

Interview Daniel Connell (ABC) with Ross Bolton

20th September 1991

Helen Gottaas, Ron Hunt and Ron Clugston <sup>dances at</sup> playing some of the music that used to be performed at Adaminaby in the Snowy Mountains during their younger days, I recorded them when I was up that way with Graham Scully from the Kosciusko Huts Association earlier this year.

Over the last year or so I've made a number of trips to the Snowy Mountains with Graham Scully and on one of these occasions we went into the Kosciusko National Park to look for an old abandoned sawmill. Graham wanted to find the graves of two children buried there in the 1870's.

RB Let's see if we can find these graves?

HW (Henry Willis) What are we looking for?

RB Stones around them, just little stones.

HW Was they little white stones around them?

RB Yes, you got an idea you might have seen them?

HW No.

(DC That was Ross Bolton, who remembered the graves from the time that his family used to bring their stock up this gully every summer to the pastures further up.)

RB Now that could be it.....

HW But its not white rock though....

RB No, and when I come to think of it, there was white rock around one of them. The other, see that was only a baby look, it was still-born.

DC How did you get the date, how'd you know it was 1874?

RB Well, when we were tracing our history back.

(DC A couple of months later I visited Ross Bolton on his farm near Berridale. I asked him when he first went up into the area where we found the graves.)

RB Well, I was only four when I first went there and I remember it well. The whole family went to Snowy Plains for a holiday, we had a buggy and pair and two pack horses and the rest of the family rode. We stayed on the Snowy Plains for about five weeks. Dad was looking after the sheep further out, he used to have to go out to look after them and then in his spare time we'd go fishing, gold digging, he loved gold digging, he was brought up as a gold miner and whenever he had a spare minute he'd always like to go back and fossick in the creek and wash a bit of gold.

DC When you were up there, when you were a four year old, what sort of things did you do in the evenings?

RB Just sit by the fire and talk, Dad would usually take the accordion he could play the accordion, he was only self taught and there'd be sing songs around the fire and time would get away on you.

DC What sort of tunes, do you remember any of the tunes?

RB Oh, When Your Hair Has Turned To Silver and Old Black Joe, I'll Take You Home Again Kathleen, Swanee River.

DC What did you eat?

RB Oh well Dad would kill a sheep, Mum would make bread in the stove. Dad was a terrible good cook too, he could make beautiful dampers in the camp oven, he used to call them Blueys, they had currants in them and they were beautiful!

DC Tell me a bit more about your father?

RB His father was one of the first pioneers on Snowy Plain, actually about 1840 his father came to Kiandra and in 1862 he went to Snowy Plain. He was married on Snowy Plain and all the family was born in the homestead on Snowy Plain, with no doctors, none of your midwives, seven children were born there, only one didn't survive and his mother died when the last child was only four months old. His father liked the grog, he'd go to Jindabyne to buy food and he'd get on the drink and he'd perhaps come back with hardly anything, drink all the money he'd made with the gold. After the mother died, Dad was only eight, he reared the rest of the family for some time. The youngest one Suzanne, thats his sister Suzanne, Mrs Naphthali reared her for about two years and then he took her over.

DC When you go up there and you see places like that old sawmill site and those graves, what do you feel about

those sorts of places, where people used to live and they don't live any more?

RB Well I always think when I see those sort of places, what it must have been like back in those days, it must have been hard. But you see, you've got to be brought up to it! Likes of Dad, he never really knew any different to hard times and living in that area and all that. If you weren't brought up to it, well you'd go mad. Dad and Louis and I we spent six weeks on Finns River after the '39 fires that burnt the whole place out and burnt every stick of fence on it. Burnt the hut. In 1940 we spent about six weeks there on Finns River fencing, about January, February, and we'd be over on the fenceline at daybreak, at daylight and we'd work til dark. Well that was a long day, with no hut, cause that got burnt, we were sleeping on heather in the tents. Dad was cooking dampers for us, we'd kill our own sheep and everything else. Well we stayed there six weeks and <sup>Finns River</sup> really was sort of out of the way place you'd never <sup>be</sup> seen, they couldn't get further west real well and the Snowy River was on the southern fall, we stayed there six weeks and never seen a soul! No radio, you didn't know what was going on in the world, well six weeks is a long time sleeping on heather every night and just living on the same food - anyway we survived it we got the fence up and got home, but it was a long time! I was only young in those days and six weeks seemed a long time to be out, Dad didn't mind it.

(DC Ross Bolton's father had grown up in the Snowy Mountains at a time when gold mining was a major activity, but as he explained to Ross, there are more ways than one to make money out of gold.)

RB Dad remembers the dredge on the Snowy Plains. They had thirty eight bullocks for the lap of the dredge was twenty six ton, and they had thirty eight bullocks, at Nimmo Hill which was terrible steep, there was a lot of trees in those days and it was in and out the trees. Thirty eight bullocks is a long team! Dad and Uncle Tom they the dug holes where McAllister was trying to sell the rights for the dredge. They dug holes right up the Gungarlin River and you'd have to go down 'til you got into the wash, thats what the gold's in, and Dad and Uncle Tom they'd have to throw that last bit of wash right on top of the hole last of the dirt and get down onto the bottom, the gold sits on the bottom, there's never any gold below the bottom, thats a clay surface. I think they dug sixty holes on either side of the Gungarlin, right up the Plain there - when McAllister was trying to sell it, he went along with gold and he salted

the holes. He'd put a bit of gold in the wash in this hole then he might go up four or five and do the same, and when he was trying to sell the rights he'd go to that hole and then they'd wash it in the dish and they'd get gold, and Dad when they used to dig the holes, they had a gold dish and Dad used to take a little bit of the wash down to the river and wash it and sometimes you'd only get one colour. What you'd call a colour is that you can just see it. Some dishfulls you wouldn't get a thing, there was no gold there!

Anyway they sold the claim, McAllister sold the claim, they brought the dredge there and they had to dig a big hole to float the dredge for a start, then Dad and Uncle Tom got the contract to cut wood. They had to cut the wood three foot long with all the bags and they were getting so much a cord, a cord of wood I suppose you don't know how much that is do you? Its five long, five foot wide and five foot high and thats a cord of wood. You see when they cut it they stacked it and then the boss would come along and had a cord there and they'd count the cords up. Well Dad and Uncle Tom, they cut wood, this was before the dredge was ever really put together, they cut for about four months, and Dad said to Uncle Tom, he told me he said "I think we should get paid and get out! Because once the dredge starts it won't pay!" Anyway, they went to the boss and said they were leaving and he paid them up and the dredge only worked for a bit over a week and they got no gold! Dad and Uncle Tom got their money, and there was a lot who didn't get their money.

(DC It was a hard life making a living in the mountains and people depended on each other for their entertainment. One diversion which was common throughout rural Australia was reciting and here's an example from Ron Clugston, one of the musicians you heard earlier.)

RC This is a piece that used to be done by an English Comedian Stanley Holloway who was very popular about fifty or sixty years ago and I always had a liking for the way he used to do them.

I've got a fair few of them and I do them in a very amateurish way at various functions.

On Jubilee Day the Ramsbottoms asked all their relations to tea  
Including young Albert's grandmother  
an awkward old party was she  
She'd seen Queen Victoria's Jubilee  
and her wedding to Albert the Good

And she got quite upset when young Albert asked her how she got on in the flood  
She passed quite a damper on party  
But cheered up a bit after tea  
and gave our Albert a real golden sovereign  
That she'd saved up since last Jubilee  
It had picture of Queen onto one side  
and a dragon fight on the reverse  
And it tasted of camphor and cobwebs from being so long in her purse  
Albert cuddled the Queen and he kissed it  
and he felt the rough edge with his tongue  
For he knew that the look of his father, that it wouldn't be his very long  
"Shall I get you your money box Albert," said Mother so coaxing and sweet  
But Albert let drop an expression he must have picked up in the street  
"I'll show you a trick with that sovereign, said Pa who was hovering near"  
Then he took and pretended to eat it  
and he brought it back out of his ear  
This magic filled Albert with wonder  
and before you could say Uncle Dick  
He got the coin back from his father and performed the first part of the trick  
When they saw as he swallowed his sovereign with excitement his relatives burned  
With each one suggesting some process of getting the money returned  
Some were for fishing with tweezers, some were for shaking it out  
If they only got back a few shillings they said, would be better than nowt  
They tried holding Albert head downwards and giving his back a good thump  
Said his Uncle who worked for a chemist, said "There's nowt for it but a stomach pump"  
They hadn't a stomach pump handy, but Pa done the best that he could  
With a bicycle pump that he'd borrowed, but that weren't ever so good  
At last they sent for a doctor who looked down his throat through a glass  
And he said, "Eh this will mean operation, I'm afraid that he'll have to have gas!"  
"How much is this here goner cost us!" said Father beginning to squirm  
Said the doctor, "It comes quite expensive the best gas is eightpence a firm"  
"Then there's my time, four shillings an hour, you can't do these things in two ticks  
By rights I should charge you a guinea but I'll do it for eighteen and six"

"What! Eighteen and six to get sovereign?" said Father,  
"That doesn't sound sense  
I'll tell you what, you'd better keep Albert and give me  
the odd eighteen pence!"  
The doctor concurred this arrangement and to this day  
remains in some doubt  
As to whether he's in eighteen shillings or whether he's  
eighteen pence out.

(DC Ron Clugston and before that Ross Bolton)

Transcribed by Pauline Downing  
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