

Ross Bolton and Henry Willis

Interviewed by Dan Connell

16th February 1992

DC Interview recorded on the 16th February 1992 with Henry Willis and Ross Bolton and we're at Daveys Hut in the Kosciusko National Park and we're about to get a bit of background on the hut.

Ross, if you could just describe what the hut looks like, the place its in, the valley and that sort of thing.

RB Well actually its built on the edge of the plain looking towards the Gungarlin River, its weatherboard construction and built about 1910, 1909 by Tom Bolton who lived here quite a few years.

DC What's his connection with you?

RB He's my uncle and after they finished using it as a house it was used by all the stockmen in the mountains as many stock travelled through this area and many horsemen and has been used right up until the Park acquired the land.

DC What was your first contact with the hut, when did you first know about the hut, first come to the hut?

RB I was only about four when I remember it first, Uncle Tom wasn't living in it at that time, he'd given up living here.

DC He used to live here all the time?

RB Yes all the winter, and all the summers then he moved to near Jindabyne.

DC What was the hut like then, basically as now or a bit different?

RB Actually as now, its in really good condition for the age of it, cause it was done up some years ago by the Hut's Association, but it was always in reasonably good condition.

DC Did he live here by himself?

- RB No, no he was married.
- DC Any children?
- RB Yes some of the children were born here.
- DC So how large a family would have been living here at the height of that?
- RB Not many I don't think, perhaps the first two children I think.
- DC Henry, what was your first contact with the hut?
- HW I first came here with Dad when I was about nine, that was about 1950 and that was over there at the place where we had the country further on down the Gungarlin - bring the sheep up and let them go on the run and come up here and stay at Daveys and we'd camp here while we were doing the fences up or drenching - looking after the sheep.
- DC How long would you stay here
- HW About a week, about a week when we'd come up to do the fences we could be three or four days to do the drenching, January and February or a little bit later than that, then you'd be a week sometimes nearly a fortnight doing the mustering, taking them back in Autumn.
- DC Now the hut was built by Tom Bolton, right, but it was open I mean this is a fairly unusual situation, most of the time places are owned by a particular person who then might rent out accommodation to other people. But what was the system by which people came and stayed in the hut, took turns or whatever?
- HW Well it seems to be an unwritten rule of the bush that all huts were open to everyone, it's a matter of survival just mountain courtesy I suppose. If you had a hut it was open to everyone and you never ever found a hut locked in those days.
- DC What if you found someone else in it?
- HW Well they'd just move over and you'd share it.
- DC Would this rule still apply, say going back a bit when Tom Bolton was living here with his wife and a couple of kids, would they put up visitors?
- RB Oh yes they'd put anybody up, any travellers, you know always welcome and always a feed, feed for your horse, in those days people looked after one

- another.
- HW They shared what they had.
- DC Right! So just thinking of some of the people, well its a weatherboard hut, we've described that, I think you said that its basically the same, but isn't the roof a bit different to what it used to be?
- RB Well they put ^{iron} over ^{it} - it used to be only shingle roof and I couldn't say how long - oh thirty years since they put the iron on over the shingles and, but I wouldn't be sure on that how long it is, but it always had a shingle roof in my early days.
- DC And its two rooms with a fireplace....
- RB And a verandah in the front and a wood room on the end of the verandah.
- DC Now just talking about some of the characters who have come and gone, some of the stories associated with Daveys Hut. Henry, what are some of the people that stand out in your mind as mountain people who have come through and stayed in this hut?
- HW Oh, Davey was a sort of an institution in the place, he used to quite often be here and the blokes who were helping him there was Ron^{ny} Harris and Leo Williams used to be here quite often, Jack Bolton, we camped here with Jack a lot.
- DC You said it was built by Con Bolton..
- RB Tom Bolton.
- DC Tom Bolton, right, but its called Daveys Hut, why is that?
- HW Because Davey acquired the country, he bought it at some stage along the way....
- DC Is Davey the first or second name?
- HW Davey Williamson was his name and when he got the country it just became known as Daveys Hut. I think that's right isn't it Ross?
- RB That's right!
- DC What sort of person was he?
- RB An old single chap, he was a good mountain man, he'd do anything for you, but fairly Scotch...

- DC Scotch, in what way?
- RB Tight with money, but you didn't blame him for that, he had to work for it.
- DC Do you remember any stories about him being tight with his money?
- RB Well one thing, he hated horses because he reckoned horses eat grass day and night and never laid down. He reckoned cattle would have their fill then lay down and chew it up and give the grass a chance. He always hated to see horses eating.
- DC Do you remember him at all?
- HW Oh yes I remember him quite well when I was a little kid, of about nine or ten years old. I can always remember him scratching around in the bedroom getting ready to go to bed one night and like the old mountain men they'd sit up and talk until eleven or twelve o'clock and everybody had to go to bed at the same time and get up at the same time because there were a fair few in the hut. Davey was scratching around getting ready to go to bed and he decided he'd better open the shutter window, you know the one with the tin on it, "I'd better open the window, if I wake up in the middle of the night I like to see some daylight" and I was always highly amused about seeing daylight in the middle of the night. It was already the middle of the night! (laughing) This always highly amused me as a kid and I always remembered it.
- DC What sort of food would you eat in these sorts of places?
- HW Bread and corned meat, thats if you only came up for a few days or a week, if you came up for longer you'd bring a few spuds, onions, something like that, but mainly it was bread and meat.
- DC Lets go back to when the hut was first built Ross, how isolated was it, how often would people come by. Was there a fairly large number of visitors coming by or would quite a few weeks sometimes go past without anyone coming by?
- RB No it was very... men were travelling by all the time. Napthali's house was over there and Uncle Con's house was up Diggers Creek and there was some people lived over at the Chalet.. Stockmen - in the winter time it would be quiet in the summer time there would be several fellows on horseback going through, going through with stock or just riding up to go and look at them. It wouldn't be real quiet in the summer time, but winter time it would be a

- bit quiet, especially when it snowed.
- DC How often would they go out to get supplies, especially in winter?
- RB Not very often.
- DC What, five, six weeks?
- RB Oh once a month I'd reckon. Well they had to go to Jindabyne or Adaminaby. Jindabyne mainly, fairly rough going, especially if there was a lot of snow on the ground.
- DC What about any other characters you can think of, you mentioned a couple of names, Henry could you describe some of those people?
- HW Jack Bolton well he ...I don't know where he had his stock up here at the time, he spent a fair bit of time here and he used to bring the old Land Rover up here in later years, he used to have horses up here. He'd alway's have the Land Rover, fairly unpunctual sort of a bloke, turn up anytime, day or night. Very relaxed about what he was doing, never got in a hurry, never got excited about anything, real good old bloke to camp with really, a good bloke to camp with. There was some blokes would come along, burn up all the wood and never bother putting it back in again. Couple of characters that also... they were Rangers with the Lands Department, Claudie Freebody and Frank West, they were bits of characters used to wander around the mountains here.
- DC Freebodys, is that the family who used to conflict with Carter?
- HW No, I think they were distant relations but a long way apart. Claudie was from the other side of Berridale, I don't know where Frank West lived mainly about Waste Point I think.
- DC What about people from some of the other huts round about, Carter, did he have anything to do - did they meet very often ^{with} the Boltons?
- RB Charlie Carter was he sort of more of less lived by himself, travelled about, he wasn't terribly popular with his yarns and cures. He'd come around to the huts occasionally, well he lived over here for two years, drove us mad while he was there. (laughing)
- DC Two years is a long time to go and stay with someone (laughing).
- RB I'm glad we weren't staying full time, we used to go

home to get away from him.

DC Which hut was that, this hut?

RB No, the one on Diggers Creek.

DC On Diggers Creek, did you used to stay in that hut quite a bit did you, you used to go to Diggers Creek?

RB We always went to Diggers Creek, Mum used to come up sometimes we used to stay six weeks, we'd have a cow, make butter, she'd have the stove there make bread.

DC And what would you be doing around Diggers Creek?

RB Oh we'd be looking after the sheep further out, and Dad used to go fossicking in the creek, he'd be happy with his gold dish. Day in day out, he enjoyed that.

DC There was another hut, fifty metres away from that Diggers Creek hut wasn't there?

RB Well that was the Italians hut, it was built by seven Italians. They were gold digging in our paddock and found a fairly rich seam there.

DC What date was that?

RB Oh in the thirties, about thirty one I think, thirty two, then they run out of water. Worked it up the hill as far as they could, then they run out of water and decided to go away and all get a job to buy a pump and an engine to pump it from the Gungarlin so they could wash it further up the hill. They went to Newcastle and three got killed in Newcastle, and only one ever came back to this area, they never got the pump and never finished the gold digging, its still there today.

DC What happened to the one that came back?

RB He went to Kossie Hotel, worked there - tremendous man, Johnnie Piazza was his name, real white man. When the war started and the other Italians were interred, the manager of the hotel guaranteed the Government that he wouldn't leave the hotel, he'd look after him and they left him there. He was a marvellous man, Johnnie.

DC Lets see, the sort of changes that happened when the Parks first came in here how did they look after the huts in the first few years, because previously they'd been looked after by the people coming through, the people who worked up here. What

happened in the first few years when the National Park and people got forced off the leases down here, Henry?

HW Well the huts deteriorated in a big way, the huts got run down, a lot of them fell down altogether, like Boltons on Diggers Creek and that went on for quite a few years, then the Kosciusko Huts Association was born, and had it been around a few years earlier, then Boltons on Diggers Creek would have been saved too but they were too late for it. Olivers Hut over here on the plain fell apart too, but before the Huts Association came on the scene the Park did practically nothing. A lot of the huts they deliberately pulled down, they were destroyed and lost forever.

DC These stock yards just here, they were used.... what, how?

HW They were used for..... Davey used to yard his cattle up there, brand his calves, draft his cattle up in them.

DC Other people used them too?

HW Yes people used ^{to} leave horses there overnight.

DC How's it feel coming back to the hut after all these years Ross?

RB Oh I've enjoyed it - enjoyed the night last night. Really relaxes me to come back here and see the I used to like the mountains too, in my young days I used to love them, used get a bit sick towards the end when we knew we were going to lose the leases and the Park Trust was going to buy them out we sorta lost interest in them. Didn't seem to be any future, but I wasn't sorry they took it I suppose.

DC Why weren't you sorry?

RB Well in our position down there, we used to come up into the mountains and we had terrible bad neighbours, rabbits all around us, we'd be up here looking after the sheep - go home the rabbits would be everywhere and in the Autumn....

DC What do you mean when you say the neighbours do you mean rabbits?

RB People all around us always had rabbits and we never had none, they'd get holes in the fence and they'd be in thick by the time we got home and that was a lot of work. Sometimes I'd wondered if we ever did make anything out of the mountains, the time that was lost. In bad years it was good but in a good

year I don't think we made much.

DC Any final comments about Daveys Hut, Henry?

HW Oh yes, I thoroughly enjoyed here and spend a night or two and have a look around, keeping old traditions alive sorta brings back old memories of good times, fairly tough times too. Its good, its sorta, its like they say, when mountain water gets in your blood you're finished. You've just got to keep coming back.

you cant get rid of it,

DC Ross?

RB I think that'd be right Henry, I think it gets in your veins and you can't get it out. I love to come back, especially fishing, but now there's not much fish since they dammed the Snowy, the fishing's not like it used to be. Used to be able to catch twenty or thirty fish in a couple of hours in the Gungarlin, now you only catch sardines. Things have changed and so have I. I've got older, too old I'm afraid, I'd hate to be up here fencing, looking after stock.

DC Thank you very much, Ross, Henry thank you.

Transcribed by Pauline Downing
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