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comments.

INTERVIEW WITH JOHN BOLTON

23 August 1991

by Graham Scully

Note John Bolton (born 25 December 1914) is the eldest son of Cornelius and Grace Bolton, and a grandson of John Bolton.

GS Graham Scully

JB John Bolton

GS Can you begin by talking about your grandfather, John Bolton?

JB He was one of the early diggers at Kiandra. My father was born at Kiandra and they moved to Snowy Plain and was digging in the Diggers Creek. He took up a 40 acre selection where he built his homestead, and the boys used to dig there.

GS I believe they worked in pairs.

JB Yes. My father and Uncle Jim worked together on one claim, and under Harry Bolton and Uncle Tommy Bolton worked together on another claim.

GS Did he do exploring for other gold areas?

JB When the Snowy Plain diggings were finishing off, grandfather and a party took off to Back Plain, we call it the Grey Mare. They found alluvial gold. This was before the reef was found. Murray Napthali was one of the people in that party but I don;t know who the others were. After the alluvial diggings was finishing off someone else found the reef part, and then a chap by the name of Mc Allister, he was the first bloke that had the mining lease at Grey Mare.

GS I recall that Harold Hedger told me that a rogue called Mc Allister salted the Gungarlin River bank so that the lease could be sold to the dredge company.

JB That would have been. He was a bit of a rogue. He even salted the mine at Grey Mare to get more money into it to keep it working.

GS It was operating at the turn of the century?

JB Yes

GS Did it close down?

JB Yes, for several years and then in 1930, the depression time, they opened it up again. A chap by the name of George Bell took up the lease. That's when I was boundary riding for Bobundra at Masons Hut.

GS Then it closed down?

JB Yes, it closed again, and after I found another portion of the reef about a mile further south, this yielded 2oz of gold per ton in the part we tested. It was then that we took up the leases.

GS Who were some of the workmen?

JB Mick O'Shea was one, and another chap was named Goldsmith - he was leading hand.

GS When did you float the Grey Mare Gold Company?

JB 1947, but we took out the lease around 1945. In the early 1940's Russell was involved then his son Leo was involved.

GS Who were some of the other shareholders in your company?

JB Charles O'Connor from Albury, then Mick Pullen, a taxation officer and Charlie Lill and N K Cowey, John Yipp, Fred Seedsman

GS How many years after 1947 did the company operate?

JB Only a few.

GS What sort of machinery did you take in?

JB We took in a stamper and a flywheel weighing four and a half tons.

GS When you dug the ore out, how was it processed?

JB We got Ernest Murphy..... with a bullock team and he took it to Providence. Then we got a 4WD lorry and took it to Kiandra and got it crushed there. We never got the plant at Grey Mare set up. Funny business went on there, we couldn't get it going.

GS How many years after it started was it wound up?

JB I'll have to come up with that date.

GS Albert Peterson helped you build the new Grey Mare Hut. Is he still alive?

JB I am not sure about that. George Finch is gone, he was Albert's uncle. He was caretaking my part of it while I was dingo trapping.

We had only taken up those leases when the war broke out. Albert Peterson, my mate with me, he enlisted and went to the war and we left it sit idle till he came back. By this time the Snowy Mountain Hydro Electric people were commencing their hydro electric scheme and we thought we wouldn't do any work with so many new Australian people around and wait till that job was finished.

During this time, the Kosciusko State Park Trust, they took over, and being in the centre of it, and not complying with conditions, we lost our lease.

GS Can you tell me how you found that gold reef?

JB Well, when I was dingo trapping, I caught an old dingo 50 yards or so on top of the rise, and, we didn't tie our traps permanently solid, we tied a drag so they could get about and not break their foot off. He went down over the hill and when my old dog found the dingo, I was skinning the dingo and I noticed these quartz reefs coming through the side of the hill that looked very much like the Grey Mare quartz stone.

I started taking samples of that stone to an old mountain mate of mine at Round Mountain hut. George Finch who was a prospector. He used to sample the stone and couldn't find nothing and he kept saying, "There's gold there, it's very good looking stone." Eventually I did strike the seam that was carrying the gold and it was rich but only small.

GS The photo you let me copy is of that shaft?

JB Yes

GS How deep did the tunnel go?

JB It would have went in about 8 or 10 feet in a little open cut. We kept breaking the face down.

GS Is there gold still there?

JB Yes, but, not payable under present regulations.

GS Can we go back to John Bolton. As well as discovering gold at Grey Mare he was also the first to reach the summit of Kosciusko in winter.

JB Yes. I believe he was and was presented with a medal. One of his sons was supposed to be in that party. I'm not sure which one it would have been,

but I think it was Uncle Tommy Bolton, or Uncle Harry Bolton.

GS If it had been your father he would have talked to you about it.

JB I don't think it was my father.

GS You lived at Diggers Creek with your family until 8 years of age.

JB My oldest sister, born in Cooma, lived there with us. She was about 6 when we left there.

The main thing I can remember was a large vegetable garden in front and the water race from the creek through the garden. I remember the big clumps of rhubarb growing along the bottom fence. I didn't like rhubarb when I was little.

GS Do you remember any of the gold workings?

JB I remember seeing some of them digging for gold, but most of the diggings was finished then.

There was an old chap, Dick Eames, who used to live in a dugout up the creek. He used to do a bit of fossicking for gold. He used to have a violin and used to come across and play for us. I used to be taken with the violin playing. I'd sit on his knee when he was playing and when he would stop I would put on a bit of a tantrum to get him to play again.

When he died I was supposed to get his violin, but I don't know what became of it.

GS Where was he buried?

JB I think at Gagedzerick, Berridale.

GS Did you ever visit Dick Eames in his dugout?

JB Only when I was a boy - oh yes, I used to go up there with my mother. We never went in the dugout - too much smoke. You could only find where he was from the smoke from this hole in the ground. It was just a hole with bark over from mountain ash trees - level with the ground, a little tilt to drain the water off. The smoke would come between the bark and the bank. There wasn't much furniture, just what he could make from local timber.

GS One of the other diggings you spoke about was at Collins Creek and there was an old miner working there.

JB My father and Uncle Jim was digging in Collins Creek at this time. They was digging further down the

creek and that old chap by the name of Jones was digging further up the creek. They built a dam and the old Jones chap used to turn the water on for Dad and Uncle Jim and let it run down their race each morning.

One morning there was no water came down, and they decided he must have been sick. They walked up to where his hut was and he wasn't in the hut. they went on up to the dam and was dead on the bank of the dam. So my father and Uncle buried him just opposite the dam under a muzzlewood tree. In later years my father put white stones around the grave to mark where it was.

GS Jones, Collins Creek - did Jones have a hut there?

JB Not far from where he was buried. 150 yards downstream from where he was buried, on the same side of the creek. It wasn't much of a hut, more of a bush galley, a few bags and a bit of a fireplace.

GS You said that Con and Jim Bolton had a hut downstream from there.

JB they would have had a galley too, a bit of a camp, not a proper hut, partly waterproof, more a windbreak.

GS There was another miner who mined along Long Corner Creek (on modern maps as Campbell Creek).

JB Old Ned Hull. His hut was 400-500 yards west of Davies Hut. He never got much gold there, just enough to keep him going. My father and Uncle Jim were his main pals and they used to go across occasionally of a weekend to see Ned and this time they went across and found that he had died several days before.

They went across to Murray Naphthali, because everyone seemed to go to him, and they came back and rolled him up in his blanket and brought him down to that sunny point under the muzzlewood trees just north of Daveys Hut and Murray Naphthali read a few prayers and they buried him there.

In later years my father thought that he would carry a headstone from his diggings. It was about three feet in length and he would carry it a short distance every now and again. it took several years to get it over to where the grave was, but it was during the depression years that I helped Dad put the stone in at the grave. That was about 1932/1933.

GS He was buried there before Daveys hut was built?

- JB Oh yes, in the early 1900's.
- GS I wanted to get your comments on Tin Hut, that your father built in 1926.
- JB The first Tin Hut - Dad built that one too. It was built a little bit further down the hill and it was more or less in the snowdrift. When the snow came it drifted over and the snow came on it. so they pulled it down and rebuilt it on the windy part of the gap now there's only a little bit of ice, it all blows away.
- GS When you were working on the Bobundra run you used to use the Tin Hut.
- JB Yes, occasionally I used to use it in the day time. My boundary went from Mawson's Hut and I used to boundary ride up to the head of the Valentine swamp. Instead of going back up and down, I used to go on to the Tin Hut for a few hours and boundary back in the afternoon. 1931 or 32, the Mawson Hut was built and I was boundary riding then and I used to ride up and back.
- I helped Mawson build the hut.
- GS So the builders were?
- JB Herb Mawson, Con Bolton, Lindsay Willis and myself.
- JB I used to work up on the building with Mawson. I suppose because I was young. Lindsay, he was frightened to climb up, but he used to pass timber up from the ground. My father's main part of it was to cut some big snowgum trees which was about 3ft 6inches in the ground on the verandah side to support it from blowing away. He had to go to the Mailman's Crossing to get trees of that sort, because the trees around the hut were little, stunted, twisted ones.
- GS Moving on to the Bobundra. It was a big property, wasn't it?
- JB Yes it was. It was cut up for soldiers settlements. Herb Mawson was the manager. It belonged to Scottish Australian Land Company, I think. In 1929 Lindsay Willis and them took their sheep up to the mountains. That was the first year I worked in the mountains.
- GS Could you tell me the boundaries of the Bobundra run?
- JB The boundary followed the Valentine River, which headed up near the Tin Hut and went down to Valentine Falls to where the Rocky Plain River came

- in. It followed the Rocky Plain river back up past the Mailman's crossing to Big Strawberry then north to Strumbo, then turned east and followed the divide to the Big Bogong where the Mailbox is. It took in the head of the Rocky Plain River and back down to the Red Gap, from there to Bulls Peak and back to Valentine's Swamp. There was over 17 mile of fence of that run.
- GS How many sheep on the Bobundra run?
- JB They used to take about 10,000. There was only myself and Lindsay Willis as boundary riders because the rest of it was fenced. Davey Williamson was there - more or less as boss or overseer.
- GS The Grey Mare Hut - you and Jim Bolton built it in 1949.
- JB We helped with it. Albert Peterson done more of the construction work of the new hut, because he had a bit more building experience than myself. My Uncle Jim was pulling part of the old hut down, knocking nails out of the timber and I was helping carry it up and helping Albert with the building. I done quite a bit on the building, but Albert would have done most of the construction work.
- GS Can you tell me about Cesjacks Hut and lease?
- JB that was a lease that Cecil O'Brien and my Uncle Jim Bolton had, when the lease was taken out. It was in the early 1950's. I think our lease was F11. the first year we was up there we was camped in tents. Cecil O'Brien was never a mountain man, he was the storekeeper from Berridale and he decided that living in tents wasn't much good in that country. He got the timber precut, and got Noel Clarke to bring the timber and iron up. when he brought it up I helped him put it up. His son, Tom, helped him build it to.. Then he left after we finished the building. And Bert Constance, with Hains, who had the lease adjoining ours, used to camp at the same place.
- Bert Constance and I built the chimney. We carted all the stone with a horse and slide and built the chimney.
- GS The lease went to the Doubtful River?
- JB Yes, across the Doubtful, and over to the side of the Bogong, up to Reg Moulds boundary on the northern side. Hain and Constance had the lease on the south. Flannigans owned the country on the eastern side.

GS I also wanted to ask you John about your years as a dingo trapper.

JB When I was boundary riding at the Mawson Hut the dingos was very bad one year and they wanted a dingo trapper and because I had caught one dingo previous to that some years before they decided to give me a trial, and I got that job.

The first year I was trapping, I was trapping for 8 weeks and I caught 11 dingos. From the Grey Mare hut and around on to the Geehi River, up to the Big Bogong, up to Farm Ridge, Round Mountain, across to the Fifteen Mile. I even caught one over at Tabletop Mountain and Temperance Creek behind Nixon's hut. I was trapping for 8 years, and caught 73 dingos altogether.

GS When did you start dingo trapping?

JB 1936, my father was killed in a motor accident in 1935 and it was the following summer.

GS Did you ever visit Harry Bolton's hut on the Finn's river?

JB No. That's a hut I never was at. I was about there quite a bit.

GS Did you ever go up the track from the Back River, past Reids and Tolbar hut?

JB I went up there at times looking for stragglings sheep. I was up at the Alpine Hut one year cooking for 9 skiers. I used to make 8 double loaves of bread and four double loaves of brownie, currant loaves. I'd make that one morning and the following morning and I'd have the next day off. the main puddings I used to cook was boiled plum puddings. I used to make a brandy sauce with them, but we ran out of brandy, they liked that too much.

GS I have some photos here. This is a photo of Jimmy Bolton's hut.

JB Yes, just across from the Chalet. Uncle Jimmy got that because he was great pals with Donnie Rylie. Donnie gave him that.

Harold and Amos camped there nearly all their young life, trapping rabbits. It had a big fireplace. The old Napthali house was like that, it had seats along each side of the fireplace.

GS That's Harold and Ossie at the old Bolton homestead. This next one is Farm Ridge.

JB My mother used to run the mail from Snowy Plain to Eastbourne. I remember walking from our place at Diggers Creek across to Napthalis. She used to have to catch a horse there and ride down, once or twice a week. Eastbourne was at Harry Fletcher's place.

I remember where we crossed Digger's Creek. There was two big rocks we used to jump across to get over, about half a mile down from where we lived.

GS Were there ever water flumes in Diggers Creek? Harold Hedger showed me a log that he reckoned carried water from one side to the other.

JB Yes, there was. They flumed it across from one side to the other. That was just above where we used to cross when my mother and I used to go and get the mail.

GS You didn't have horses?

JB Dad did, but he'd be out working with stock. We had a sulky, but only in later years just before we left.

I should tell you about Harry Hedger's hut. That's where my mother was working for Harry when she met my father. That's where they had the tennis court. Uncle Harry Hedger done most of the digging out of the tennis court. Dad used to come down and challenge him. Dad gave him a hand, but he done most of it.

I had Dad's tennis racket for many years. It was made of split cane and it went up the handle on one side and around and back down. It had two wire rivets through the handle and where the Vpiece came in it had another.

The strings in it was all double strings. I had it for many years but I don;t know what happened to it in the finish.

I would have been good to have a lot of those things now.

A lot of the old records and documents I had, and photos, I lost them in a mice plague in 1984.

GS Well, we'll stop there. I'll write this out and send to you for comments and corrections. Thank you for all the wonderful information you've given me.