

A SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC HISTORY OF FORESTRY WITHIN THE ACT

Oral History Interviews

Transcript of Interview

with

Attilio Padovan

conducted by

Brendan O'Keefe

at the

Australian War Memorial

on 24 May 1994

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ACT FORESTS

"More Than Just a Pine Forest"

ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

INTERVIEWER:	BRENDAN O'KEEFE
INTERVIEWEE:	ATTILIO PADOVAN
DATE:	24 MAY 1994
SUBJECT:	ACT FORESTRY HISTORY
1 TAPES	1 Hour 35 minutes

BEGIN TAPE 1 SIDE A

Identification: This is tape 1 of an interview with Mr Attilio Padovan conducted by Brendan O'Keefe, recorded on 24 May 1994 in the sound studio of the Australian War Memorial. The topics covered in this tape are the history of forests and forestry in the ACT and in particular, Mr Padovan's work in the forests.

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 kms north of Venice - if you can put a line and another 100 kms from Trieste and another 100 kms from the Austria border - that's where the hills finished and the flat starts. We called it Pallan[?] Flat.

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.

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: let's go down to the office [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 ...

Pierce's Creek?

Lees Creek. Pierce's 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 Pierce's 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, 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.

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,' he will say, '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 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 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,' 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, Paliamento[?], 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 a 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.

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.

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 was Franklins and the forester in charge was Slinn at the beginning. 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.

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'd 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.

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 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 ...

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

It must be fairly old now.

Yes, generally they were early '60s, 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 '70s. 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: '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 Pierce's Creek. Pierce's 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 Pierce's Creek and Uriarra.

Yes.

That's a pretty wide range of experience, isn't it?
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. 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 Pierce's 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 was 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. 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, Rumanians, 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 '86 I retired.

If it was '86, 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.

END OF SIDE OF ORIGINAL TAPE RECORDING

BEGIN NEXT TAPE

Identification: this is tape 2 of an interview with Mr Attilio Padovan, conducted by Brendan O'Keefe, recorded on 24 May 1994 at the sound studio at the Australian War Memorial. The topics covered on this tape are the history of forests and forestry in the ACT and, in particular, Mr Padovan's work in the forests.

We've been talking about your time in forests in the '70s and '80s 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

* Translation of Italian word.

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 hammer 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. 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 '63.

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.

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 everyone 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 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 goal for everyone. I really, as I said, now and then I have to go up there like the Abos [sic] - 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.

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.

END OF INTERVIEW