still had the headache what to do with the water because sooner or later it had to be released. So we built another big reservoir right up the back and we pumped it from there up to there, see. But then that filled up. After it had been there and we had a pump spraying it up in the air to aerate it and do that with it. And the other thing about the phenol – I know it's dangerous – but once it's set off in the glue with heat, it won't let go again; and so you can eat it if you want to, it won't do you much harm, not that I'd advocate eating it. Well then, we used to let it dribble over the side and it went down through a marsh and the marsh sieved it all out. It was rough but remember I wasn't getting any money to fix the ... All they were saying was 'Fix it' and no money. They were very concerned; they had a brand new plant, spent five million bucks and things weren't turning out too well. They were losing a million bucks, so they weren't happy. And I couldn't say, 'Well, I didn't do it'; they were paying me to fix it.

I went along for about six months with the thing and then I thought I'd better have an understanding with the directors. So I wrote them all a letter and said that basically I was Simpson, not Samson, and working for three

bosses was no good and it was my considered opinion, even though they might chop my head off, that two of them had to disappear.

I wasn't fussy which two, but make up your mind because we weren't going anywhere and it was like having three horses and there's no way you can control it. So then they had the meeting and they agreed with my finding that there wasn't room for all of them; someone had to get out. But since, like everyone else, they didn't want to lose any money, they decided they'd try and sell it to the government or try and sell it to anyone. So then I had a rather unenviable job of people coming into me from all walks of life, all parts of the industry, and saying, 'Fancy you losing a million dollars a year.' But you had to sit there and take all this.

So I flew the flag and they all came through because no one wanted to buy it. And then finally we had the government sawmill down at - not near Fyshwick - near the old Causeway ...

Kingston.

Kingston ... and they got ideas of grandeur and they decided they'd like to buy it. I'd sense a public servant [trying] to make an empire and I thought, 'I've got a chance here.' In fact the character that came out, he was that good he used to drive up past my house which was a company house in Hawkesbury Crescent which is a pretty la-de-da street in Canberra. He was even asking me how many bedrooms were in it and I could see him settling in well. But there was no job for me; I was going to disappear. So the upshot of that was, believe it or not - and this is typical Canberra - one of my workers at the kilns, one day he came in and he always used to call me 'Chief,' he says, 'Have a look at this.'

And I said, 'Ah, yes.' He said, 'My son works over at the Government Printers.' 'Does he?' And here I've got this eight-page epic of a presentation to Cabinet to pay four million dollars for the show. They even put the price in; I couldn't believe it. It's all right saying one thing that they were interested in buying it, but to put ... Lord knows what else goes disappearing around Canberra out of that printery, but I'm talking about twenty years ago. But there it was. Talk about leaking to the press - and here I got it. So I was a bit like Mr McLachlan - it didn't say 'not to be read only by women,' so I distributed the thing.⁹ But, of course, it was in the days Gough was in the chair

9 A reference to Ian McLachlan, then federal Shadow Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and to the Hindmarsh Bridge affair in South Australia.



Women handling sheets of veneer glued together during the manufacture of plywood at the IFP mill (Forests Branch, Department of the Capital Territory, *Forestry in the ACT*, c. 1978).

and about every week there was a major or minor disaster. And I know that we all knew from the other gentlemen at Kingston Mill just where this letter was getting to in the files coming up to Cabinet; it never bubbled its way to the top and, by that time I think Gough was gone or as good as gone, so there was no more of this socialising a sawmill. That was the end of that.

I thought you'd want to get rid of the sawmill, except you'd lose your job.

They wanted to get rid of the whole lot because the big thing that went with it was the 110,000 cubic metres of wood. And there were a lot of the small sawmillers that had been here for yonks and taken a lot of the stuff; they thought badly about the stranger coming in and getting 110,000. But the point was the opportunity was there and it had to be someone big to come in. You're not big for the sake of being big but, I mean, for the money that had to be spent you had to have a big volume. And while talking about that, 110,000

on reflection wasn't much at all. To put up a sawmill today you need 200,000 minimum. I told you last night, New Zealand has just got a mill which pushes out 100,000 cubic metres of plywood, which means it's got a 300,000 cubic metre log input. And we've got to go out and compete in that market.

So you see, the whole thing was a grandiose scheme and really there was insufficient wood all round. And the Government, via Forest Branch, they insisted on the ply mill being in it; it wasn't the idea of the tenderers. It was put up because – I read this after, I wasn't here when all the tendering went on – so the idea was to be ... Not only did they want timber dried and dressed, but they wanted veneer and they wanted plywood and then they really were angling for a pulp mill as well. One thing they didn't ask and I did put up for, was a bark plant, and that's how Pinegro came about. And we treated pine and we could give you pine bark whatever size or dimension you wanted and we made that big tunnel screen out there. Have you been to the plant and seen it?

Yes.

Yes, we devised all that and we made more money out of that than we did out of anything else, but that went back to another section of APM who owned Pinegro. And then they used to mix coal from Bacchus Marsh, crunch it up and put it in, and that became a good substitute for Sphagnum moss.

Getting back to the main thing, we had insufficient volume, but you're there, you know you're half-way so you've got to keep on going. So to make a quick story of it, we fixed the effluent. The way we fixed that was that we mixed our own glue which wasn't there in the beginning. We made a glue mixer and all the effluent water that went out from cleaning the lines, we used that to mix the glue the next day; and we started to recycle stuff and when we did have, as you would have after five or six months, a fair bit of clogged up glue around the place, we just put it in a container, set it off by heat and gave it to the industrial tip and away it went, so that was no more trouble. So we settled all that down. I then put a conveyor belt under the lathe and sent all the veneer off into a great big hog, so we were able to hog the veneer into chip and put it back into the boiler to burn. And we picked up the sander dust and this ... Finally, I proved them all two million dollars was wanted and finally Hancocks and Duncans got out at that famous lunch ...

I'm going to ask you about that in a minute.

We had a financial adviser from APM on the board by that time, whose name

was Stanley Wallace who, of course, is the current Managing Director of Amcor. And he was only a young man at the time, about thirty-eight, and not long after that he went straight up to stardom. He became Managing Director of Amcor.

This meeting where they got the other two partners out, how did they manage to get rid of them at the meeting? Did they put up opposition?

No, everyone was quite friendly about the whole thing. They just realised and they didn't argue the toss; they all sent independent assessors in after I did my original calculation toll and the independent consultants also said, 'He's right.'

It is about two million dollars to do all the jobs and just get it back to ... Two million to fix it.

Fancy, two million on five million already spent. So they didn't like the sound of that at all and they were ready between them, I think ... they'd each lost a million bucks. And APM, of course, was up for about three and a half million because they had the biggest share. They just said to them, 'We'll give you a dollar and you walk away and we assume all the responsibility, the debts, the liabilities and everything.' So you gave them a dollar each and they disappeared.

That made it legal. Well, otherwise they were still in.

Don't forget we had consequential claims. You ought to read that agreement that Edgerley wrote up. They could slug you year in, year out for royalty, even if the mill didn't turn over anything.

So you got rid of the two partners and ...

It wasn't a case of getting rid of them. It was, 'Are you going to put part of the two million in or are you going to get out?' – that was what it was. And they said, 'We don't want to put any more money in and we realise we've lost a million and we'll cut the cord at this point.' Because if it didn't work ... and I mean we're still on trust – a hope and a prayer – I mean there were more headaches turned up later, as I found, but at the time all you could see was this obstacle to get over and then you go further downstream. So they got out and then we started spending the money and we had to fix up the pollution business. The last thing we fixed up was the boiler because that was another two million bucks all by itself; I never had it on the list. We all knew that, but my quaint way of working the boiler by running the veneer dryer for sixteen hours and then at midnight we'd switch the kilns on from midnight

till dawn – six o'clock – and then we'd take two of the kilns off and leave one on, and then worked the kilns all the weekend for two lots of twenty-four hours. And that's how we mugged our way through. But in the process the boiler used to spout black smoke and all that out. But part of that was because we didn't have – which is out there now and which I finally got built two years before I left – we put in a very special waste shed in which all the green waste from the sawmill in the form of sawdust or green veneer, hog waste, went into one side of the bin; and in the other side we put all the dried waste and that was all the shavings out of the planer mill, the dried plywood, the edgings that came all crunched up, they all went in. And so we had dry and green.

And then we had a junior system which pulled the fuel along the floor, but at two different rates because then you could get a ratio of green and then there was perfect combustion. And that was done on a computer and the guy up in the boiler worked that out all by himself.

So that solved the smoke problem.

Yes, that didn't solve until about eighteen months before I left.

How did APM feel when you said to them, 'Well, you've got to spend two million dollars here to fix this up', after they'd lost so much money before?

They weren't overjoyed. But they knew it was their fault because they had put poor old Howard Grant in to build it and they assured the other two that he knew what he was doing when he didn't, with all due respects. The boiler was a classic cock-up because he would not believe that the veneer line used 19,000 pounds of steam, and he went ahead and blithely put in a 25,000-pound boiler where for another \$100,000 at the time, or thereabouts – I'm talking 1973 – he could have put in a 50,000-pound boiler and it would have been no worries. In the finish we had to put another boiler alongside the silly looking thing and hook them up and try and run them in tandem. But remember, 'Mother' said we had the boy and we'll do it, so that's why 'Mother' was caught, that's along the line, because they didn't like it getting represented that ... to their credit they stuck in.

They didn't want to pull out. They couldn't sell it. They tried to sell it to the government but that didn't come off, so they were in then. They were in for the long term. So that was that. Then things just steadily came better and better; and we turned around and we started to make a million bucks a year.

When did you start making a profit?

About '76 I think it was. It tied up a lot with the wind throw because the wind throw accidentally provided me with the way of getting bigger diameter logs, because when the wind throw came it was amazing how many big logs hit the ground. And then we had the problem of cleaning up the site quickly. So if they insisted on us going down to what was the old Imperial five inches under bark, [it] was going to slow things down; so we kidded them to do it eight inches and that made a lot of difference because every time you did a saw cut you were getting that much wider board. It's all a matter of passes through a saw. You can't alter the thickness because that's it, but boy, oh boy, if you can alter the width, your productivity goes up enormously. And of course they were good logs to peel; they were great.

And then we ran into another recession and I said, 'Well, the only way we're going to get out of this is to get greater productivity out of the veneer mill,' because it was taking us two shifts to make the plywood because we had presses that had fifteen openings or daylight, as they say in the trade – you could see daylight through them. The best we could do was make about twenty-eight cube per shift per day which was fifty-six cube in total, and it involved about twenty-eight people. We went to Japan and bought a press with thirty daylight and that was humorous because when they went there the thing was in about eight foot of water and we said to the Japanese, 'I hope the rest of it's there.' 'Ah yes, ah so!' They just cut it up in pieces and it came back and we only had paint marks where it all joined together. Our boys put it in and they made a fantastic job of it. The first time we worked it we got forty-five cubes in one shift, but we couldn't lift it above this – and you'll love this story because it's always told against me.

I went to the girls – there were ten girls worked on the thing – they used to put the veneer through the glue spreader and there were two on the in-feed, two on the out-feed and two either side – that was six – and then there were the two guys on the presses. That's ten people all told. I said to them, 'You ladies can do much better than this.' 'No.' I said, 'Look, I'll tell you what, I am sure you can get sixty-two cube out of this standing on your ear. If you do, you can pick whatever restaurant you want in Canberra and I'll take you all out for the night; all of you. You just nominate and away we'll go.' 'Who else?' 'I'm the only male. I'll take you girls out. I'm the ref.' So they all giggled and went away and the next day was Friday. They made sixty-three cubes, so into

town we went. I had to tell my missus a tall story: it was all in the interests of work. They were all dolled up; you can imagine these girls. So we went to the swishest restaurant. It cost 700 bucks for a meal. Took them back over to the Leagues club, gave them plenty of money to play the pokies. Half of them wrote themselves off. I got home. It was the worst day's work I've ever put in. It was very laborious.

On the Monday morning I said, 'Did you have a good time girls?' 'Oh, it was lovely, nice of you to take us.' 'Good,'" I said, 'Sixty-two is the number.' And then they had all sorts of aspersions about my background and my birth and my mother and father, but at least I proved to them.

Really it was easier work than when they worked the other press because it was a matter of timing. You had to go clappity, clappity, clap, get it together and then it went into a cold press, in which you initially pressed all the things together so they were ... When they were glued they were about that thick and, when you come out of the cold press, you got it so that then you could get it into the hot press to cure the glue line. But we also told them that they didn't have to get ahead. We had to make sure that whatever they made was in the hot press within twenty-six minutes and if it wasn't, well, don't make anything, just stand and have a smoke, do whatever you like. Took them a while to wake up to that, but once they got in the rhythm of it they found it easier. They'd have a flurry of activity and then just sit back and have a smoke and a mag, and then a flurry of activity, and the ...

So they could do the sixty-two easily.

I knew it. I'd seen them do it in the States. I wasn't asking anything that I knew that couldn't be done. The trick was to kid them to do it and when they did it they went crook, they reckoned I'd trapped them. But I said it doesn't matter, you know how to do it. And with it away went eighteen employees out the mill. So eighteen multiplied by whatever it was at the time was a big saving in money.

Now, I didn't have to sack anyone. That's a joy about Canberra, you don't ever sack anyone because they keep wandering in and out of jobs. All I did for six weeks, I said, 'Don't put anyone on.' I didn't care where they went out of the place and then I'd shift around and eighteen disappeared in that time. Whereas, in a small country town, you'd have had the invidious job of going in and dismissing them, which wouldn't be any good. The other funny thing about the place was that they became timber men and timber women, and

they became plywood workers and they were on a worldwide rating because in the finish six and a half cube per person, per shift, it was good going.

Unfortunately, we only worked the thing for one shift, so that's ten shifts out of twenty-one possible shifts in a week and thereby lay our promise. I couldn't get any more efficient because they didn't have any more wood. Then I said to them, 'Why don't we give the sawmill away? – because it was a very inefficient sawmill. 'Why don't we go and buy a four-foot lathe and have it alongside the eight foot lathe?' You don't need any more in fabrication; all you're trying to do is produce more veneer. I even got to the stage ... we bought the lathe except it stayed over in a shed in Portland on the west coast and subsequently got resold again; they wouldn't go ahead and in their wisdom they elected to rebuild the sawmill, which I built. That was the last month in ... January 1988 it was completed. We put it all together in six weeks, mind you. We'd built the foundations prior to that and that went in and that was the end of it. And then the next thing after I left, they sold the ply mill.

What about the chips? What had been happening with them in the meantime?

Sorry. In the beginning, *in initio*, when we couldn't sell them to Botany at APM, there was a sale done to HAL, Hardwoods Australia Limited, who make Masonite. You know the plant at Raymond Terrace, near Newcastle. They were a combination APPM and CSR. Very quickly, they used to make the Canite out of bagasse.

Which is?

The by-product from sugar cane; because Colonial Sugar, they had heaps of that. That was down on Pymont near the bridge there. Then they suddenly twigged that bagasse burns very well as fuel and doesn't give out much black smoke.

And Oberon had just come on stream as a pine producing area which was only just up the road, so then they decided they would use pine chips and Canite disappeared and pineboard came in. That was the transition. So although they had a fair bit up there and knowing what strife we were in, they came down and offered us a terribly low price. But they had us over a barrel; we had to get rid of it. Even if we gave it to them we had to get rid of it, otherwise it would have shut the whole plant down. You couldn't have moved. You would have been buried in chips. So I went up and the directors told me to go up and see if you can get the price up. Well, I went up and I think the

price come down. The bloke was a very nasty character I had to deal with. He had no sense of humour whatsoever. Anyway, I said, 'All right, that's your wish, that's well and good but I don't think it's wise for you to grind us like that because things change as times go by and there may be one day you might wish you'd spoken a little nicer to me.' No, he didn't want to talk nice – take it or leave it, so boom! My goodness, we're caught. But by that time 'Mother' had put in the big line down at Maryvale and they wanted a lot of chips. And Stanley Wallace was the Managing Director and he didn't want any company in APM with a red result. So we started selling chips.

What year was this, Terry?

Early 1980s, I think.

As late as that.

It took a long while to shake off HAL. So they gave us a price which was better – not a lot but at least it was ... Hang on, yes, it was a lot better because it was in the company. It was only transferring from one to the other so it made it easy. But Boral used to enjoy it at the same price and they were only five kilometres from the plant at Maryvale, so you can imagine how much money they made on the books. I had a big freight charge to get it down there, but I still had a nett figure far bigger than HAL. So I then I had the pleasant duty of going up to HAL within six weeks at the end of their contract, and 'Good morning,' and I said, 'Well, we're here to negotiate the price of the chips for the next period' – tongue in cheek. 'How much do you want?' I said, 'Sixty bucks a ton will do me nicely, thanks.' Well, he went clean through the roof. He was hanging from the rafters. And I kept him up there, too, and I baited him – God, I paid him back. So I said, 'Looks like we can't do business, so goodbye, thank you for your help.' He was in a hell of a mess because he then had to go back to Oberon and his chips cost him a lot more up there; they were dear and, of course, his results must have gone, boing, boing. So I had my fun [inaudible].

The same thing with Monsanto, the glue company. When I first went there someone in their wisdom had elected to ... and this was the thing that worried me about Hancocks. Hancocks, although they'd been in the business for a long time making plywood, they'd never had a modern plant like this Ralto plant. It was as modern as anything. You had a bloke pulling up at one end and the stuff went straight backwards and forwards through this big dryer, came

out to another operator who just clipped it for fault and then it automatically clipped the rest; and then all they had to do was press the button to grade it and it dropped into a slot. So only two people worked the whole line. But they'd never had a line like it.

Also, the bloke that came out to put it in was a sales engineer, not a real good engineer, and these big mesh mats that went through it cost an arm and a leg. They were about \$40,000 each and there were six of them went in. We were wearing them out in ten months. We found a way of getting them to work. And first, they'd start up work at midnight on a Sunday night and nothing would go, the whole thing would be locked together. Anyway, you've got to be lucky. I had a friend in New Zealand and he rang me up and said, 'I've got the Finnish fitter here and he's finished with us' – because they were putting in an identical line on the North Island of New Zealand; NZFP¹⁰ were putting one in. I said, 'Oh yeah.' 'Could he come and help you?' 'My word he could come and help me.' So over he came and it was in Christmas.

We'd just shut down in December and it was delightful because I had a whole three weeks in which he could look at it and we could do anything with it. He said to me, 'You're funny people, the way you've got this to work.' I said, 'Maybe we're comedians but it doesn't work real well.' He said, 'It must cost you a fortune for mats.' 'It does cost a fortune for mats.' 'I can fix it.' 'Can you?' 'Yes,' he said, 'It might cost you a couple of shifts of production.' 'How much are you prepared to give away?' 'If you can fix it, I'll give a whole week's production away because it can't cost me as much as those mats. And once I've solved it, whatever the cost, it's solved forever.' 'All right,' he said.

So on start-up day I said, 'You're in complete charge, just tell us what you want and we'll do it.' So the thing, we roared it up, it operated at 140°C. And he said, 'Stop it, now. Open the doors and we're going to get in.' He jumped in and he was only in there for about sixty minutes and he marked a notch. He said, 'Now we're going to have to wait for it to cool down.' I said, 'Oh yes.' Well, we waited. It took about five hours for it to cool down again. He went in and he made an adjustment. He said, 'Now, start it up again.' We started it up again and he did that twice. The thing was you had to make the adjustments while it was hot. You had to take the measurement and we were waiting for it to get cool and then adjusting it up.

¹⁰ New Zealand Forest Products.

He marked it when it was red hot and then jumped out, and went back when it was cold and knew exactly what was on. He only did it twice and that was the end of it, and we didn't buy mats for another three years. I asked him which island in the Pacific he wanted to go to for a holiday. I could have spent a couple of grand on him easy – go wherever he wanted. He was a funny bloke. He went to China later and put in another plant in China. I kept correspondence with him for a while because he was the mightiest man I ever struck. So that was another major thing solved.

So we'd solved the glue, we knew how to make the dryer go, we'd put the big press in, and then we ran into one other little bit of a hornets' nest. When you finished making it [and it] comes out of the hot press and it's cooled, you send it down the trim line and trim the two sides and trim that. Since we used to work the trim line two shifts that was all right; but now all of a sudden we've got two shifts production in one and this thing couldn't work twice as fast. So I rang up the Japanese and said, 'Come here, see how this thing goes to and fro like that. We want another one down this end – two of them. All we want to do is buy that.' 'But, can't do that – the electricians.' I didn't have the heart to tell him we'd rewired the thing ourselves after it had come out.

'No, you cannot do it.' So away they went. Six Japs had to come and have a look at it. You can never get one Jap to tell you; it had to be six and the six of them said, 'Could not be done.' All they wanted to do was sell us another unit. So I said to our engineer, 'Take that thing apart on there and get it drawn and build another one ourselves,' which we did. So when the sheet went in then we just went boom, two passes in one, and the productivity went up 100 per cent and that was it. The Japs came a couple of years later and looked at it.

You should have patented it.

It was funny though the way they did ... It was things like that we had to figure out ourselves and in the finish I was blessed with a very good engineer. It took me three engineers before I got him, but he was something; and really most of these plants are just good engineering, after you've settled down and figured out exactly what you want to do. You've got to get that firmly in your mind first and then put the engineering to match. Don't let the engineers get ahead of you, otherwise ... So that worked it out all right and we had it up to world rating. All we needed was more wood to put through it because only working it five days a week, we were making 15,000 cube of plywood. So if we'd worked it seven days we'd have doubled it. We could have gone twenty-one shifts.

And then if we put the veneer line in the other four-foot lathe alongside it, we really could have made that hot press go a little faster again.

But the problem was the lack of resource was it?

It had it and I'd told them how to do it. 'Well, don't try any more with the timber,' because all the time I told them this ACT forest resource is shrinking in diameter. I'd showed it to the directors year in, year out – the whole fifteen years. I used to go and work out what the average diameter was and I could run it off. I could extrapolate it and show them we were in trouble. And I said, 'This machinery will not go fast enough because your diameter is down, so your piece count goes up and for the same volume of wood you've got to do much more work; so why don't you put the four-foot lathe in and we can get access to all that smaller wood?' – which at the moment was going to the others around town and we'd have had much better utilisation. But there was no way you could have put it through the sawmill.

And, of course, in between all that we'd put that diameter sorter on the log line to make everything ... but that was mainly for the new mill because that new mill had to have logs sorting to work. We didn't need the log sorter for the veneer mill, not at all. And we didn't need the other boiler if we were only going to work the ply mill. But when they tried both and had insufficient resource, you couldn't run it. So now it's getting old, it's fifteen years old – no, it's older than that, what am I talking about? – 1973, it's twenty-two years old. The last lot of capital was when they built the new mill – a couple of million – and the boiler. Yes, they've probably sunk another five/six million in it, so that's only been depreciating about eight years, but I guess on depreciation the cost ...

I know they made a lot of money the last couple of years when timber prices just roared up, because even their good mill at Morwell had trouble when CSR – when their entry to the market – decided to drop the price by twenty-five per cent. No-one could believe it but they did it. They tore the bottom out of everything and shows that had been very viable and done well. There was no reason to do it. It was an insane reduction in price. And at the same time the Yanks had bespotted our business and Clinton went and locked up all the forests, so Ooregon and everything was getting to be a premium price. It was a good time to get top price for everything, not to go and chop the bottom out of it. It took about three years/four years before the price got up, and for years the price out there was worse than three years ago. That had

Canberra's Foresters and Forestry Workers

nothing to do with the mill. All mills were experiencing the same problem with the marketplace.

Terry, in the time you were at IFP did you have any strikes at all?

No, we were very lucky. We went the whole fifteen years without a strike.

Not one?

Not one.

What do you put that down to?

I had a little habit and it was well known in the industry that when I was in town I used to start work every morning with the workers, and I used to go round and say good morning to each and every one of them. I always thought it was a good idea, particularly when I first got to the place and it was so obvious, you couldn't even talk timber to them because they didn't know what they were doing. So I used to go round and just chat to them a bit; there were a lot of women in the place at the time. I just thought, well, if they thought the old bloke in the main office was concerned about them, it might help a bit, and I just told them, and they knew darn well, that as I walked around, if they had any major complaint and wanted to talk to me – I'd prefer they went through their foreman – but they could quite feel free to tell me and I'd see what I could do for them. It worked out rather well. A lot of people in the trade must have known. 'You're the bloke that goes round every morning and says g'day to them.' I say, 'It doesn't do any harm.' It didn't, it proved the point. Whereas my successor came in, I think he locked himself up in the office and they struck. The union finally got in on him and he was out for over a week – couldn't believe it.

What was the size of the staff you had there? How many people on the staff?

There was, I suppose, about 160 in the finish but when I first went there was well over 200; it was unreal. We had personnel officers and the whole shooting match. But that all calmed down in the finish [in] that there was myself and there was the timber superintendent who looked after the sawmilling, plus the drying, plus the dressing. And then there was the ply mill superintendent who looked after the whole mill in the both shifts. There was an engineer who was responsible to keep the plant going and there was an accountant. But before that, oh boy, I had anyone and everyone working, but we got it down. And then underneath that there were the foremen that broke them up into

workable sections; and it was relatively a very simple plant to run.

But as I say, we never had enough wood and we weren't prepared. Well, what the final decision was after I left was to go 100 per cent timber and give the ply mill away. Personally, I think they made a mistake. I think they should have gone the other way because it would be more suitable for the diameters that I feel sure are going to come out of that forest. Even the little trip I had through this morning, there's a lot of small wood turning up from here on in and you'd do better to go peeling on a small lathe and don't forget these small lathes can get down to fifty millimetre cores – fifty millimetres – whereas with any stem in *radiata*, the centre around the pith, there's generally an area of 100 mm by 100 mm and it's no good because it's a weakness; and if you put it through the F-rating machine to strength it, it will give you F3 and lower which is no good because you need F5 minimum. And the other thing, it's pretty brittle and it's really only chip quality. But whereas you think you can peel and bring out a veneer two and a half millimetres thick and go down, and there's always the splicing and the putting it together and improving your recovery out of sight and, of course, your end product is probably two and a half times the average value of your timber. I'll sit and argue it all day, which way they should have gone.

Also, they get into a niche market because there's only 20,000 cube of LVL made in Australia at the present time and that's nothing when you think of the consumption of hardwood and heavy structural – I'm talking about big structural stuff which you can make out of itty bitty logs; this is the beauty of the thing. And the Finns have been doing it for yonks. Fifteen years, I saw it in Finland that long ago. Still, we are slow. One fellow's making it. I think you could go out and have a 100,000 cube on the market and still not be conflicting with co-producers; you'd have it to yourself. But you get into building material and you've got CSR there who is a [inaudible] giant – the latest acquisition was 400,000 cube at Bathurst last year, at New South Wales. Boy, oh boy, they're just about it as far as softwood goes on the east coast of Australia. It must be policy for CSR to become that big. So I'd sooner get away in another pond, not annoy them and do it.

Tell me how did you find the quality of the timber or logs that were delivered to the mill? How did you get on with the logging contractors and so on?

There's two ways of tackling that story. When I first came the die was already cast in that in their wisdom IFP had done a contract with Crawford Logging,

which was a fellow called Ivan Crawford, whose base was in East Gippsland, who was a very big contractor, supplying pulp to the Maryvale mill. This was a new thing for him to come up and supply saw logs and ply logs. They had a fellow called Klapker who was the local manager up here, Roy – not a bad sort of a fellow but he went by the book unfortunately – and he had an agreement. And if he had an agreement, forestry had an agreement, my bosses had an agreement, the only one who didn't have an agreement was me; and I was right in the middle of all these agreements which I systematically ran and broke most of them down, thank God, otherwise life would have been unbearable. I couldn't get through Klapker's head what a ply log was and what a saw log was and how important it was to get them right. The contractors mainly had the pulp wood concept of bringing in tons rather than volume.

So it was a continuing war which was most unpleasant. They weren't very efficient.

You're talking about all the contractors.

I only had one.

They had sub-contractors, was that the ... ?

No, he was the one. He had the big contract. Also, they hadn't arranged for the high lead logging. By high lead, I mean to log those high slopes where conventional gear couldn't get in. It was also in the agreement that IFP had to find a way of doing it, and there was a timetable and 'Thou shalt go into this area' and so on. In the finish I had to ring up Edinburgh of all things because I struck up a relationship with a fellow called Chisholm who worked for Klapker; and he had, of course, a Scottish mate in Edinburgh who, of course, had a high lead system who, of course, brought out the whole crew and shooting match, wives and the bairns, and then the population of the Robbie Burns Club doubled overnight in Canberra. And wild Normans they were.

Bob Smith was his name and he was over in Queanbeyan. He had a factory there and he brought high lead to the ACT. And they were good machines and they did work. The only concession I remember at the time [was that] ACT Forests gave was they gave us four dollars back on royalty because they knew high lead logging was more expensive than conventional logging. Mainly on account of output, you just couldn't get the output a day out of the machine that you could get out of conventional logging. So that was another one we had to fix: we had to get the high lead. So he came.

And Klapker had escalation clauses in his agreement which had blown beyond belief, but he used to come down and read them to me religiously. But, when the loggers' yard was empty and I rang him up, he suddenly turned deaf, so ... oh dear, oh dear. There was one other clause in the agreement that we had to go down from about five inches under bark – and it was inches in those days – to three inches, because the other was a grandiose scheme of having a pulp mill. Well, we were flat out getting rid of the chips. I've told you the sad story of HAL; they had more chips coming into the yard and have to debark it and handle it and chip it – forget it. So I thought this is about the end now, so I went into Mr Edgerley one Friday afternoon late, about ten to five, and I said, 'I'd like to say goodbye to you. In case you realise, I never bought a house here, so it's not going to take me long to leave town. But if you insist on bringing those restrictions in on us' – not restrictions, they were conditions – 'we'll just go under. And I can't do it and I don't think anyone else can, but I wouldn't like to be around when you close that joint down.' So ... 'We must sit and have a talk.'

So we talked on and on and then I came out with a new agreement. I got rid of the three inch end, boom! And I got the five inch to go up to eight inch and I told him I just needed breathing space. I told him all my problems. I said, 'We've all got problems,' and I told him what I had. And I said, 'You are not aware of most of them but they are real headaches' – pollution and crook water and the residue, and I had to eliminate all that burning up the back. That took a while, just waiting for the right wind and letting it go. And, of course, they had old Bernie Morrison the next day, the Laird of Tralee,¹¹ and I ran into trouble with him about three days after I run into trouble with Miss Campbell. So I didn't have a friend, a feather to fly with. My friend, Chris Lacey, who worked back out at CSIRO, his daughter used to come past and she said, 'Daddy, isn't that where Mr Connolly works. He kills horses, doesn't he?' Talk about keeping a low profile. The *Canberra Times* used to ring up and I'd say, 'Kelly's Wood Yard, how many tons do you want?' So that kept them at bay for a long time; they used to think they had the wrong number.

Just tell me about – you mentioned that when they got the logs they had the pulp wood concept and they'd deliver it in ...

They'd come in incorrect lengths. That was wastage because timber had to

¹¹ Bernard Lawrence Morrison, owner of 'Tralee', a local sheep and cattle property.

be sold in 300 mm intervals; and we were entitled to an overcut from the Forestry, but we didn't want to bring in more than the overcut because we were paying on tons. I only wanted exactly what I wanted to pay for and no more, no less, and there was nothing in the agreement where I could penalise them or cut it off.

Unfair.

It was terrible, so they didn't care how they cut it. They should have, but they'd 'Yeah, yeah,' and go away and not take any notice. But he was very quick to come down and tell me the escalation clauses.

What were the escalation clauses?

They were at the end of each year. There was a system tied up with – you know, the usual escalation clause – the cost of living or something; it was a government figure. That time, under Whitlam, it was going up through the roof. He came down and exacted his pound of flesh, so I was getting real silly. So I said to Edgerley, 'You help me because Klapker's contract is about to finish. What, if I give you all the logging? And then we'll get better utilisation because you control the other loggers for all the other millers, and then you can go through compartments one at a time and give us the products we want and what these are fellows want' and so forth; whereas at the time Monier, who were cutting roof battens, were cutting up peeler quality logs, peeler-sized logs, because we had to be given a compartment to ourselves because of the agreements, because we couldn't mix with the other contractors. And the other contractors, since they were only delivering, obviously at times he let them in compartments that were very good. So I was losing on two counts and as a forester I knew that.

He grinned because his empire was going to get big because when you count up all the contractors, oh boy, the number of people that he had under him suddenly went up. So that was the deal I struck. I will hand over the logging and I said, 'What's more, I want lower prices to the logging because Klapker's just ridiculous and if you've got the lot, like everything else – a scale of operation – you can bring costs down because you can give blokes a volume that can actually ... they can become cost effective. He said, 'I agree with all of that.' So that happened, so we won.

When did this happen? When did Klapker's contract start?

About 1975, 1976, I think, and not long after the wind throw occurs. So it

all came beautifully because what could have been awkward at the time [inaudible], Edgerley had control of all the logging and therefore he could nominate where logs had to go to. So all they needed was supervision at the landing and saying, 'Well, that's IFP, Monier, Koppers and so forth,' and everyone was getting what they wanted and I wasn't losing out on peeler logs which, of course, were at a premium. We didn't want to see any peeler logs not go through the lathe. So life became a lot more bearable. I had a hell of a time convincing APM that we should let go the logging and I said, 'You're nuts.' With its integrator like that, one fellow has got to control it all because then we can go to him and complain or praise him, whichever is the case. And he will give us one price, delivered in the yards, so we've only got to write out one cheque. It worked well. I've told other people on the north coast where integrated is happening in hardwood. They should do the same thing but they don't and it's a bit unfair. They make the contract and negotiate the sale. I said, 'Gee, that's crook.' So once Edgerley took over the logging or control the logging, the contractors did a lot better job because, well, they reduced the number of contractors for a kick-off.

There's only three contractors left around here now, and I'd done the hard work for him on the high lead. I'd found the blokes, so I handed him over to him on a plate, so all his headaches were solved; and he had absolute control over the lot and he knew what we wanted and I was happy, he was happy. It was one of those good deals because something was on the table for everyone. When someone puts it on and wants to take the lot and gets greedy, there's no use doing deals like that. So it was very effective and life got a lot easier for us all the time because I only had to ring up on the phone, 'Where are the logs?'

Did you buy a house by this stage?

No, I never bought a house. What I saved, I built the house at Woolgoolga. I built it in 1984; that was four years before I left.

So you had it all well planned.

You'd laugh about the house. The house is 100 per cent plywood and *radiata*; and it's built on plywood I-Beams, the most modern technology, which they won't do here and still won't do it because they sent me - 'Mother' [sent me] - I think they just sent me overseas to shut me up and get me away for a while. And I'd come back telling them another good idea. But I went to this factory at Eugene in Portland and they were making five miles of this material a week;

and it was an I-Beam about that high which had the top and the bottom plate out of laminated veneer lumber. It's all going the one way, the veneer, and then the web, it was a piece of seven millimetre plywood. Now, when you build a house like that, you don't have to put piers all over like the conventional house. Like there's about 100 piers under the ordinary conventional house. I've only got three walls and these span it because you can make it as long as you like. So, I've got them twelve metres long and we space them at about – whatever eighteen inches is in millimetres – 450 mm and Bob's your uncle. And then we put ply floor on top of it and then we put the timber frame up and then I clad it with plywood on the inside coated with Creosote paper, which you can either paint or do whatever you like. And then on the outside, down the works, we made stone ply. We put the sheets down and we put epoxy glue on and we poured stone on it that I'd got from the Nambucca River in various grades.

I'd seen the Yanks do this. I'd seen them make this stone ply. There's factories over there that have been operating for about twenty years. So I clad all the outside of the house with stone ply and then I made one big [inaudible] down the centre of the house of stone ply and it looks like there's a concrete wall, like that – what do you call it? – pebble ...

Pebblecrete?

Yes, a bit like Pebblecrete and I got this nice salt and pepper shaker colours from Nambucca River, from a fellow up there. [Per] kilo, it was the princely price of about seven cents. The glue wasn't. The glue was about nine bucks a sheet. It was the dear part of it. That was almost the cost of the plywood sheet at the time. So I made the whole thing to show them how it was. And the ceiling – the roof – I had it cathedral style because it's hot up there, and I put exposed beams right along and then I put absolute clear veneer because we got that from the big fire in Adelaide, remember? And they put it out in the pond. I was able to buy veneer at that time and I bought select clear at the same price as you could buy D grade, so I made all the sheets. And we were selling it at Canberra as well. So up went the house, so there she is. At least I've done exactly what I preached and people have come to the house and say 'Where can you buy it?' And I say, 'You can't.'

So you built this in 1984, so obviously you were planning four years before you retired and left Canberra to ...

I could see what they were doing and thinking about the ply mill, and I figured

I'd better exit. It was starting to get me down as well because it was a long time. They'd tried valiantly to get me to go to Melbourne to become the Production Manager for the whole group because we had Tumut at the time, we had Morwell and we had East Gippsland. But that was only a flash way of becoming a taxi driver, going down and doing that lot and I wasn't having that on. Besides, I wasn't going back to watch Australian Rules again; I'd had a bellyful of that. I said, 'No, I'm not going there. I'll go north.' I remember having a serious conversation with him. He said, 'Where would you like to go?' I said, 'I'll go.' I didn't tell him the place. I said, 'We'll do this and this and this.' He said, 'That's good. Where's that?' I said, 'Coffs Harbour.' He said, 'We haven't got a plant at Coffs Harbour.' I said, 'I'll go and build you one.' He wasn't interested.

At the time, of course, I had a boss above me that was only a marketing bloke. But the bloke above me was much more interesting; his name was Ross Adler. He was 2IC to Stanley Wallace in Amcor, and then of course he got a bit impatient waiting to get the job because they're nearly the same age. So he's the Ross Adler that is Managing Director of Santos in South Australia. He's been over there about seven or eight years now. So we had some interesting brains above us. But although APM Wood Products is one of the names we subsequently became – although I think it's Brown and Dureau now – Brown and Dureau belong to Adler. He sold that to Amcor; that's how that all came about. And remind me to tell you about the submarine deal after that. We were big compared to the other timber and plywood companies around about – our peers – but in the corporate image, they weren't real interested. I think Boral suffers the same problem today. Even though they've still been buying up till three years ago, there is a distinct impression that Boral might divest themselves of their timber interests. And it's big. They're the biggest hardwood interest in the east coast.

The submarine – this is a classic. When Brown and Dureau came over ... and we're always getting hunted into someone else. We were with APM Forests for a while and then we went to APM Wood Products and finally we went over to B and D. And when we got there ... this is the thing that Adler headed up and they're a different type of people because they're all buying and selling; they never had any production. And, of course, when we came along – boy! – we had a big plant and he couldn't unload us in a hurry because he told me one day, very confidentially sort of affair, that any of his plants he could get rid of

within six weeks. He'd have a big sale and clear out the shelves.

He never owned any buildings they had. He was on lease. He'd cancel the lease and the sack the people and – boom! – that was the end of that. I said, 'Oh, that's lovely.' But now he had a production plant and tied up with agreements again with people like ACT Forests and I said, 'You've got to pay them out.' He wasn't used to it. They sold all sorts of things like Bic pens and those ETC tools in the marketplace; they got them from up in northern India, that's where they buy all them from. They're made in little villages, in a cottage-style industry. But finally one day – this is in the day of telex machines – they're going to sell three hundred million dollars of Sikorsky helicopters – not submarines – to the Navy. My telex machine used to start working at five o'clock at night and it would come out as long as a cricket pitch; you never saw anything like it. And then a guy would come out from town and he'd confidentially put it all in a big sugar bag and away he'd go with it; I wouldn't see him again for a while. But I was the only APM outlet in town and he was the PR bloke. I think he was stationed in Sydney. He used to come to and from the Department of Navy all the time – that's why I was thinking of submarines, but it was helicopters.

It went on for seven years this sale. Finally they sold it. They made three per cent on the deal, I think, but I reckon they added it all up in expenses going to and fro, across to America and Washington and back. It just took too long. In those days all the wood products were going well and we were holding Brown and Dureau up by the scruff of the neck. But, of course, when things get tough and the housing industry collapses, well, they weren't used to that. They kept thinking people buy Bic pens every day, but I said, 'People don't build houses every day; it comes in waves and you've got to put the fat away to get you through the skinny times.'

How do you think APM saw you? Did they appreciate what you did for them or couldn't care less?

No, that was [inaudible] and they always used to like to come up and see the place and [I'd] take them around because my shining effort was the day my daughter got married in Canberra. That must have been 1985; that must have been this month, too. It was the first Saturday in March in 1985 and the big fire went.

Were you living here when the big fire went through Canberra?

Yes. Do you remember this hoon got on a trail bike and went all around town and lit everything up? He lit up the back of ... He certainly lit up down in Hume and then he went out over the top of the hill, Hindmarsh Drive, and he gave that a bit of a tickle up because ... Remember it was extraordinary conditions because the grass was yea high. It was a thirty degree day. The breeze got up to sixty k[ilometres] and everyone was down at Batemans Bay because the following Monday was Canberra Day – remember? – so it was a long weekend. And it all took off. Well, poor old – what’s his name? – Leon Brune[?], his sawmill went up in a flash at midday or by one o’clock.¹² I watched it from the top of the hill where the original old garbage tip was and it was spectacular.

And dear old IFP survived the lot. Here we are this gigantic seventy acre green postage stamp in the middle of utter blackness. I had a fetish of prettying the place up because I knew how bad it looked around the back and I thought, ‘Let’s make it look pretty.’ They used to grizzle a bit about the maintenance, but I had the lawns all around it and I put shrubs and I had a fire dam and I kept the fire trails right. Old Bert Veston who I used to play football against in Royals, he was out at Hall, he had a grader and I used to make sure Bert used to come in every summer and went around and graded everything. The fire tried to get into the place, but like all grass fires they come along – whoosh! – and then they got right round till they’re trying to find dry fuel and they couldn’t because it was green. And then they took off and went straight up into Tralee and I said, ‘Big Bernie, here it comes.’

And the police went beserk. They really jumped out of their tree. They got on at about ten o’clock in the morning and warned all Canberra that it was an explosive situation out at Hume; there was a fire out of control and it was heading to an arsenic factory up the other end of ... They meant Koppers. It never got anywhere near Koppers but it wiped out ... And they said, ‘There could be poisonous air all over Canberra and everyone had to keep ...’ You never heard anything like it. I couldn’t believe it. I went and tried to get down the hill to go to the plant because I had not only fitters in there doing the usual work on the weekend, but the engineer had his daughter who was about twelve or thirteen ... she used to earn pocket money by titivating out the

¹² This was the Smith Brothers’ Sawmill. Leon Brune is thought to have been a director of the company (AM).

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The ruins of Smith Brother's mill at Hume on 3 March 1985, the day after fire swept through the area leaving the neighbouring IFP mill untouched. (N. Padovan)

office – dusting it and so forth, giving it a good clean out on a Saturday. She was down there, trapped, I thought. There was a fellow called Raiy Jostaead [?],¹³ my engineer, who still lives here in town on the north side, and I thought, well, they'll all have enough brains to get into the dam if it gets real bad; because the dam was fifteen foot deep, so they wouldn't boil to death because the grass fire just goes whoosh [and] it's passed you. So as long as you are under the water ...

And then I found out after, they'd put a sprinkler on top of the office and had it going merrily along and they turned all the big boom sprays on the lawn and they behaved magnificently considering there was only Ray there who was the engineer. He quietly went around and started all the sprinklers up. Sure it jumped the fence and got into dry sawdust, but they just went around and beat it out. They had a terrible forty minutes until ... because the fire kept going whoosh. And it got over the railway line and I went there ... I never got onto the plant until three o'clock in the afternoon and, gee whiz, the sleepers just disintegrated – there was nothing left; that's how hot it was. And in some places the flame never got there, it was just instant combustion. They took

¹³ He is believed to have been from Finland and was employed because of his knowledge of the ply and veneer equipment supplied by the Finnish Raute Corporation. The spelling of his name is not certain (AM).

two days to put that out because this bloke was still racing around. He went out to Tuggeranong, remember where the pines were there? And then he got [down] the south side where my daughter was at Chisholm and they were thinking about evacuating Chisholm. But of all things my daughter had to get married at four o'clock.

I finally got down to the plant. The police wouldn't let me through there, 'You'll die.' I said, 'Don't be stupid. The fire's gone through the grass now; it's just smoke. I want to get to the plant to see it.' 'No,' refused, point blank, 'You'll get killed.' So I went all the way around the back road to Queanbeyan where I said the [inaudible] and then I followed up through the properties till I got on the railway line. And then we crossed over there and I came in the back way into the plant. And they were all there and they all had a big grin on their faces and they'd saved the day. Nothing was burnt – nothing. And next door, not only Leon's mill went up, but he used to have an external diesel tank and you ought to have seen that when it vapourised and went straight up in the air about, I suppose, twenty metres it went straight up. I watched it burn for an hour from the top of the hill.

And the other thing, the contractors had got a bright idea; they had brought hardwood logs – I don't know if you saw them, but they were there on the opposite side of the road to where Leon was – and they'd stacked them up and they were about sixty/seventy metres long and they were easy seven or eight metres high and I suppose they were about eight metres long; it was a huge volume of wood. It caught on fire at three o'clock in the afternoon; it was gone by midnight. Because I came down after the wedding, at the breakfast, just to have a look and even then we had to get about fifty metres away to look at it. But it was gone. I couldn't believe that volume of wood had burnt in less than nine hours. I was expecting it to burn for weeks when it took off. Nine hours that burnt – God, she was a fierce fire! And it trickled up the road a bit towards Koppers but never did any harm, but Leon, he was gone, boom! The office just exploded in front of my eyes when I watched from the top of the hill – all over between twelve and one. That was a big day. Of course, the board had to come up and all the big noses come up to see Connolly's mill – she's intact – and, of course, Stanley, the Managing Director, said to me, 'A bit lucky.' I said, 'Good management, Stan. Think of me at Christmas.'

You'd love this one. We had to entertain the board and they just wanted afternoon tea, so I said to Marge Lohwe who had worked with me all the time

there, 'Get some pros to come out and do it. We don't want to go mucking around.' So she rang up some mob and you wouldn't believe it, this fellow came out and he used to be the butler at the Lodge and he ran this professional afternoon tea business. So out he comes and all the silverware and silver ... You had to see it to believe it. I nearly died. I took one look and, 'Oh no!' He brought out this little French maid – frilly little black dress and the bonnet on – and this other ... You had to see it, Brendan. You'd have killed yourself laughing.

And, of course, Stanley said, 'Is this another one of your ideas, Connolly?' 'No,' I said, 'This is a pure accident, this one.' He said, 'I think they like it, though.' But we never had any more swisho afternoon teas like that. It was so hilarious. And all those big fellows there: the chairman, he's the new chairman at the moment, he was the general manager of Ford. We had some heavyweights there. And the head of Pacific Dunlop, he was there. He's the current chairman. But, oh boy, who was who in Melbourne business was there that day. But that's only because I got something right. I don't know what would have happened if the thing had burnt to the ground. I don't think they would have ever rebuilt it. I think they would have collected the insurance and bolted. They would have took the first [inaudible] out of the agreement and said, 'Hooroo.' At times I don't know whether they were really thanking me for stopping it. But it was the good practice we had of maintaining the lawns and anything green that fire just didn't tickle at all.

You left the ACT in 1988 to go up to Woolgoolga. You were intending to retire or ... ?
Yes, that's where I stay from here on in, but I'll operate out of there.

You didn't exactly full-time retire though, did you?

No, but if the phone rings and that's interesting, I'll go and do it. If it's not interesting I tell them I'm busy.

You see, there's two good projects ... First of all a fellow rang me up in the October – I'd left in January – from Parbury's in Melbourne and he said, 'We've got a little plant up there and would you be interested to try and put added value onto it? We only sell it as green.' I said, 'Yes, sure.' So I went out for a year and a bit and the same old problem turned up – no wood.

This was at Woolgoolga?

This was only three k[ilometres] down the road to go to work of a morning; it was lovely. And unfortunately before I could even set ... I did all the designs

and stuff or layouts for putting the kilns and the drying machine and then I thought, 'I'd better check the wood,' and once again, for the umpteenth time, no wood. So I rang him up and said, 'Look, you've got no option; you better sell it.' It was a good industrial site. I said, 'You should be able to get some good money for it.' At the time right alongside us the Japanese were into a big venture. They'd bought a big chunk of country and were next door neighbours, but unfortunately it was just at the point when all those grandiose schemes took a dive. So he had to sell out to another sawmiller down the road who just wanted to change sites; he was in problems [?]. So that was that.

And then they rang up [inaudible] Tea tree one day. That was an interesting thing so I went to a seminar up there and all the hoi polloi came down from the University of Armidale and the doctors and specialists come up from Sydney Hospital and everyone waffled on about the efficacy of *Melaleuca alternifolia*.¹⁴ I had a fellow, he owns the pub, and he was thinking about making a quid and he said, 'Do you know anything about that?' And I said, 'Yes.' All I knew was the botanical name for tea tree. So up I went and listened to the whole forum for him and I wrote him up a brief. The Coffs Harbour Shire were in all this trouble with effluent going out to the sea, so I said, 'We might be able to kid them and we'll go and plant tea trees and use it.' But the Coffs Harbour Council were no use at all. They didn't have any suitable land. They offered us a strip alongside the airport. I said, 'That will be brilliant; all the trouble we'd get into with DCA,¹⁵ growing.' So that fell through, but he did have a mate out at Wee Waa in the cotton. I said, 'It would be very interesting if you had water to go and grow that tea tree out there. It's a big value crop. That oil is worth money.' And a couple of fellows had done very well with it. So it was an interesting one but it's lapsed. But I could easily kick it off again if we go and find the block of land.

And then I did the job for Jaako Pöyry when Boral took over Duncans or took over the Adelaide Steam. And I've done quite a bit of work for Northern Rivers Development Board because they're generally interested in getting activity in the area and, since there is very little added value with timber in the area, I suggested to them about making this parquet flooring and I think it's a real winner and that was a presentation made on Tuesday at Grafton. The forestry ones saw it and they want to do it and a couple of sawmills want to

¹⁴ Botanical name for Tea tree.

¹⁵ The Department of Civil Aviation.

do it, but I'm just concerned about Boral. Not that I'm worried about it if two plants went in; I think, again, there's plenty of scope. You couldn't produce too much of the stuff and not find a market. The market is there in Europe, I've seen it, because I was lucky, they sent me over to Sweden and Finland to have a look, and into Germany, and I saw it all there and I'm more than happy the market's there. We'd have a superior product because it would be 100 per cent eucalypt and, since it's fourteen millimetres thick and there's four are select, eight are non-select and a bit of veneer, it's beautiful, it's one to two, you'd get rid of a lot of non-select material inside and you're going to get about twenty-eight hundred bucks a cube. This is for stuff that they're selling out as shortlings, palings, pallets.

Now, I don't mean for one minute that 100 per cent of what they sell is palings or pallets but take me up some of them and it's straight grain. Well, we can dry it and you can turn it into this product. If only we had the chipping plant up there, we could really go through and do a good thinning throughout all the regrowth, pull the short lengths out to get these products, chip the rest, have a silvicultural sitting and everyone is happy, except the 'greenies' – you daren't knock a tree down. That was it.

The other one is the one at Nundle where the pines come up. Grabbs[?] and me, we formed a little company, just as technical know-how to sell and present a proposition, how to make LVL out of it up there.

LVL?

Laminated veneer lumber. There's only one plant in Australia and up there it's the first rotation. It's a bit like this joint again in the early days and they've got a bit of this and a bit of that. The planting really didn't get going until '67 so it's not real old. It's about twenty-five, very little stuff's thirty plus. So as I said, we'll have a hairy time for five years till it gets through to thirty years of age. But I said, if we concentrate on small diameter logs and we buy this latest technology lathe, there is no reason why you can't make veneer out of it, which is all you want to make, LVL. Forget about a sawmill. I said even if it was perfect in size, it's insufficient volume. It's not economic.

You've had a pretty varied career. Just looking back, would you say turning the IFP mill around was the achievement you're proud of most or were there other things or one other thing?

No, it was an interesting one, but I didn't build much of it.

I liked the time I had in the north-west at Smithton where we pulled up, you know, because a lot of that got copied after. That was something no one else had done, so I was much happier with that and I thought it was the best achievement. And luckily the plant is still there and going flat out which most of the others aren't, unfortunately.

Little places like Terretts collapsed and that's a pity, and places like Parburys up there. No, the one at the northwest, it is a nice plant, and unfortunately, with the Canberra plant, it didn't go the way I reckoned it should have in the finish. Starting from scratch they couldn't muck around with 80,000 cube here and go and build it and do it. They're only there, as I mentioned earlier, with the depreciation being well down now, with the majority of the plant being twenty ... 1971 I think it started ... 1972 I think it actually ticked over. That's twenty-three years and, of course, they'd have got money back for the sale of the ply mill so that must have helped a bit. But I should imagine, if you could look at the books, depreciation wouldn't be very crippling, which makes it feasible. But they're totally dependent on the housing market – totally.

Here?

Not here. We'd never turn it on Canberra. Canberra was funny. Canberra never bought anything off us.

I was going to ask you about your customers; where you sold most of the stuff to.

The timber we always sold north and not much in Sydney. We tended to go Wollongong and then around Sydney till you got to Newcastle, and then all the way up. And we used to sell a lot in Queensland because – it's not exactly axiomatic but it's a pretty good rule of thumb – the further north you go, the higher the price is and they pick up the freight a lot better. Whereas, you see, you get the same price in Sydney as you do in Melbourne, but in Canberra it costs us much more to freight to Melbourne than it does to Sydney. Therefore Sydney market, the net profit is a lot better out of there than it is out of Melbourne. Take the timber first, we sold that all north. We sold none to Melbourne because Melbourne could be looked after from Morwell, our other plant. Tumut was in action at the time and they used to sell there, so we used to take care of Wollongong, Newcastle, very little of Sydney – a bit out in the western suburbs like Campbelltown, the fast expanding ones – and then, boom, straight through to Brisbane. The plywood, sure, it was Sydney and

Melbourne and Brisbane; a little bit to Adelaide, not much. We did take a load of timber once over to Adelaide just to annoy them because ... Adelaide came in and Adelaide, when we were first here, used to use Canberra as a dumping ground so we couldn't, even though they had a mill like us in the middle of the town, Adelaide deliberately cut the price because they've got great habits of dumping it somewhere and Canberra was the dumping ground, so Canberra was very lucky.

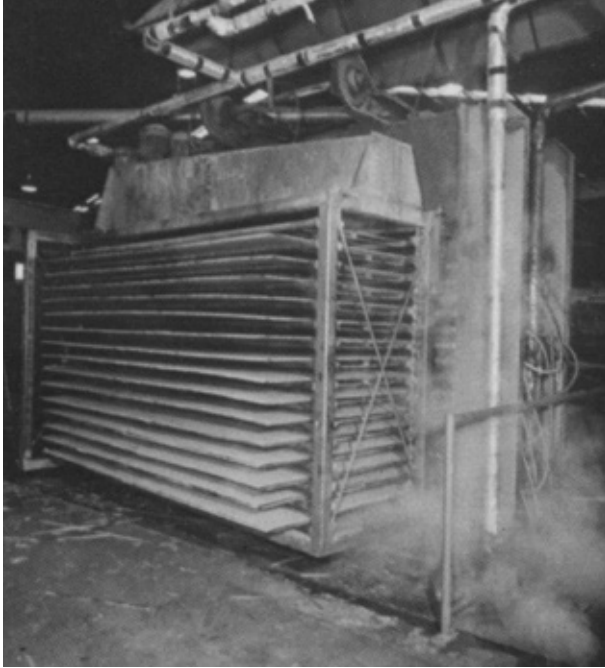
If we hadn't been here with a mill, Canberra would have paid through the nose for their softwood timber. So Canberra got cheap timber on account of us being there, despite the fact they never bought off us, if you follow my drift. That's how it happened. But if we hadn't have been here, they would have ... We did all right because I did well on freight because everything comes in to Canberra but nothing goes out of it; and we had the chips, the plywood, the timber. We had 24,000 cubic metres of timber to go out. We had 15,000 cubic metres of plywood and we had 40,000 tons of chips. So I used to get the back freight to Sydney, not the forward freight, and Sydney was the best because things didn't come up from Melbourne so well; but things from Sydney, that was great. I liked selling to Sydney because I had the freight rate ... We paid a million-odd bucks to Jetexpress and we used to buy about a \$1,000,000 worth of glue a year, so they were very nice to us.

The plywood was ironical. When they built the great Parliament House and there was about fifteen acres of form ply went into it, not one sheet was bought off us; it all came in from Indonesia. The worst one was, though, all the rainforest stuff that went in and as soon as Parliament House had all the rainforest in position then they said no more rainforest logging – the greatest pack of hypocrites I've had in my life, that one. If ever there was a rort, it was that one. You go over to the Law Court and it's full of it, too. Fair dinkum, they knocked down some rainforest to build the Law Court.

Obviously you enjoyed your time in forestry, but obviously on the side where you're making the product rather than the planting and so on. No regrets at all about your career, the direction it's taken?

No, it could have gone anywhere, I suppose, but it was fun doing and making things like that and generally I was quite happy wherever I was. It was only the children and education that I just had to move along.

Tassie, for sure, I did have the difference of opinion with the managing director and I was subsequently proved right, but there was no point in



The hot press oven at the IFP mill glues veneer together to make sheets of plywood.
(Forests Branch, Department of the Capital Territory, *Forestry in the ACT*, c. 1978)

arguing the toss there when he signs the cheque. So it's best to say, 'Well, lovely to have met you,' and move on.

Just one little question, just about the workforce you had at the IFP mill. You mentioned there were a lot of women working there which I found a bit of a surprise. What was the percentage of the workforce that women constituted there?

I suppose fifteen or twenty. Let me put it this way: none of them worked in the sawmill because that was a bit hard and we didn't expect it; and none of them worked in the kilns. But in the planing shed, the women worked there. They used to work the automatic dockers and they still do, and they did a lot of the sorting there. We weren't fussy whether it was male or female on that section and they'd go over on the finger joining machine, things like that, which was relatively light. Don't mention that. I just immediately thought of the young lady that went and chopped her four fingers off doing that job one day. That was horrific. That was the worst accident I saw at the plant. I wasn't there, I was on holidays and they rang up and told me what had happened.

But in the ply mill, oh yeah, that was good because when I got ... In the veneer mill first, I used to leave a man on the lathe, although in Finland I've seen women on the lathes; but I did put the woman on the clipper. There were men when I first got there and I finally kidded one of the women to go up there and do it. I said, 'You can do it better than any man. I can assure you because no-one but women work this in Scandinavia.' She got up there and she was really good. She worked it because, without being sexist, women seem to have an attitude about doing washing up, washing clothes, making beds, and then if they're in a conversation they can click away and knit a sweater and still do two things at once without boredom.

When you've got those sheets of veneer coming past, bang, bang, bang, all day long it gets very monotonous and I find that a male starts to lose concentration whereas the female, in her mystique, she seems to be able to do two jobs at once and not bore her. She had to do three things. She had to wait for a defect to come through, so she went just a little button like that and boom, boom, that fixed that and it automatically tray leapt[?]. She didn't have to open the tray, the tray automatically opened at the same time and let the waste drop down. When the sheets came past she had to classify it three ways: a C, a D or halves - half of it was all right and the other half wasn't all right. As soon as she pressed the button down there in the three openings, they'd go automatically into the thing. And then we also had a moisture detector on the thing, so as the thing came out of the dryer if it was over the required moisture content, this thing used to squirt a little bit of water paint on it, just to tell you that was it, so she had to segregate that one because that had to go back again through the machine and be dried. They used to do that work real well. And then on the actual plywood when ... There were six of them on the glue-spreading machine and they did that and I'd never have a male there ever, never. They were the girls that went out for the big dinner - they were good.

The men worked the hot press because I used to think it was a bit dangerous at the high temperatures and I didn't want anyone getting trapped or leaving their hand in there absentmindedly. And all the sorting - the women used to do all the sorting of the veneer for grades, around the back. And then on the recovery units, I used to crew that always with women. So in the veneer ... and even overseas you'll find women are there all over the shop in veneer operations and very few men. And in the planing section I'd have loved to have been fifty/fifty. You couldn't on account of the nature of the



Terry Connolly in 2010. (K. Mykytowicz)

work. But wherever they were there, they had priority. So I suppose it averaged somewhere twenty/twenty-five over the whole plant.

Percentage-wise?

Yes, percentage-wise. In the ply mill it was much higher. It was probably forty per cent on the floor were women.

That's quite interesting. That's something that hadn't occurred to me, at all.

Well, they did it. And then we used to have them on forklifts. I had one disaster with that. She got a bit flustered one day and here she is with a great ... She was a greatly over-endowed bird. I said, 'Throw your head back' – boom! They were good because they entered into the spirit of it when I come there and, again, I could try it out because it was a new timber plant and no-one knew too much about it and you could virtually tell them anything up to a point, and that was good. Whereas if you went to one of, say, a ply mill up there, one of Hancocks, and they've been in it for years, you'd have a hell of a job changing habits and everything there. I guess anyone coming in after me

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would have a bit of a problem, too, because they'd say Connolly doesn't say that you can do it [like] that.

Okay, Terry, thanks very much indeed for all your information and your time. It's a pleasure.

It's very good of you. It was very interesting, indeed. We'll probably have another several dozen questions by the time I've gone through this. We'll have to bring you down again. I'd better talk to Graham about that.

Or I can fix it on the fax for you.

Okay.

When Canberra was selected to be the site of Australia's capital in 1908, the area was desperately short of suitable timber to build the new city. It was thus imperative that a forestry program be established as early as possible to supply this need. Founded in 1913, forestry was one of the first industries to be set up in the ACT.

The forests were vital to Canberra's water supply, too, as the major factor in protecting the catchment of the Cotter. And as the trees grew, they contributed to the aesthetic setting of the city and Territory at large, restoring hills and valleys that had been devastated by generations of ringbarking and tree-felling. In more recent times, the forests became favourite recreational outlets for Canberrans.

The development of Canberra's forestry industry represents the achievements of foresters and forestry workers over more than a century. This is the story of some of those who took part, told in their own words.



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