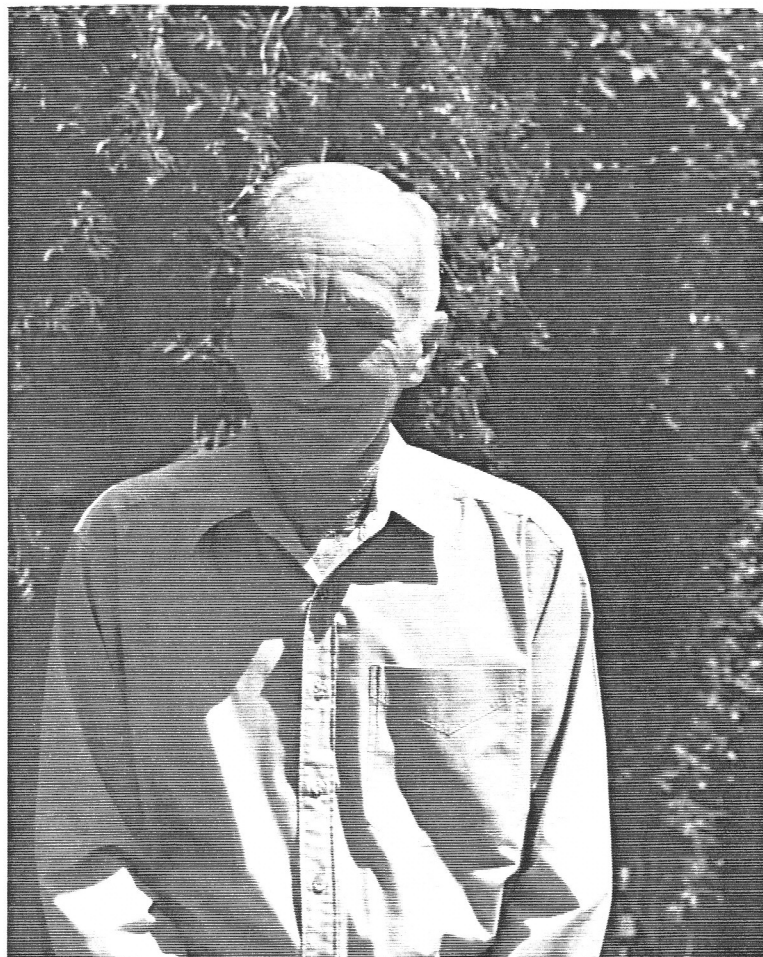


HARRY RUNDLE

Harry was born in Queanbeyan, in 1927, of a Canberra family. He grew up on Duntroon where his father worked, and attended Duntroon School and Telopea Park School and Canberra High; he left after the Intermediate. Too young to serve in the Second World War, Harry joined the army in 1946 and spent 14 months in Japan with the British Commonwealth Occupation Force. Returning to Canberra in 1948, he worked as a bus conductor. During 1949-51 he drove trucks and for some of this time he worked on the raising of the Cotter Dam wall. He then worked on buses and subsequently drove Commonwealth Cars, retiring in 1992. In 1950 Harry married (Mary) Joan nee Mackenzie; they met at the Cotter Kiosk where Joan worked. Harry and Joan, who live in Ainslie, had seven children.



Tape 1 Side A

Harry was employed by the Department of Interior as a truck driver on the dam; Works employed the other workers on the project. He started early 1949 and finished in mid 1950. The trucks carried 'river spall' (rocks), from the Murrumbidgee bed up to the crushing plant on Mt McDonald. Here the rocks were crushed as aggregate for the concrete mix for the wall.

'[The rocks] were all loaded by hand [into the trucks]. I'd say 99% of the workers at that time were what were commonly known as New Australians... They consisted of — which I always thought rather cruel — doctors, lawyers, whatever... In those days they had to do a two-years contract, irrespective of what they were.'

'Balts and Poles' were two major groups. On the whole they were a 'decent crowd'. Very few spoke English, and Harry only knew them by their first names; consequently

he has missed many of their death notices in the Canberra paper over the years. Those with better English became leading hands.

Harry gave them lifts in the truck down to the camp from the crusher at the end of the working day.

Regarding loading of the trucks, Harry wasn't allowed to assist because of union demarcation — he was a driver after all. Demarcation was very strong on the site. But sometimes he would help. Each truck carried about 4 cubic yards, and took 4 blokes about 20 minutes to load.

Sand was also carted in the trucks. It came from Casuarina Sands and was mined firstly by Berryman loaders, then by a Barber Green excavator. Shovels were only used if you got bogged, which did happen in the Murrumbidgee River bed.

You'd do about 10 loads per day. The road up Mt McDonald was very rough. Working in the river bed was hard on the trucks too and broken axles were common. Trucks were 1942 Fords and had been stored at Kingston without being run periodically; so their engines often were in poor condition. About 6 trucks were in use at any one time. Cement for the concrete was brought in bags on semi trailers from the government stores at Kingston.

Harry mentions blokes riding the cableway, and how men used it to get down onto the wall from the crusher and batching plant above.

He has vivid memories of the big 1950 flood and tells how he (newly married with a wife in town) and fellow driver Lofty O'Brien couldn't get into Canberra for several days because of a tree left on the Murrumbidgee bridge by the flood. They spent those days sandbagging the Cotter Kiosk to save it. The flood swept away two compressors from the dam site, one of which was never found.

Harry recalls 'site manager' Mr de Bomford, and engineer John Dalgarno who had a good reputation for his work. The Works site office was c.500 yards from the crusher.

He tells a story of running over a snake on his way up to the crusher one day in the truck. Then at the crusher he found the snake wrapped around the tail-shaft. The migrants hated snakes and one hit it with a big hammer. The truck's tail shaft had a vibration forever after. The Cotter was 'a haven for snakes'.

Harry got to know the migrants very well and he (unofficially) gave them lifts into Canberra on the truck at the end of the week. (Many of them had wives in town working at hostels etc.) At the Hotel Kingston they'd show their appreciation to Harry and Lofty by buying them lots of beers. The worry with giving lifts was the lack of insurance in case of an accident; the Department turned a blind eye.

Harry tells a story of how one Jimmy Johnson duped another worker, who was carrying a very heavy jackpick, by engaging him in conversation for 20 minutes. The other man, not having the sense to put the tool down, nearly collapsed when Jimmy finally said goodbye.

Harry was not aware of the concrete problems of the old dam. He refers to the original Administration Building foundations in Canberra which had to be discarded because of poor quality concrete.

The relationship between workers and the Departments of Works and Interior was generally good. There was no great industrial trouble, just some demarcation disputes. The main union was the AWU; Harry of course was in the TWU. A camping allowance was paid but the pay was no better than in town. Working near the crusher

was very dusty and noisy. 'If you could've, you'd have had 2 or 3 showers a day. But you couldn't, you had to wait till you knocked off.'

Harry recalls no fatalities or bad accidents [see also Fred Byrne interview]. But one day he accidentally squashed the hand of the Barber Green operator, and barely escaped with his life! The man's hand injury was apparently not too extensive. A fatality did occur on the Mt McDonald Road, not related to the dam. A car load of Bulls Head workers went off the road and Harry went to their aid. His brother-in-law, Alec Mackenzie, was killed.

Discussing the workers' camp at the Cotter, it was located near the swimming pool at the Cotter/Paddys River junction. Harry reckons about 150-200 men were accommodated [the figure was closer to 80 or so]. Tents had duckboard floors and held 4 or 6 men; beds were camp beds/stretchers. There was a mobile kitchen and a communal dining area. As is mentioned earlier, there were no women.

Tape 1 Side B

Harry and Lofty stayed in the tents for a time, then moved into one of the timber 'cubicles' above the Kiosk. They also mostly ate at the Kiosk (Harry met his wife Joan at the Kiosk, where she worked). The Kiosk was popular with Canberrans, though migrant dam workers rarely patronised it, probably saving their money to send home to families.

Discussing again the tents, each had a small cabinet and a rack like an open wardrobe. Lights were possibly kero lamps [see Fred Byrne interview]. The food in the camp dining hall was 'very repetitious'. Pay was deducted for meals at the camp. The basic wage then may have been 4 pound 10 shillings a week; 12 to 15 shillings may have been deducted for board per week.

Harry left the job because it was hard being newly married and separated from Joan who lived in Canberra. There were no married couples at the camp.

Although not officially encouraged, alcohol was in the camp, and Harry tells how some of his migrant friends gave him a middy glass of cherry brandy one evening! Migrants bought drink in Canberra at weekends and brought it out; Harry would also bring drink out when in town buying fuel.

Recreation for the workers included music; many of the migrants played a 'squeeze box' and sang. For many of them, 'it was their first taste of freedom'. They walked a lot, and fished in the Murrumbidgee. Harry says fishing was not allowed in the Cotter [see Louis Margules transcripts as shown in bibliography for another view]. Card playing was popular.

Harry reiterates that 98-99% of the dam workforce were migrants. Australian-born men were mainly the gangers, drivers and plant operators. For many of the migrants, coming from Canberra hostels like Riverside or Eastlake [see also Byrne interview and Campbell letter on this point], the Cotter was their first job. Many of them settled in Canberra, and many have since died.

The Cotter project holds no special place in Harry's memories. 'It was just a job.' The interview concludes with me asking Harry to recall when, as a Commonwealth Car driver, he drove Malcolm Fraser to Government House on the day of the dismissal of the Whitlam Government in November 1975, and his (Harry's) conversation later that day with Gough, and his respect for the late Lance Barnard.