

# **A SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC HISTORY OF FORESTRY WITHIN THE ACT**

Oral History Interviews

Transcript of Interview

with

**Ron Murray**

conducted by

Brendan O'Keefe

at the

Australian War Memorial

on 28 March 1995

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**ACT FORESTS**

*"More Than Just a Pine Forest"*

ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

INTERVIEWER:	BRENDAN O'KEEFE
INTERVIEWEE:	RON MURRAY
DATE:	28 March 1995
SUBJECT:	ACT FORESTRY HISTORY
2 TAPES	2 Hours

BEGIN TAPE 1 SIDE A

Identification: This is tape 1 of an interview with Mr Ron Murray, conducted by Brendan O'Keefe, recorded on 28 March 1995 at the sound studio at the Australian War Memorial. Topics covered on this tape are the history of forests and forestry in the ACT. End of identification.

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 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.

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 '56 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 '56 and '57. When you graduate 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 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 - '56 and '57 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 '26 or something like that 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 First World War. He's known as the colonel and he was a very well respected person. He retired in '59 but he was still working then in '58.

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 a listen 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 '63, 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-'50s 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 Dept. of Primary Industry. So the old Forestry and Timber Bureau which had a Director-General at the time, G.J. Rodgers [sic]\*, 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 '63 - 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 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

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\* Actually, G.J. Rodger

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, 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 '58, 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-'60s 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 '62, and I'll talk a bit about that later. I'm not quite sure, I think it was '62, could be '63. 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 '58, 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 '60, I think, or '61. 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 '59, '60 or early '60 most of it - at the most there were four or five years' timber. We were cutting about two million super feet hoppus 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 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 Mt. Franklin where we had roads already existing and down Moonlight Hollow Road 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.

'62, I think.

'62, 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 .... 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 introduce it. We didn't do it for very long, as a matter of fact, because myxamotosis 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 prefeed 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, myxamotosis 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 region for - 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 but .... 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 '62 or late '61 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 awhile 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 awhile 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 in USA.

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

Ron Slinn then moved on to the Forestry and Timber Bureau proper and then studied and went overseas and got his doctorate at Duke - 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 '59/'60. Bill Bateman who 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 '65 and then when I came back, I came back to Uriarra in August '67, and then

stayed there even though I started working in town till about '69 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 '39 and '51. '39 was out the west and parts of Uriarra and Pierce's Creek had been burnt. And in '51 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

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\* This actually occurred in 1952.

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 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 '65, February '65, 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 Vanities 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 '66/67, '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 '60s, 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 '58 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 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 Kupfor. Attilio Padovan worked on



that and we did some experimental logging in forests ourselves before the Forestry and Timber Bureau - Bill Kenwish, 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 '59, 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. 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 Connelly 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 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-'80s or till the early '80s 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.

END TAPE 1, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A

Identification: this is tape 2 of an interview with Mr Ron Murray, conducted by Brendan O'Keefe, recorded on 28 March 1995 at the sound studio at the Australian War Memorial. Topics covered on this tape are the history of forests and forestry in the ACT. End of identification.

Ron, you wanted to just finish off what you were talking about on the subject of establishment, so I leave it to you.

By the mid to late '60s 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 '65 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 Herrons 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 '60s. When the hardwood cut out the government mill increased its cutting of softwoods. Most of that, in the late '50s and early '60s, had gone into weatherboards and flooring -

weatherboards 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: Cutfritches[?], Johnny Voveris over at Fyshwick as well. 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-'60s 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 '60s, 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 Caneite stuff and I think later in replacing asbestos type things, but 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 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-'60s - 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, there was a recognition by the Commonwealth government that there was a resource here that needed 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: APM 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 ply wood 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 ply wood, 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. 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 ply wood 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. He cut slabs for Monier and sent it down to Sydney and they resawed 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 '62/63 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 '84 should pay its way and essentially it's done that, so I suppose that whereas there'd been, till IFP got started, a nett 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 '91 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 ...



END TAPE 2, SIDE A

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 '76, 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'-60s through to the early '80s, 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 '70s 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 piece work 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 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 acutally 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 cyprus 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 Cyprus 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. 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 .... 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.\* 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

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\* This was probably in 1968.

been about the time I came in there .... He was still around looking after Forestry side of things for awhile 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 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, '52, not '51, '52. It was quite interesting that one of the jobs of '58 was cutting Christmas trees from the regeneration from the '52 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. 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 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 '39 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 '60s 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 Bill Cheaney 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.

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 '87 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 '92. 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.

END OF INTERVIEW