

A SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC HISTORY OF FORESTRY WITHIN THE ACT

Oral History Interviews

Transcript of Interview

with

Harold Tuson

conducted by

Brendan O'Keefe

at the

Australian War Memorial

on 13 May 1994

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ACT FORESTS

"More Than Just a Pine Forest"

HAROLD TUSON

ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

INTERVIEWER:	BRENDAN O'KEEFE
INTERVIEWEE:	HAROLD TUSON
DATE:	13 MAY 1994
SUBJECT:	ACT FORESTRY HISTORY
2 TAPES	1 Hour 40 minutes

BEGIN TAPE 1 SIDE A

Identification: It is 13 May 1994 and I'm sitting with Mr Harold Tuson in his home in Griffith in the ACT. Harold was a forestry worker from way back but you don't need me to tell his story; he can tell his own story, I think. So, I'd like to start by asking him first of all where were you born, Harold?

Macquarie Plains in Tasmania on 20/9/98.

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

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

Yeah, keep going.

[Interruption by someone entering the room.]

You're switching it off, are you?

No, keep going, it's all right. That will look pretty good on the tape, that bit, as they brought the coffee in. Anyway, go on.

And worked for the Municipal Council in Cootamundra. By way of a change I went and worked on a mine. Some distance out

there's a place called Cunnengah[?]. There I met a chappy who had worked with B.J. Bond. I suppose you've got some records of him.

B.J.

B.J. Bond.

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

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

Oh, right. When was this, Harry?

That was - I couldn't say the month but I think it would be about April, 1926.

Oh, right, yeah.

The first planting, as far as I know, at Stromlo for commercial purposes. By the way, I was reading the book

that was launched here last Saturday and she mentioned that she used the words 'planting for cash'; the same thing, I suppose.

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

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

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

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

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

No, I was fourteen when the broke out but that doesn't make any difference; I was nineteen when it finished. But they didn't like this.

I see.

and therefore I ...

How did you lose your fingers?

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

Was your father a miner down there?

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

Yes, I have.

I reckon you would be. Just in passing, we were the closest family living to Dove Lake in a house, but not on the road that you would take when you went there on the Forth River. As a matter of fact, you know where the post office stump ...

I'm not that good with it.

The coaches would pull up and show you that's where they used to deliver letters a hundred years ago. I thought you might remember that.

No, I don't remember that.

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

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

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

Who were you working for, Harry?

The ganger, a chap named Alex Loan.

And what was the company you were working for?

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

Oh right. We might just stop there for a moment because you might like to have some coffee. I'll just stop the machine.

Rodger started in 1926 and planted a hundred acres or so at Stromlo and something like that out on the catchment area. Bond went with him. When he went to the bureau, Rodger had been in and wanted some fellows, and the chap pointed this out to Bond. So Bond took it on and was working at Stromlo. Rodger then offered him the ganger's job at Uriarra. When he finished that he said he was starting another place which was Kowen and he would like a married couple to live there. So Bond came up to Cootamundra to visit some friends and I came back on 4 November '26 to see Rodger about that job and a fortnight later I started.

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

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

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

9 January 1923.

Right, so you'd been married about three and a half years when you started ...

And living in Cootamundra about three and a half years.

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

Where did I live?

Yeah.

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

What kind of house was it?

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

Wow, what a beautiful photograph. We might get the ACT Forests people to copy a few of these for their own records, I think, if you don't mind.

Yes.

That would be great. That's a very solid, nice looking house you've got there. I thought things might have been quite a bit rougher for you when you first went out.

That's coming.

Your wife like this house, did she?

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

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

And then - Rodger was the forester - shortly after he had a trip in Tasmania, just on loan, I think, like that. Came back and then went to New South Wales. Max Jacobs then took over; all of which you know. And then Cole took over. About that time they decided to stop Kowen, they didn't like the look of As it was progressing the trees didn't look good at all. Apart from that they wanted to concentrate on the catchment area and country like that.

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

The property?

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

Native forest. All those hills that are now planted were eucalypts. Some of them had been grazing properties before the resumption by the government and it was overgrown and nobody happened any more to graze on it or anything like. Kowen property itself was overgrown with green wattle trees. That was the reason I understood why they permitted forestry to go there because the lessee, McInnes, wouldn't tend to the wattle and that sort of thing. So they took 500 acres over for a start and now it might be 10,000, I suppose, I don't know.

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

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

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

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

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

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

No and that was okay. I liked being on my own, too. But the thing was about 116 acres. They cut it out - everything. Rodger was very good that way [inaudible]. Fall the green, fall the dry, fall the wattle, put a half chain break all around it, chip a three foot break around the centre, and I done all that on my own. Then he said do about twenty chain all around the dry. That was dry timber. That was to protect [?] the forest that was to be. While this was going on they started, I understand, a new nursery at Yarralumla. It didn't produce as many plants as they expected. It was very dry up there. I was the last in. In '27 I got only 10,000 plants and that was known as the 'twenty-seven' on part of this 116 acres, if I remember rightly, but the rainer[?] was done in 1928 of that block. But getting back to what I done. It often amuses me now. When Rodger said, it's not important how much work I actually done, took an interest in the place. An interest in the place was if somebody was cutting the wood on the Sutton Road or pinching the wood, I'd go down there and patrol that and pitch them off. Listen to all the lies that they liked to tell me: 'Oh, I didn't know this was the ACT'

and on and on you went. The next hour, the week week, whatever it might be, I'd see a smoke and I'd have to mount the horse and go and look for this smoke. And get a ring, say, from one of the graziers, somebody's broken into his gate and took some wood or left the gate open, so I'd have to stick the axe in the tree and go after that. There's a lot of people doing those jobs now; they were all mine.

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

Oh yes, it was all the time. From time to time, I used to when [?] invited and 'Coley'* says, 'Come in'. Have a shave. 'What's happened in Kowen' because Kowen was dormant for about five years, I think it was. Down the hill comes the chap with a dray and a load of wood. Coley pulled up and asked him had he got a licence. No, he didn't know you had to have a licence. And Coley said, 'Yes, you have to have a licence'. So it went on and he would send one out. He'd send the money in and we'd get a licence. Coley says, 'I don't know why it is they have to tell all those lies and all that story because ...'. Then that fellow would go away - same with me - and tell people, 'I put it over Tuson'. What can you do? Only sit there and you're not going to tell him he's a liar and you're not going to arrest him, you're not going to take his horse and dray or [inaudible].

* C.R. Cole, Chief Forester

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

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

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

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

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

How long did I live at Kowen?

Yeah.

Three and a half years.

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

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

Wood for what - firewood?

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

Thirty years, that's a good record.

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

Yeah.

That sort of thing.

Where did you live when you went to Pierce's Creek?

I lived for about seven months at Westlake - the old Westlake. I've got a refresher on that, perhaps you

wouldn't be interested. There was a book launched last Saturday by ...

Anne Gugler.

Gugler, yes. Have you read it?

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

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

So you were at Westlake for eight months.

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

Where did you shift out to?

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

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

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

In the house at Pierce's Creek did you have electricity or telephones or anything like that?

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

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

I don't know whether she was pleased or not because there's nothing much you could do about it.

Cole wouldn't spend anything on the place or on anything.

Anything he could scrounge around, say, hutments from old camps in here - there was a few of them around then - and pulling down some old stuff at Duntroon when they was changing over and getting secondhand material like that. I remember once he got several ton of cement. We used it and it was no good; it was too old, it was dead. So it was a dead loss.

What sort of work did you start doing at Pierce's Creek?

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

Yes.

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

What were you planting at that time?

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

Why not?

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

They didn't want it. How did the ponderosa grow? Did it grow very well around this area?

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

So the radiata was probably a better bet.

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

For fruit and things like that.

And I remember trying to get it on the market a few years later. A chappy went to Coley, he'd used a few, he said, 'I want to know whether there's any more available.' He tried the stuff before I started cutting them at Stromlo and those places. He said, 'I made some garage doors out of it and they're good'. Coley said, 'I wouldn't have let you have it had I known you were going to make garage doors'. He didn't want the timber to get a bad name. It's unsuitable for It might be now, I don't know, because there was no ... it

was just straight out of the paddock and make a door of it. There's the house out at Murrumbidgee, never seen anything like it. They'd shrunk about that much end on.

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

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

A big gap between the planks of wood.

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

Right. Towards the end of the '30s there were major bushfires in the Canberra area in the forests. Were you involved in fighting the bushfires in 1939?

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

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

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

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

You must have felt fairly lucky, I guess, all through the '30s or from the outbreak of the Great Depression up till the mid-'30s to have a job all that time.

Yes, to come here in '30 and actually there's a question of [inaudible] start here in '28. Maybe, listening to it on the air, people that were put off in the different States and here it happened, it came in right after the 1937* opening of Parliament House because when I came here there were men everywhere. Like everything else, they were the government, they made a date, one, two or three years, I don't know ahead, when we'd open Parliament. And then, of course, when it came to the last twelve months we find we'll have to wriggle our hips to make this work, so there were

* This was actually in 1927.

men everywhere doing this, that and the other. But soon after that they cut down so that it was well and truly on its way in '28 and started to bite in '30, so I was lucky. I don't know how I finished with the job on the Municipal Council, whether it was respected much in Cootamundra, I don't know but I'd be amongst the first three or the last three if it had come to reductions which it had to. I could say this, I had no regrets about that I ever came when I came and I've got no regrets when I left.

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

The cubicles?

Yes.

Yes, we put in there until '32, about a month before Christmas '32 and we then went into another one. Just in passing, Coley came out one day because it was direct between It was only half a dozen. I think I was the fifth on the job and there was only a few of us, apart from the planting season and things like that. So he used to come out and have a ride around. He came out this day: 'Is that all you have to show me, Tuson?'. I said, 'Yes'. I said, 'otherwise [Inaudible]'. He said, 'There's a man from the Age or the Argus been pressuring me for a day or two, wanting to have a talk on forestry and I've nowt had time.

I can get back early now if that's all you've got to show me.' And I said, 'You should wait, the wife's just going to get the camera and you could show the type of overseer's house in forestry'. 'Many people, Tuson, would be very pleased to live in a house like that'. I said, 'They'd have a lot to account for their family for'. We never argued. We only had argument in the thirty years as how we worked together, Coley, so we had a lot of regard for one another.

That's good.

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

I will.

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

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

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

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

Those days everybody did a lot that they never got paid for and you had to draw the line somewhere. Coley expected the

wife to be in the house whenever he rung up and all that sort of thing; any fires in the districts - her just to hang around the phone and answer messages and all that sort of thing and it was all for nothing. So there came a time when all that sort of thing has altered, but there came a time when you get a bit sick of it.

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

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

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

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

And this is at Pierce's Creek, too?

Yes.

Right.

You'll find mention of those houses. They were cubicles from the brickyards. Four cubicles, separate, four doors into the paddock and that sort of thing. And so they

brought one out after I was telling Cole about the overseer's house. And they landed it in the paddock, just there like that, and I wouldn't go into it. That's the sort of thing I was difficult on. So then spent a hundred and twenty pound on it, to it, [inaudible] and I spent the other I think I hung a tent fly up in front of it.

You spent 120 of your own money?

No, got a contractor to come in and do it again up.

It's got a very tall chicken wire fence around it.

What's the purpose of that?

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

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

Teloepa and Canberra High and St Christopher's - a mixture.

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

They walked down a track through the pines which is now the existing road as you go from the kiosk up to the depot. Used to go round the old road when I went there and all the schooling went there. And they walked until the last twelve

months or so, I think, one or two of them got a ride when the bus came up after that road was put in.

So they walked all the way into Canberra, too?

No, only to the kiosk.

Where they got picked up.

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

Right.

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

Right. As we all know at the end of the '30s, the Second World War broke out and I'm just wondering how that affected you and your family and the forest work at that time.

No, I think they just went on as usual.

No cut backs in funds or anything for you.

I've got a bit of a black out on

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

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

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

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

That's exactly right.

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

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

Yeah.

Right.

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

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

We had a few out there in '40, quite a few, and I said to Lin [Pryor], talking about different ones, I said, 'That chappy, he would like to stay'. 'Yes,' he said, he'd keep him out of the army.

Well, of course, wood production was very important for the war effort and they might have wanted as many men as possible to stay on to keep wood production going or to even build it up.

Never cut any wood at Pierce's Creek, there, to an extent. A little bit perhaps with cleaning up just to appease. There was always somebody, 'Look, you're cutting down good trees and they're burning good wood' and everything like that. So that you might cut down 500 trees [inaudible] wood or anything like that but stack twenty ton. We'd say, 'Oh, we'd produce ...'. It's not being burnt, it's being sent in to the hostels or somewhere like that. But they did cut a lot of wood at Uriarra but not at Pierce's Creek.

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

With the exception of '41 [inaudible] ...

Sorry, what?

I think it was exception of '41, '42 and there was a drought. And I remember I always claimed, and not very popular for it, anyone that couldn't grow a radiata tree couldn't wheel a wheelbarrow. There was a woman that come here, she was from the university, several years ago. She said, 'What do you mean by that?'. She pointed out about '42 and it was nearly all almost a wipe-out - or '41 it was, they were. I didn't bother carrying on with it. But we had twelve inches of rain and we'd resown the burnt out stuff from '39. I can remember we didn't have much. We read a bit about forestry in one of the States of America. They were quite happy because they'd grown good pines on eighteen inches of rain and they put that down because there was a lot of fogs in this district and things like that. I didn't point out to her that there was a lot of difference between eighteen inches of rain and twelve inches of rain; you don't grow many pines on twelve inches of rain. And as Rodger said to me this is a very dry district, dry winds, and that sort of thing, so that they were no good. Other years fared well enough.

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

Yes, we lost a bit up there. I can remember the day quite well because it was one of those days when there's a number of lightning strikes. There was the one that caused all the damage down around Stromlo and one at Pierce's Creek up under Black Spring Mountain which we went into and we was there when the other was going on. But we never lost much on that. It never got away.

After the '39 fire, I think, there'd been a bit of a program to build up fire trails and to set up a warning system for fires. Did you find that helped at all in the '52 fire?

Well, in the '39 ...

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

Pryor went after these things but, of course, it, too, Coley might have done the same thing for all I know had he been here but, of course, he went into the army about the same time. But up on the Tidbinbilla block, he had an outside

break at the time and continued on afterwards, it had a half chain break. He said, 'Well, make it a chain'. Otherwise there wasn't much to it. Gradually the roads took shape and then when you did get a vehicle come along they could get into it but previous to that there'd be no roads made and it wasn't accessible on many occasions for a vehicle.

So it would make firefighting very difficult indeed.

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

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

The houses?

Yeah.

Well, there was the cubicles we started off in and the other one was just a four compartment cubicle, all open the

[inaudible] side of the country and knock one petition out and make one long room - that was [inaudible]. Out of that room there were two bedrooms and they've got two cubicles and a dunny and a verandah, something like that. They built the first two houses - you would have seen them. I've got them out there. Contract - they're still there - 1936. I thought that was so little improvement on what I was in I wouldn't go in till they built this other one. You wouldn't believe it, I suppose, now: that they built a house in '39 when the fire was on, just about building it then for Bond. He was going ahead, he'd become a foreman. A little bit better. Coley said for a house for me, something between that what was built for the forests workers, we'll say - I was one but I was designated as overseer - and the house that Bond had who was the foreman. That's a demarcation that. I think the house would still be at Uriarra but it would be up [inaudible]. Bond wanted to get away on his own. He didn't want no people knowing how often he went out.

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

At any one time or overall?

You started off, you didn't have any staff at all under you.

When we actually went there there was one man and that was in '30 and then - how authentic this is I wouldn't know - but the Depression was biting and they wanted reef work. And Bondy was camped in some camps around the old Acton job and the ranger bloke there, he was a leading light in the AWU, and therefore it was court and talk about getting some work going and they came up with getting some extra money for forestry for relief work, that was in '32. Well, then gangs came along and there'd be hundreds and hundreds of different fellows, there might be thirty or forty at one time. And when they'd let all the contracts for holing, for instance - there was contract holing then - and a chappy would tender for that and he'd bring three or four others with him so there'd fifty or sixty blokes but they're all their mates and a lot of them not registered because you had to be registered here in the ACT and that sort of thing. So how many was around like that. It was just the same as when it came to extracting the timber. There was dozens and dozens of fellows then, many of them Italians. I never even knew their name because they were brought in by the chappy who contracted to do the timbers and mill it.

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

A couple of his mates. A chappy would put in a tender. At first they didn't know what to put in - dimensions. I think

the first lot in was about twenty-one inches by twelve inches deep. Well, you can't dig a hole like that without taking the dirt out. Once you take the dirt out you wouldn't dig many in a day. But they finished up digging them about eighteen inches wide and about three inches deep and that's the way they went. They got going and they kept on cutting one another. So it got down to about five and six a hundred.

A hundred holes?

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

Coalie, 'Who will you accept?'. 'Oh, I think I would accept Jacobs' goals'. Well, it depends It's only compass work in the first place and the chaps you've got with you. The first block that we did out at Kowen, Rodger came up and he was a very fast walker and a very heavy drinker, too, and a very fast walker, 'We'll measure a block off'. So went up and I'm tailing. I think I must have been walk about two. He'd stick a mark in and tape. Blimey, it's fifteen yards over and I'd take a run and jump on the thing and he wanted to tie down the other end and it didn't tie in. He looked at me. So he went back to the other end and tied it like that. But he knew what had happened. And so I tell that story because that could quite happen to the boys when they went out for the scratch gang; you're depending on others a lot.

And you were in charge of these gangs during the Depression years, were you?

Yeah.

And after the Depression they all, I suppose, disappeared and were you back to just yourself or did you have a few staff members to work for you?

No, there was always, even after the war - they got plenty of money and there was planning on and just about planted out as far as Pierce's Creek was concerned. They've scrounged a little bit more since. Just after I went out

they went up around where the koalas are and those type of things out in Tidbinbilla and they cut out there. A chap named Hughes, Minister for Territories at the time, he hung up off for a long time, he wouldn't even let them burn it. No more to be cut up there so you'd only niggles a bit out since. So it didn't expand. But after the war there was any amount of men and we had trucks then and tractors. Otherwise one of the big jobs - had many more breaks than what they have now because they've been replaced by roads in some cases. all over those hills, around every compartment, used to chip a six foot break. And that was gangs come there and so a month before Christmas as many as you could jam in. We had beds or tents for the casual labour. That was money made available for Christmas hamper for the people on relief work. And the same thing would happen before the end of the financial year - [inaudible]. So there were a lot of big gangs then. That's when, with the contractors in the winter time on the holes and the full-time that they gave the chappies who'd be married men, one on and one off. Earlier when it first started, single men they made available one week in five, but they improved on that after but the married men would want one ... other than this Christmas box and

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

Yeah and right up to '38 it was still. [Inaudible] when, say, three or four weeks before Christmas, you might get six weeks but we were still back. But at the same time there

were always [inaudible] and gangs of half a dozen -
something like half a dozen permanents, so we got those

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

After the war?

Yes.

Oh yes.

With maybe new immigrants to Australia making up the
gangs? I'll start again.

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

Don't worry about it.

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

No, I was just asking what happened after the war with
the work gangs. Did you still have plenty of workers

to fill the work gangs or were there cutbacks or did you have a lot of ...?

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

During the '50s your family must have been growing up and maybe getting on to leaving school.

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

When you left, you mean in 1960.

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

That's quite a record, too.

Of course, it wasn't unbroken. She was married and together her husband was posted overseas on two occasions for two-year stints and that sort of thing. But as I said, it was a pretty good record as far as that goes - too good as a matter of fact. By the time redundancies and them sort of

things were coming in she was too close to sixty-five, they didn't offer her a redundancy. She said some of the others had six or seven years to go and that sort of thing, they got good redundancies - too much of a good thing.

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

Sixty-one.

Sixty-one. How did you feel about retiring?

As I said, I had no regrets but that doesn't cover everything. I liked the work but there was a number of people that I worked under and I didn't like them and there was a greater number of people that worked under me and I didn't like them. But I did leave when it suited me. I had an argument with Did you meet Edgerley - before your time, was he?

Who was that? - sorry.

Edgerley.

No, I don't know him.

He died a few years ago. He became Forestry Officer in the end. I didn't know him, hadn't talked to him but went out, looking around Kowen one time, him and MacArthur and two or three of us, and he wanted to have a hit at me and he said,

'I believe you left because you was dissatisfied with the establishment'. That wasn't so. I left because it suited me. And the establishment wasn't going to make any impression on me one way and another. I put it up to him different when I got annoyed [?]. Some of them there would have liked to have got rid of me earlier, but they didn't have anything on me and they didn't have enough to try and hang anything on me.

So who were the people you worked for at various stages? You mentioned a few of them. You started off under Rodger, wasn't it?

Yes.

And how did you find him as a person?

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

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

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

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

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

juliana[?] and that sort of thing and he booked[?] them all down and made them up. He got a lot going and he was out in the bush and they were about to finish it out and Rodger went away and he took over. And Rodger came back and Max was all het up then to go back into the forestry school. So Rodger for a short time and then along came Coley in the mid-winter 1929. He stuck around for a long time. He said he was quite satisfied in the job, I don't think he ever said he was looking up the jobs vacant, I don't think, every week to see if he could better himself. I think he was quite happy where he was which was okay.

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

Oh yes, there's no doubt about that. It was funny. When I [inaudible] his pack was out. I got six snaps - they're still here somewhere - that he sent me from England because we were both cricket mad and football and they were showing the test match at Lords and things like that. And then I picked up another card when he was in the army. We sent him over a cake or two. The first one went over and he thought it was great and he said, 'Thanks to my good soldering it was good [inaudible]'. I used to solder it in the tin. And he said, wonders of the world it hadn't been opened - pinched. So evidently there was a lot - I suppose there would be for any old reason, I suppose - there must have been a lot of ships go down with a lot of presents on. But he mentioned that they hadn't been stolen. And he sent me

these snaps over there like that. And when he came back and he was talking and he complained, I felt a bit it wasn't my fault in this case, and nobody sent me a paper with the football finals in, he said. He was Manuka president of the football club. Well, I had suggested to a chappy that I'll do that, I'll send Coley some papers. 'Don't worry, Norman Taylor's going to do it'. Norman Taylor had never done it.

When Cole joined the army Lindsay Pryor took over.

Yes.

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

Oh yes, I think it was legitimate The only really arguments we had - I thought it was a legitimate one. They sent out war bonds. You bought them for sixteen shillings something and they become a pound in so many years or something like that. They were circulated around the jobs and you signed up for what you would take, so I signed up for what I took and actually more than It left me pulling on some of my savings, like, with these bonds which was quite a few in those days - chicken feed now. Every now and again these bonds would come along in a bundle and Shoobridge was handling them and fetch them out and things like that. This time Pryor brought them out. I had it on my chest and out it come: I'd heard from a chappy working at Uriarra how much I was paying for bonds and I didn't think it was right then and I don't think it's right now because

if he was handling those things it should come from him how much I was paying. That was my business, I thought. I might be wrong. I might be expecting too much from human nature. We finished up he was standing in for Shoobridge. I thought I had to stick up for him. And of course, once you start to stick up for him, I don't know, my hackles started to rise but I still think I was in the right.

Lindsay Pryor was there for quite a while, too.

As a forester?

Yeah.

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

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

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

Who took over from Cole?

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

How did you get along with him?

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

Who would have told him that, do you think?

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

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

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

But generally they were pretty good people.

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

That's right.

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

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

What hours did you work?

[Interruption while coffee is offered].

Oh no, some of the other fellows were easier than what I was, say, millers and things like that - any little thing. Let's say, Coley would say we'll cut the pines down six inches. You go to another place and you'll find that

they're cutting off eighteen inches. Well, that didn't like that as me. I remember a chap, was Lattin, he came here as a supervisor. I went away and I came back and the same blokes that I'd been keeping it down to six inches which was what Coley asked and they were cutting them up to eighteen inches high and didn't get on too well there.

You certainly have to make your presence [felt].

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

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

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

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

They used to have a locked gate for years, going down into the top of the dam for fisherman and like that. The Lattin man came out and said, 'Take it off and take one off to [inaudible]'. I said, 'I'll take the one off up there because it was on when I came and that's one of the advantages of the new road I got it from Lin Pryor to put a lock on the gate and keep it on it and you write and tell me to take it off and I will'. That one I'll take off now. Next thing all the complaints are all over the catchment area, fishing and camping, put it in the police's hands. Lattin would do that, I suppose. Police go out and he said, 'There used to be a lock on the gate. Why is it not there now'. I said, 'Because I was told to take it off'. 'Well', he said, 'I'll go back and advise it be put back on'. It was the only sensible thing if you didn't want them to go down on the catchment area. It was only a fire protection as far as I know, as far as forestry was concerned, didn't want them down there. I suppose it was the drinking water then there were no other dams upstream. This was the main water. Coley would say that he thought you should do what was right.

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

There was plenty of that with Coley. Another time, I asked him about something and he said, 'If you think that's right, you do it. This is your little job.' That was Pierce's

Creek. Well, of course, afterwards ... that was for years and years when it was only Coley and me direct. And then they come in and they got either six apprentices or assistant foresters. I understood at the time and we'll have no more overseers but the overseers remained and the six assistants remained. And then, of course, when they come on, to give them anything to do at all, it had to be something that I'd been doing all the time; not only me but Bradley and Southwell because we'd been doing it for years. Although another thing, Lin had been going around - he was assistant but Coley never gave him much to do. So he came over to Pierce's Creek and I didn't think it was very tactful on his part because Coley and Lin both together and he was going to do a stint there and he said, 'You needed bother with Tuson, he knows what to do, let him go ahead'. And this was in the front of me and in front of Lin; it wasn't very tactful. I don't think Lin would have liked I don't think I would have done either. So that's the way he treated.

He must have trusted you a lot.

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

find some workers: you're killing the goose that laid the golden egg.

What were your hours per day when you were working?

I think it was, when I came out, I think it was forty-four. We finished up on forty. That was the recognised working times.

No Saturday work?

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

What time in the morning did you start work?

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

That's not too bad.

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

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

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

That's right.

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

I've seen that, too, from council workers.

Yes, well, I was a council worker, too.

Maybe we won't talk about that.

It reminded me of a story. I thought it was good. Silly little stories make me grin and others are so subtle I can't see through them. This was a gang of council men. They went three or four mile out from the depot and found they had no shovels so couldn't do much. The foreman went away to the nearest property, rung up, told them he had no shovels. They said, 'Okay, we'll send some shovels out. In the meantime tell them to lean on one another'.

I like that one. You retired in 1960. Have you lived in Canberra ever since your retirement?

Yes.

No thought of ever moving away from Canberra?

No, there was no reason because we had five children. They're all married and they all live in Canberra.

Well, that's a good reason.

It's easy enough.

Looking back, you enjoyed your time with forestry?

Oh yes. As I said, I had no regrets, simply because I like the work but I don't say that I was ever cut out for a ganger. I was a ganger on a job in Victoria before I came

here. I was only twenty-two. Batched for a while at Yallourn. Ever been to Yallourn?

Yes, very briefly.

In the early days [inaudible] they were making the brickwords or something. When it all boils down I never mind working. I look upon it as I done quite a lot of personal work, myself, at Pierce's Creek. Wanted to do something and wanted to do it my way, I'd take a man with me. That man was never very favourably disposed towards me, either. I'd take him away and we'd do a job for a day or a week and he seemed to get the idea that he was doing more with me than if he'd been in the gang. But it boils me down, mostly I'd rather do the work myself than be bothered telling somebody else to do it.

And you feel that all the work you did in those years was worthwhile?

That's another thing, too, that I had the feeling and expressed it, too, that I was producing something and I thought a hell of a lot of other jobs, they're non-productive. And I like that idea.

Producing wood for houses and for other uses, is that what you mean? You mean, you felt it was valuable because you were producing ...

Yes, you'd be producing timber and you're doing something worthwhile.

I think we're nearly at the end but I'm just wondering if there's anything else you think you'd like to tell me you think is important about your work or your times.

In some ways you're just a few years too late. I'm not that bright now that I can remember much ...

You're doing pretty well.

And things that I'd like to hear it afterwards.

END TAPE 1, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A

I always thought if you were clearing the rabbits out of a paddock, if you were making a road, you were doing something worthwhile. But that was an argument over wages and conditions some time or other. They would tell you then you're not paid for what you do to work, it's your skills. No skills in my work, I was just a glorified navvy.

That's interesting because the one thing I thought I should have asked you was what skills you thought you had to get the job in the first place.

Purely and simply on Bond's say so. Rodger asked him did he know anybody. And Bond had seen me doing a bit of chopping.

Where had he seen you doing that?

Just when we were at the mine - at Cannongale, out from Cootamundra - just chopping a bit of firewood. It's nothing but if a man picks up an axe and started cutting there, I could tell in two minutes whether he'd done any axe work or hammer work. And not only that, I always claimed that if I put a man over there and never come back for two days to do a certain job on navvying or something like that, if I was away for a week, I knew when I come back whether he worked or whether he didn't or to what extent he'd worked because I'd done it all.

In other words, it was ...

Axe work and the fact that Bond had recommended, Rodger was new here, too, and he wanted somebody and he wanted a younger person to go to Kowen and somebody who would take an interest. In other words, Bondy - well, I like Bondy, too - Bondy was one of the very, very few who ever seemed to take a liking to me.

I can't believe that. I don't believe that one.

So he recommended me.

So it was your background of bush skills you learned as a boy and as a young fellow in Tasmania that helped you get the job. So you learned how to cut trees properly.

We had this place called [inaudible], the latest place on the Forth River, down opposite the Cradle Mountains. There was about 2,000 acres of good ground there and ten mile either side of [inaudible]. It was an isolated place. Come in there, no school at ten years of age. That's why I'm illiterate. There were other kids in there my age and there is a lot of regrowth round about where we were living. There'd been an old mining settlement and so I just got an axe and I just cut trees down from when I was ten years of age. Spoiled the landscape. I think now what a mess I made of that. I used to chop these trees down and I done that from ten to thirteen and then got a job on the roads.

You're not illiterate, are you? You were reading the paper when I came in.

Well, we say semi-illiterate.

I think you're all right. Obviously you didn't have a lot of time for schooling in Tasmania.

I often think whether in fact it would have made any impression on me. You see, I'm a guy ... I was backward when I was born and I've steadily lost ground ever since. Yeah, that's right.

I think you're selling yourself short.

As I said to Lattin - you've heard of Lattin [inaudible] -
'No difference in it.' I said, 'You're a fool and I'm a
fool but I have the advantage of you because I know I'm a
fool and you don't know.'

How did he take that?

He had a way of stiffening his jaw but that's all. He'd
have to take it.

Harry, I'm going to finish up there. I'm going to say
I've enjoyed very much talking to you. It's been great
and I hope the tape turns out well.

I hope you don't show it to anybody that knows me.

I think it will be all right. Thanks again.

END OF INTERVIEW