

Danny Collman

DANNY COLLMAN

Interviewed by Klaus Heuneke

11 December 1986

Interview took place at the headquarters of the Snowy Mountains Authority in Jindabyne. Danny started working with the Water and Irrigation Commission in 1950 in the mountains. He was born in Cooma, and in 1953 he started with the Snowy Mountains Authority at Island Bend, and at different times worked at Cabramurra, or was based at Cabramurra, at Khancoban and at Jindabyne. He has mainly been a hydrographer. He at one stage visited Jagungal with *Elyne Mitchell and her son, John*. Elyne wrote this up in her book she did in 1980. In 1964, I believe Danny met Robbie Kilpinen, near Mount Tabletop, during Robbie's record-breaking ski from Perisher to Kiandra.

Danny knew Charlie Carter and was quite involved in downhill skiing for a period. He is now based at Jindabyne during the week, and has a farm out at Shannon's Flat, to which he goes on the weekend.

KH: Does that sound all right?

DC: Is that about a three-hour tape, is it?

KH: This is - each side's three quarters of an hour. So it's an hour and a half, and then I put another one if necessary. I have been taking between two and three hours.

DC: Yell out if you want a drink, there's orange juice or there's a grape thing there, Coke?

KH: I'm right for a while. Do you want to tell me about the start of the Paddy Pallin Classic, before we get on to other things?

DC: Yes, we could talk about the Paddy Pallin Classic, held from Round Mountain to Perisher. On the actual track from Round Mountain to Perisher, there was a control at Mawson's Hut, and I

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think another control at White's River, where the runners went through. And they started a group from Round Mountain, there was a small meeting there to see whether they wanted to race or not, and there was fairly cloudy conditions, not terribly good visibility and they started off from Round Mountain and they ran out past Jagungal, to the west of Jagungal and then, instead of continuing through <sup>to</sup> Mawson's, they veered off to the left and went out towards Bulls Peak.

KH: Oh, did they?

DC: Yes, and it meant quite a big dog leg, and there was quite a lot of worry on the time they were taking to get to Mawson's Hut. We were concerned from the Cabra end, because we had to set search into operation, and we were getting concerned about whether we should go out and start looking. And they eventually turned up. They did a big dog leg out towards Bulls Peak and then came into Mawson, so realised that they'd gone off course. And then they came back in again.

KH: The weather closed in after Jagungal, didn't it?

DC: Yes, yes. And then, once they checked in at Mawson's and started to run through to White's River, one of the Victorian racers developed bad stomach cramps.

KH: That was a fellow called <sup>[Bck]</sup> Maddison and then there was a Charlie Derrick.

DC: Derrick, Derrick.

KH: The fellow who died later on.

DC: The chap that died - I'm not sure if it was him or the other chap that developed - there were two chaps together from Vic, and one of them developed cramps, and they had to pull him out close to White's River. They had an over-snow vehicle standing by there. And they pulled him out, and then the rest of the runners went on. And at Perisher, what they were going to do, when they got close to Perisher, they were going to make their run past, the skiers were going to take off. And when they got in close to the control point, the final point at Perisher, they

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all said, "Look, we <sup>(no-one checked?)</sup> 'll hold hands and we will go through together," and .....they didn't do any running, they all went through together.

KH: There must have been - the hazards of a course like that and the difficulty of having staging points, that made them relocate it - - -

DC: Yes.

KH: I think it then went from Perisher to the summit, didn't it?

DC: Perisher to the Chalet out past Mount Duncan - I think it was Duncan - to the Chalet and back around and then down to Smiggins, I think, and back to Perisher.

KH: That used to go back down to Smiggins, that's right, in the 60s.

DC: Yes. Was it 30K or more?

KH: It must be at least 30K, <sup>coming down Smiggins</sup> .....and back up again.

DC: It would be at least 30.

KH: Have you got any other christian names as well as Danny?

DC: Yes, Lawrence.

KH: Danny Lawrence.

DC: I'm actually Daniel. I adopted the name Danny for skiing, I think.

KH: And when were you born?

DC: I was born in December 16 1930. So I have a birthday on the 16th of this month. I shall be 56.

KH: Right. And where were you born?

DC: Cooma.

KH: At home or in a hospital?

DC: In the hospital - in Cooma maternity hospital.

KH: And what are your parents' names?

DC: Katherine - she was always Kate, but she was Katherine, and my father was George.

KH: What was your mother's maiden name?

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DC: MacGregor, she was a MacGregor.

KH: Was it a Mrs MacGregor who had that shop in Jindabyne?

DC: Yes, that was my aunt.

KH: That was your aunt?

DC: Yes, Polly MacGregor. She had the shop there. Actually, I've got an old grandmother's clock there, that came from there, an old relic.

KH: I've read about Polly MacGregor. She was your aunt.

DC: She was my mother's sister.

KH: Right. Did you go there? To her shop in Jindabyne?

DC: Yes, oh yes.....with two lollies when I was a kid. But yes, I used to go and see her quite a bit.

KH: Apparently, it was one of those stores that had everything.

DC: Everything, yes.

KH: It was crowded with everything. I think it was the one main store in Jindabyne when the Snowy Mountains Authority started?

DC: It was. Blewitt's had a store, right by the post office. There is a road forking off - the road that came out where she was, going up there. And Blewitt's had a store there. It wasn't as well equipped, I don't think. But she had a good shop there.

KH: And what happened to her when the town was flooded?

DC: She - I'm just trying to think. She's not with us now. She passed on a couple of years ago. Yes, she's not alive now.

KH: But she didn't set up a new shop?

DC: No, she didn't. But she had a house. Oh, that's right. She had a house down on McCall Circuit in Jindabyne. As you go down past the hotel, before you get to the hotel, you turn left and there's a little - McCall Circuit - that runs round and gives you quite a good view of the lake. And she's got a brick home there. Yes, she just settled there.

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KH: And where did you go to school?

DC: I went to the public school at Jindabyne. And then I went to Hurlstone Agricultural college.

KH: So your parents lived at Jindabyne?

DC: Yes.

KH: In the town?

DC: Yes.

KH: In the old town?

DC: In the old town, yes. My dad spent a lot of <sup>his</sup> life gravelling the Summit road with a horse and cart - - -

KH: Gravelling?

DC: Gravelling, yes, and doing maintenance on the road. That was his job, with a horse and tip cart. And when I was very young, before the war had started, every school holidays I'd take off with him, 4 o'clock in the morning, we'd go up and we'd go up to Red Hut, or somewhere there. And he'd go about his work, loading the cart up and gravelling the road and doing work on the road, and away I would go into the hills. I remember very clearly, I was down at Sawpit, and I went off into the bush there, and I thought, "That's bloody strange." I mean, "all this scrub and timber" and I thought, "that's bloody strange, where in the hell am I?" Then I thought, "Oh, I've got to come out of it. I've got to come out of this." So eventually I hit the Summit Road, the Kosciusko Road, it was way down to blazes, down towards the Creel. <sup>I've gone</sup> down <sup>into far</sup> and I've lost sight. I didn't have sight, and I thought, "I'm going to get out of this. I'm going to get out of it somewhere." And I ended up way down the road.

KH: Did he find you?

DC: Oh, I found myself.

KH: Oh, I see.

DC: He used to go <sup>to</sup> work and I'd go off into the bush.

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KH: This would be back in the 40s.

DC: Yes, before the war, in the late sort of 30s. And when I was about 8 or 9 years old, I suppose, I first went up there.

KH: Were they still logging up in that country then?

DC: Only a little bit. Not a great lot. Because I was working with Dad and a couple of my brothers doing felling, up at Penderlea, falling ash by axe. That would have been in the 40s, probably just after the war.

KH: Were they bringing them out with a bullock team?

DC: Oh, using horses to spare-chain them, I think. I had a bit of a sawmill there, at Penderlea.

KH: Oh right. So there was nothing going at Sawpit. That goes back a long way.

DC: No, nothing up that way. That's right. I think they stopped all milling up there.

KH: So at school, you would have got what, to intermediate level?

DC: Round about intermediate level. And I went to my father, and I said, "Look," I said, "You've got me at an agricultural college," and I said, "I'm not interested in the land. I'm not interested in doing landwork." And he said, "Righto, if that's the way you feel. Come home." So I came home, and he said, "Right," he said, "You can go and work for Ray Adams. He has got a property down out of Cooma. Or you can go and work on the ski run at Kosciusko with Johnny Abbottsmith." I thought for a while. I said, "Righto. I'm going up to work for Johnny Abbottsmith on the ski run."

KH: At the Kosciusko Hotel?

DC: Yes, that was in '45, 1945. And I went up there and worked for Johnny.

KH: What, hiring out skis and things?

DC: Yes, and fitting steel edges to blank skis that used to come in from Norway. And anyhow, Johnny lent me a pair of skis. And I went over on - there's a little course running down past

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Kosciusko Lake, and it's got a name - and I try and think of it - - -

KH: Not the Kerry course?

DC: No. The Kerry is further up.

KH: Or the Grand Slam?

DC: This was on the eastern side of the Kosciusko Lake, and there's a little course there. And I remember Johnny giving me a pair of skis. I went across there and I skied and I thought, "Bloody skiing! What a bastard of a game!" I thought, "This is bloody shocking!" I didn't know how to ski, I was all over the place, on my neck and - anyhow I got mucking around a bit, and I was skiing with Geoff McClutchy, he was a perfect parallel skier in those days, which was pretty rare. And I got skiing with him, and it wasn't that long, and I was parallelling. And in '57, I think it was, or '58, I started instructing at the old hotel. There was about seven instructors there, doing the old Arlberg course, the body rotation.

KH: Sorry, 1947?

DC: '47.

KH: '47 not '57.

DC: No, not '57 - '47. doing the old Arlberg rotation, you know. And I did that for two years, and I thought, "Gee, I wouldn't mind doing some racing." So I wrote to the ANSF, and I said, "Look, I'd like to get into ski racing, and I'd like to get my amateur status back and get out of instructing. I'm not terribly keen about instructing, and I would like to get into racing." So they wrote me a letter back, they said, "Your amateur status is granted. Get into your racing."

KH: While you were an instructor, you were getting paid for that.

DC: I was a professional, yes, and I was paid, yes. This is what I was concerned about. I wanted to gain amateur status.

KH: And so what did you do in the summertime at that - - -

DC: In the summertime, you'd do a bit of anything.



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Maintenance, or - we used to fit a lot of skis with steel edges, new blanks that came in from Norway. We used to fit those up and put bindings on them, get them all ready for the next winter. And generally repair old skis that were cracked, or whack a bit of glue into them, and clamp them up, and do that sort of thing, general sort of getting all the skis and that ready for the next year. And boots and that, <sup>we'd</sup> look at boots. Some of them had the heels half torn off .....that type of thing.

KH: So were you at the hotel when it burned down?

DC: No, I'd left there. I'd left <sup>there</sup> the year before, I was lucky.

KH: So you raced for a couple of years?

DC: Yes, I raced from - I started racing in '49. And I got my first state title - the New South Wales Jump - I won in '49. I thought it was funny, you know, winning that.

KH: Not in slalom, or - - -

DC: No. And then I started slalom racing, I think, in 53, I was second in the New South Wales Alpine Combined. And then in '56, at Mount Hotham, we did <sup>the Nationals, the</sup> National Slalom and Downhill. I was second in the Combined there. And I got beaten on the drag in the Downhill by two-fifths of a second by the young German.

KH: Who was that?

DC: <sup>Seppie</sup>....Staedtler. And then he beat me in the Slalom again. But I came second in the Alpine Combined there. And in 57, the following year, I won the National Downhill at Thredbo. And then I won the All Round State, I was All Round New South Wales Champion in 57.

KH: This is all downhill?

DC: All downhill. Well, I won the four events.

KH: Cross country as well?

DC: Cross country, jump, the slalom, the giant slalom.

KH: Oh, a combined event. I see.

DC: Combined event there. In '58 I got the New South Wales Alpine Combined. '61 I retired from alpine racing. I raced with

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Australia against New Zealand. And we got the best result out of that. And I had a good result there in <sup>the</sup> slalom, I had the best result out of New Zealand and Australia in the slalom. I wasn't worrying much in the downhill because I was a late runner and we had it won. I came off the top and landed on my backside, and bounced back onto my skis and went through. But, oh, I wasn't one of the fastest.

KH: So you had about 12 years of racing?

DC: Twelve years of racing, yes.

KH: Oh right. I didn't realise that. You were really involved.

DC: Yes. I was equal runner-up in the National giant Slalom <sup>here</sup> in '61, when I got <sup>out</sup>. I was chosen to represent Australia in Oslo in '53. And I couldn't make it because the competitor had to pay the whole - there was quite a bit - you had to pay the whole lot. There was no government aid or no help at all. So I'd have given anything to go to Oslo, but I just couldn't. I had to step down.

KH: That was the Olympics?

DC: The Olympics. <sup>Oslo Olympics.</sup>

KH: What, in 52?

DC: <sup>'52 or '53.</sup> 52. 53. I think it was, Oslo. Then I made the last - '59 I made a bid to go to Squaw Valley in the States. I thought, "Oh, if I <sup>could</sup> get in that team, it'd be quite good. I'm probably getting a bit old for it." And I went to Buller. It was funny. I was too cautious. In the slalom I came third. I thought, "God, that's not good," for a result for a team, for an Olympic team. So, in the downhill, off the top of Mount Buller, it was sheer ice. It was funny. There was, Adrian Studley was racing, he said, "Look," he said, "you've got <sup>Combination</sup> Kneisels(?)," he said, "I have got <sup>Kastles</sup> downhills," he said, "they're much faster." And he said, "Come on, change them over, you'll push them." We were climbing Mount Buller on foot. There was no lifts there. And anyhow, the first day on these

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Kastles, oh, I came down off the top and I was rocketing. I thought, Holy - - - and I got down on the middle of the slopes, and I went out a bit wide and I hit some bumps. And the jolly things, in the finish, threw me right up in the air, and I crashed. And I ~~thought~~, "God!" So, the following day, I had another run, and I got right down to the last turn through the finish, and as I was coming round to go through the finish, my tips opened up and I went through headfirst. I fell between my skis and I went through headfirst. And I said, "Right. I'm not going to do any more training. I'll be right." So, the day of the race, ~~Sepp~~<sup>Sepp</sup>.Staedtler said to me, he was at the start, he said, "It's icy, isn't it?" I said, "Yeah, it's icy." He said, "What will you do?" I said, "Well," I said, "you come out at the start." I said, "You can do a couple of ~~long, long turns~~<sup>for that steep</sup> if you want to slow yourself down. If you go out of control there and hit the timber, you are going to - - -"

KH: Yes, it would be curtains.

DC: So anyhow, I had my eye on Billy Day; <sup>I was</sup> watching him. And I thought, "By Gee, I'm going to get as close to him as I can." So away we went, and - - -

KH: Was it a mass start?

DC: No, no, just individuals. Billy went ahead of me. But he was terrific on ice. Very good edge control on ice. And in the turns I was inclined - I would have the speed all right, but I was inclined to drift out a little bit, and over a course, over a distance, he'd gain half a second or three-quarters of a second on me. But anyhow, I thought, "Well, I've got to get up in the Alpine Combined." So I went down. Malcolm Painter said to me, he said, "You bastard!" I said, "What?" He said, "You bloody...skated out at the start," he said, "and you went down there like a bloody rocket," he said, "and you told me to do two long turns." I said, "Look, you asked me what you'd do." I said, "I didn't tell you what <sup>was</sup> going to do." I said, "I'm chasing <sup>the block</sup>." And anyhow, I finished off second, and I brought

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myself up to second in the combined. And anyhow, Billy Day came to me and he said, "Look," he said, "I'll be chosen for Saw Valley and Brockoff, young Brockoff from Victoria, he'll go." And he said, "The reserve is going to be ~~Sep~~<sup>Sep</sup>.Staedtler. Now," he said, "this is very wrong. If anyone's ever earned a trip to the Olympics, you have." He said, "You've worked really hard at your racing. You've done well." He said, "You've earned a trip." <sup>He said</sup> "I would stand down tomorrow and let you go. But I'm not going to stand down at this stage." So that was it. I knew then, I knew I wouldn't make another Olympic anyhow. And probably it wasn't - Billy was about the same age as me.

KH: Oh, was he?

DC: Yes. But really probably getting a bit old for the Olympics, I think, because I was 29, probably getting a bit old for top competition.

KH: Well, you wouldn't think so, by some of the champions today. That Norwegian or Swedish guy - there's a guy who has been at the top for years.

DC: That's right. Years, yes.

KH: He's in his thirties now, I think. But to go back to a few other things, what year did you meet Charlie Carter?

DC: I met Charlie Carter, it'd be in the early, <sup>fairly early</sup> 50s.

KH: But he died in 1953, I think.

DC: '53. I must have met him just before he died - oh, no, no. I met him - that was a funny incident.

KH: Probably when you were a boy, did you?

DC: Yes. He used to come in at the end of each winter and get his - he had two pack horses, and he would fill up with supplies and that would keep him going, probably he would come at the beginning of the winter - - -

KH: And he would go to Polly's shop, your aunt's shop?

DC: Yes, he used to get all his supplies from there. And he used to go up past the <sup>old</sup> cemetery. And when we were kids, we used to go up, and I used to go up and I'd be looking. You

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know, he had a couple of roan pack horses. "Oh," I said to Charlie, "Geez, I'd love a horse." He said, "Next time I come<sup>in</sup>, I'll bring you a horse." So he brought me in a little brumby mare filly. Oh God! Anyhow, I took her over to Polly MacGregor's house. There was quite a big yard there. And I had a young fellow, Mervin MacGregor, doing the mouthing, mouthing her. I thought, oh, she'd be pretty good. So I went over one day, and I put the bridle on her, and I had no saddle. I jumped on her bareback. And I went down along the paddock, and she wasn't holding. She started galloping and she was going flat out, and I thought, God! And there was a big barbed wire fence straight ahead of me. There was a little bit of a lagoon with mud and stuff around it. And she came flat down the paddock and she propped, and I went in head first! When Charlie came back, I took her up. I said, "No, I don't want her." Oh Geez! I didn't know whether she was going to jump the barbed wire fence, or go into the jolly pond. But I knew Charlie from those days, further back.

KH: The pond was a better landing than the barbed wire fence.

DC: That's right, yes.

KH: And did you ever go out there, to the Tin Mines?

DC: Yes, I had five years in Tin Mines.

KH: Five years?

DC: Yes.

KH: What doing?

DC: Operating. We had gauging stations in there.

KH: That was, what, one of your first jobs with the Water and Irrigation Commission?

DC: Yes, with the Snowy Mountains Authority.

KH: Oh, with the SMA, after 1953?

DC: Yes.

KH: But Charlie had gone by then?

DC: Charlie was gone then, yes.

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KH: Did you go out there while he was there?

DC: I don't think - see, '53 I started with the Authority. And that was the year that he died. Pinky Harris went out to bring his body in.

KH: Yes, and a policeman, the local policeman.

DC: And the Jacob River was too high. They got down to it with their horses, and it was too high, and Pinky liked his rum. He got on the rum, and oh, <sup>he was</sup> in the finish, he was <sup>half-mad(?)</sup> and they couldn't get across til the following morning. They unloaded Carter off the packhorse. No, I don't think I saw <sup>him</sup> at Tin Mine. I knew all the huts and that, where he was, but - - -

KH: Didn't <sup>the body</sup> nearly get away from them as they crossed the river?

DC: It could have, the next day, I know they wouldn't take the horses through when they <sup>got</sup> down there at first. There had been heavy rain up the head of it somewhere. And they stayed the night and then went across in the morning. Pretty wild old stream, Jacob.

KH: When did you get married?

DC: I met my wife at the hotel, and - - -

KH: The Jindabyne Hotel?

DC: No, the Kosciusko Hotel.

KH: Oh, I see, right.

DC: Yes, I met her there and I think we got married in '50.

KH: Is she local?

DC: No, North Sydney. Comes from North Sydney.

KH: What's her name?

DC: Pamela, Pam, Pamela Rose.

KH: And you've got children now?

DC: Rodney, David and Darryl, three boys, three men. They're 32, 33 and 34, I think now.

KH: A family of men.

DC: Yes.

KH: So they've all gone and left home?



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DC: Yes. Darryl's up at the Snowbird, at the Chalet. The Snowbird Lodge. He's been running that for 6 or 7 years. And he got married a year or 18 months ago? I know he went to Europe for his honeymoon. And he's hung in there, he's stayed in there. Rod's doing excavator<sup>work</sup> up at - on one of the suburbs close to Tharwa. You know there? He's working there at the moment. He's a top excavator operator, and very good at excavating.

KH: Plenty of work like that in Canberra at the moment.

DC: Yes.

KH: And so, when you started with the - oh sorry, with the Water and Irrigation Commission, where were you based for that? What was your work?

DC: With them I was based - I was actually working from Jindabyne. And I was a hydrographic assistant with them. And what I did, <sup>I did</sup> all recorder maintenance right through the whole region, right through down to Lobb's Hole, the Snowy Plain, Dalgety, all the WC and IC recorders that were scattered through there, and I did maintenance on those.

KH: How many were there?

DC: There was quite a number of them. I couldn't - I would have to sort of, have a look at the number.

KH: 20 or 30?

DC: Yes, something like that.

KH: And when did they first put those in?

DC: Some of them were going - there was <sup>one</sup> on the Snowy at Jindabyne. That goes back to early 1900s.

KH: Really?

DC: Yes.

KH: So there were records.

DC: A lot of record on that one, yes, on Jindabyne. <sup>W</sup>amba had a recorder on it; it was a fairly old one, too.

KH: By the time the SMA started, there were quite few records available.

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DC: Quite a few records available, yes. They ended up taking all those recorders over, the close ones.

KH: So it wasn't as though they were starting totally green. They had a lot of indications as to how much water was coming out of the hills.

DC: That's right, yes. They put a station in on Jacob's River. That was a WC and IC station. Well, the Authority used that. They took it over.

KH: There must have been a bridle track down to there at that time?

DC: Oh yes.

KH: There was no road down in there, was there?

DC: No, no. There was a bridle track down through Thatcher's...Hole, down on to Jacob's River. And then you had to climb up through Bill's Garden, onto Lookout, down to Pinch, and out to Tin Mine area, and then you could go on to <sup>we</sup> Combat Flats, which is the head of the Murray. And then you could continue on out to Limestone Creek which flowed into the Murray, and another 20K or something to Benambra. So you went right to Benambra.

KH: So most of that work was on horseback?

DC: We used horses, but we did a lot of - no, we did a lot of our work out there with Land Rovers, when we had access, <sup>vehicle access,</sup> we had <sup>a</sup> track right through.

KH: Oh, did you?

DC: Yes, across Jacob's and up through Bill's Garden. We went through some pretty steep country.

KH: Put in by the Snowy, or what?

DC: The Snowy did work on it, yes. You see, the Authority - oh well, the Trust actually put a track through from Dead Horse Gap, through Cascades to Tin Mine.

KH: The Trust put that one in?

DC: Yes, that's a new track. Well, it's a few years old, but it's not an old track. And that's a good run through there.



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KH: That went in after the Alpine Way was built?

DC: Oh yes, yes. That was built - all our access was through Grasse's Plain and Jacob's river.

KH: That fire trail which is still there.

DC: Well, actually, we went much higher up. The Nine Mile fire trail comes in on to the Pinch. But we went down through a property on Grasse's Plain, through <sup>Thatcher's</sup> Hole, down to Jacob's River, and then we had a big climb right up through Bill's Garden onto Lookout, what they call Lookout. We went over a range there - - -

KH: Is that still there, that fire trail?

DC: Yes. I don't know what sort of repair - there was a wooden bridge over Jacob's.

KH: Is that the route that Charlie Carter came out?

DC: Yes, yes. Oh yes. There was a bridle track out of there.

KH: But to go over the other side, like down into the Upper Murray, some of that must have been on horseback?

DC: We didn't - we had vehicle access to most of our areas. Windy Creek and - there was a lot of stations around Valentine River and Rocky Plain -

KH: But that was with the SMA?

DC: Yes.

KH: That was with the WC and IC?

DC: WC and IC, no. WC and IC have an office in Tumut, another one in Bega, and they have others through the state. But they're the close ones to the Authority.

KH: So you knocked around the bush a fair bit?

DC: Oh yes.

KH: You must have had old army vans, did you, or American jeeps or something?

DC: We started off with Land Rovers. We used those. I did about a quarter of a million miles in Land Rovers. They were good vehicles, too. 15 hp short wheel base. They were very

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capable, you could go places <sup>in</sup> those.

KH: Do you think the work was hard?

DC: I think some of it was a bit, sort of a challenge.

KH: What were the most challenging things you had to do?

DC: I think Tin Mine, I think, used to offer a bit of challenge.

KH: Tin Mine?

DC: The Tin Mine area used to offer a bit of challenge. It wasn't accessible to snow vehicles. And what we'd do, we'd use Land Rovers to get into the snowline. And then we'd fill our packs and everything up with all our gear, and away we'd go on skis. You could ski through, out in there.

KH: Right.

DC: But it was a bad place for anyone - one chap got food poisoning in there. And that was a bit of a problem. I got in touch with Major Clews down in the Murray. And I said we had a problem, a chap that was well, he had stomach trouble. He said, "Oh Danny, <sup>he said,</sup> we can send the stretcher gang up." "Oh, it's a hell of a climb," I said. What they did, in the finish, they sent a vehicle and two chaps right out round Benambra, and having them coming in, and the wind had brought so many trees <sup>down</sup> that they got about halfway through, and they said, "Oh, finish. We can't get through. We gotta go back." But in the finish, Wally said to me, he said, "I'm feeling much better." And I said, "Are you feeling well enough to ski?" And he said, "Yes, I think so. I think I'll be right." So we headed out, he got out all right. Another bush bloke. You know, he took his - we had another very bad trip out of there with - the Authority were cloud seeding, using silver iodide, spraying the clouds. And they had different areas. And Tin Mine was an area. If they put out what you call a ....Zero, we would head straight into Tin Mine. And I headed into Tin Mine for this ....Zero, and there was no snow. We left our skis out on the Pinch River and walked <sup>through</sup> on foot to Tin Mine. We went to bed that night, and woke

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up the next morning, there was bloody snow! You wouldn't read about it! It was when Rosalyn Wesche lost her life up at Kunama.

KH: 1954 or something.

DC Something like that, yes. It was in the 50s. Yes, it was the same year, and that was the fall of snow that came down on Kunama, off the northern side of Clark<sup>e</sup> and swept the hut off its foundations. And when I saw this, I <sup>four and a half,</sup> "My God!" We were there at Tin Mine. It's only 5000 feet, that plateau that runs right through there to Pilot, Mount Pilot. And I said to Bill Stefanik, I said, "Well, I think we're going to go out." So I got together a bit of stuff we had. There was a tin of peaches and a bit of food there. I threw it into a pack and we headed out. We had to walk on foot to the Pinch through all this snow. We started to climb up to Lookout on the northern face, northwestern face, and the snow was up way up to your hips, and it was tearing you.

KH: Walk over it, I mean, it's like a wall that you've got to climb over and down.

DC: Yes. And we got a good way up Lookout, and we pulled up, and I opened up a tin of peaches, and we had some food. And Bill said, "I'm buggered." I said, "Well, you can't be. We're getting out of here." I said, "You've got to keep moving." So we went up over Lookout. We got down to the Land Rover, and it's all under snow, it's up over the mudguards. We had an old-type radio, we wound that up and called Wambrook. And Andy was always there, Andy Kelsee, he was the radio operator at Wambrook. And he was there, rain or shine. "Oh, where are you, Danny? What's the trouble?" I said, "Look, we're at the vehicle, under Lookout." And I said, "We're moving out of the area," <sup>I said,</sup> and "I want two Land Rovers to come into Jacob's River." And I said, "By the time it gets to Jacob's River," <sup>I said,</sup> "We're walking down, we will be down there."

KH: Didn't you have your skis at the Land Rover?

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DC: Yes, we had them.

And we skied down to the snowline, and it was raining. And we got down to Jacob's River, and I thought, God! There were some old tin buildings from field construction when they put the track through. And anyhow, about - it must have been 9.30 or 10 o'clock at night, we heard a motor coming down into Jacob's River. And Doug Thatcher, he worked <sup>with</sup> me, he turned up. He said, "God!" He said, "We've got one vehicle up in Thatcher's Hole and it's bogged to the axles." <sup>He said,</sup> "I didn't bother trying to get it out." He said, "I can see why you wanted two vehicles to go in." And I said, "Good. You got got this one in and that's what we wanted." And anyhow we loaded <sup>up</sup>, and got out. But it was a <sup>killer</sup> of a trip, that.

KH: So you didn't have to stay there when there was deep snow?

DC: No, well, it wrecked the whole thing. Wrecked the .....Zero. I think it was a negative area, that one. There were <sup>areas</sup> negative areas and positive <sup>areas</sup> where they did the cloud seeding.

KH: Oh right. What do <sup>you</sup> mean - negative? Like, the ground -

DC: Yes, that wouldn't be affected by the cloud seeding. And you would take all your readings in there and then compare them with the positive area, where they did the cloud seeding. That was <sup>how it</sup> worked. They're getting ready for a big cloud seeding experiment, now.

KH: Are they?

DC: But I'm not sure if they're using silver iodide. They might have a new chemical for spraying the clouds. They use silver iodide - CSIRO fixed up a plane especially for spraying clouds, then.

KH: Did you <sup>get</sup> bogged badly very often?

DC: We did, yes. What we had - our Land Rovers were fitted up with - I think they were one ton hand winches. And what we'd do, when we got bogged - at times we'd get bogged

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pretty badly. What we'd do is hook it up, hook the winch up to a tree or something, and we'd wind - oh, you would do it with one man - wind it up and get tension on it, and then you'd get in and you'd just ease her off in low range, keep winding it up and get yourself out that way. We used those.

KH: What if there were no trees?

DC: We had special sections made up with steel <sup>those,</sup> pegs that went through them. And we'd use <sup>those,</sup> they were quite good. We could get out with those, you know, open boggy places and that.

KH: Did you live in tents when you couldn't use a hut?

DC: Yes.

KH: At the Tin Mines you'd probably use one of the huts there.

DC: One of the huts there. The Authority put in a small hut there that we used.

KH: That's right. Yes, they did.

DC: Actually, I worked with the Authority, it must have been just before the '50s in Island Bend. And they had half board, half tent. I was working there as a builder's labourer.

KH: What in 49?

DC: Yes. And we were building all the barracks, putting all the barracks up there. Putting in foundations, and doing all the work for barracks at that time. I worked there for a while.

KH: So that was your first job after the Kosciusko Hotel?

DC: Yes.

KH: But then you left that and went to the Commission.

DC: Yes.

KH: Oh, right.

DC: Yes, Johnny Abbot Smith - I met Johnny Abbot Smith and was talking to him, and he said he was actually doing that job, with the Commission. And he said, "Have you got a licence?" I said, "No, I've never worried about one."

KH: Licence for what?

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DC: Car licence. Motor licence. So I went to Geoff McCutchee and I said, "I've got to get a motor licence." And he had a little old Jowitt Javelin. Funny thing, you know, with the funny gearbox in it, reverse is in a funny position. And he said, "Oh, drive around in this for a bit and we'll go in get it." So I had a bit of a run around in this yard, and went in and did the licence test, and that's when I went over to the Commission. I took over from Johnny.

KH: So it was pretty primitive, I mean, those five years at the Tin Mines, no heaters and things like that. You just had an open fire.

DC: No, it was pretty - we had kerosene heaters. Firesides.

KH: Oh did you? Oh, right.

DC: It was nothing to <sup>if</sup> you had meat and <sup>was</sup> it, flyblown you'd have to wash it off and eat it, things like that. But you didn't worry it. You were hungry, so you ate it. We had those odd problems.

KH: <sup>So what happened,</sup> after you were there, what was your next major move?

DC: Well, what the Authority were looking at in the Tin Mine area was the possibility of bringing water into the Scheme. And after five years of studying it and operating recorders in there, they said, "No, it's not a proposition. <sup>We're not going to do it,</sup> It's not going to work out. The money we'll have to spend to bring the water in - it's not worth it." So just on - it was <sup>getting</sup> close to 60, they closed Tin Mine down. They said, "Right, that's the finish."

KH: What was the problem? Actually getting the water out into the Crackenback River - - -

DC: The Crackenback or M<sup>W</sup>amba, wherever they were going to take it. They said there wasn't sufficient water for the cost.

KH: That's right. All the water that runs off Drift Hill and all that country south of Thredbo, all still runs into the Snowy, doesn't it, and into the sea.



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DC: That's right, yes.

KH: So they gave that away in 1960?

DC: Yes.

KH: So what did you do after that?

DC: We were still operating stations, gauging stations, in the Kossy region. And in 64, I moved to Cabra. I was regional Hydrographic officer there. That was my first, you know, jump up a bit. I was the party leader here, and then I went to regional hydrographic officer in Cabra.

KH: Were you in charge of <sup>all</sup> the hydrological work in that region?

DC: Yes, in that region.

KH: So you'd send parties out?

DC: Yes.

KH: Did you have a cat, a pet cat, or a dog, in your wanderings?

DC: Yes, we had a black collie that we were very fond of.

KH: You took that out to the Tin Mines with you?

DC: No, I didn't take him into the bush much. The boys used to use him a lot, go into the bush with him. But he was killed at Khancoban, Mitchell Avenue, by a drunk in <sup>a</sup> car, went over him and killed him. The boys were crying their hearts out. It was a jolly shame.

KH: Were there many pets at the camps? At the SMA camps?

DC: There was, yes. I think a good example is Verandah Camp, that's down on the western face up above Geehi River. There was a figure of 24 dogs there. And inside 12 months they were down to 3.

KH: What, the SMA - - -

DC: Dingos in the area. Dingos were killing them.

KH: Really?

DC: Yes, there were some pretty ferocious dingos down in there. They wiped them out, down to 3.

KH: What, they'd come and get them at night?

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DC: Oh, yes. Lure them away and then kill them.

KH: Really? I mean, do dingos do that elsewhere in Australia, too?

DC: They possibly would. I don't know. But they did there.

KH: I'm interested in pets, and cats and dogs and things getting away into the bush. Do you think there were many cats that got away from the camps and turned wild?

DC: I think some did, yes. The odd ones, yes, feral cats.

KH: I mean they are often dumped, kittens are often dumped at the local rubbish dump and things like that.

DC: That's right, yes. Oh, you see kittens <sup>and cats</sup> just down here at ~~the local dump~~.

KH: I mean, there were a lot of camps around the mountains during SMA days, and if every camp had so many cats and dogs, there was a possibility of quite a few of them getting away and going wild.

DC: That's right.

KH: Did you have a garden anywhere?

DC: Yes.

KH: Cabramurra, or - - -

DC: We always gardened.

KH: What sort of things did you plant?

DC: Lettuce, carrots, beans, peas, that type of thing.

KH: Did you plant any trees, or shrubs.

DC: Yes, trees, shrubs, lilac.

KH: Lilac?

DC: Lilac, yes.

KH: Yes, you'd have to plant things that survived well up into the northern hemisphere, wouldn't you? Cabramurra is a pretty cold place.

DC: That's right, a cold place, yes. Yes, we've got an interesting shrub that we took from old Jindabyne, transferred it out here to New Jindabyne. And then when we went to Cabra, we



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transferred it out there. Then we transferred it <sup>to</sup> Khancoban. And then we brought it back. It's out the back here, and it's out at the farm now.

KH: What was it?

DC: It's an unusual - it's a bit like lilac. It's a beautiful thing. It comes out - it grows in quite a - it's not growing that big, it's only about two, two and a half feet high, now.

KH: It must be pretty hardy to be shifted five or six times.

DC: Oh, gee, yes.

KH: Did you ever plant any Spanish Broom?

DC: Oh, I think we had Spanish Broom where we lived.

KH: Because some of it has got away now.

DC: That's right.

KH: I mean, I am particularly interested in species that got away, and have invaded some of the surrounding bush.

DC: Yes.

KH: At Island Bend there's still a lot of Spanish Broom. I think they've sprayed it from time to time, but it's still getting away.

DC: Did you interview Arnie? Arnie Kirkham.

KH: No, he got shy.

DC: Did he? Because he lived at Island Bend for a long time.

KH: I have interviewed someone else - Mrs Van der Vliet.

DC: Oh yes, yes.

KH: I wanted to interview him, but he didn't want to.

DC: He didn't want to. I saw him in Cooma this morning.

KH: Van der Vliet?

DC: Arnie.

KH: Oh, Arn, did you?

DC: Yes.

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DC .....got going, it was going through rough country up to Tumut River, heading towards Cabramurra. And the Authority took a lot of tankers and equipment across on the Canberra side, on the other side of the fire. And when it came up into Lobb's Hole, they were cut off. They could not get back without going a long distance. They had to go right back through Tumut, right round to get all their tankers and stuff back in. But that developed into quite a big fire. O'Hare's Road, I thought at the time, was an area that should be back burnt. O'Hare's Road runs up onto the Cabramurra road out to Kiandra. And I sent a couple of chaps down there to look. And they said, "You can't touch it, you can't look at it. It is fire." I said to another chap there with me, I said, "I don't like the go of this at all. We are going down there to have a look at this." So we went down, and anyhow, we could drive right up O'Hare's Road. So got a backburn going. We backburned the whole of the road. It was going well, looked good. It was about 5 o'clock in the morning, I said, "Blow this. I am going to have a bit of a wink." And not long after I left, Neville Gare came in. He was the chief, then, of the park. He said, "Right, this fire is going to right through to the main range." He said, "We've got to leave this here and we have got to go up and put a backburn on the Cabramurra Road towards Kiandra." He was gone about two hours. The fire jumped the road down at O'Hare's Road, and went up into O'Hare's Ridge. God! What a mess! So we turned round and we did a backburn down Deadman's Ridge, right down to the Tumut River, and it was oh, so steep, and it came down into Prospectors' Creek, it was so steep. This was where we held the fire. And it was funny, we put this backburn <sup>in</sup> along Deadman's Ridge, and there was chaps that, when a bit of flame come up they used to take fright and then take off. And you would come along in your vehicle and there would be no-one there. A bit of flame, and "Where's so and so?" "Oh, he's gone, he's not here."

KH: That is right.

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DC: But one of the sights that I - I was walking along this Dead Man's Ridge about 1 o'clock in the morning, and I was on the steep fall in Prospectors Creek, and the Forestry were backburning up the Tumut River, and they let go on the bottom of the steep ridge, and it roared. It just roared up this ridge. And the chaps that actually let the backburn go were getting heat off - it was pushing heat back. They nearly got caught in the heat themselves. And it was terrific, the way it went up. It was a link-up with our backburn actually, on Dead Man's Ridge.

KH: They burned a lot of country, I think. I've seen a map of some of that fire.

DC: They burned a lot of country. Was a hundred thousand, two hundred thousand - it went out towards - - -

KH: It went right around to the back of Adaminaby, I think.

DC: That's right.

KH: To Tantangara Mountain.

DC: Tantangara Mountain and all out there, yes. Well, - this is funny - I got a radio message at Cabra, and one of the chaps was coming back in a vehicle. And he said, "I'm doing 45 mile an hour and the fire's beating me." And I said, "Well, you'd better turn around and go the other way." That's when it was moving across the highway, and went <sup>right</sup> out through Tantangara into the back of Adaminaby. Oh yes, it was a <sup>bad</sup> fire, that one. I think they evacuated Cabramurra in that.

KH: Did they?

DC: They pulled a lot of people out of there and took them to Khancoban, I think.

KH: Do you think the SMA caused much erosion?

DC: Probably a little bit of erosion. But they went to a lot of measures to prevent erosion with their soil conservation and work, you know, any soil that they disturbed.

KH: Did you ever see the rivers get muddy from silt?

DC: Occasionally you would, yes. The Crackenback River here recently got very dirty. And I think <sup>it</sup> was the result of the

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Ski Tube. It came from there. But it's very hard to - I went up there and had a look ~~in the area~~ <sup>in the area</sup> they've got stilling ponds and all sorts of things there. But I think they made a little flush out of the tunnels - but that got quite dirty.

KH: I mean, it must have happened at times with the Snowy, when they were putting coffer dams <sup>in</sup> and when they were building roads across rivers, and so on.

DC: That's right. They had a bad slip on the Alpine Way which periodically used to come down and cross the Alpine Way. Just turbidity and discolouration from that, that's for sure. Yes, unstable areas and that, I suppose, where they actually did work, <sup>they did get</sup> erosion.

KH: What do you think about the planting of willows and things? I mean, do you think they could have done more to plant native species rather than introduce willows and things?

DC: It's hard to say, really. I couldn't really say.

KH: Willows certainly did the trick, it seems.

DC: Yes, they held the soil pretty well.

KH: So, if you were to compare - like, what would you say, if you were to think about, you know, you know the environment now, and you still go into it, and you did 30 or 40 years ago, what would you say were the biggest changes that you've noticed?

DC: I think possibly the biggest changes are the dams. Like Island Bend Dam, and Guthega Dam.

KH: No, I was thinking more in terms of tree cover and shrubs, and that sort of thing.

DC: Oh, tree cover. Well, I don't know - I was out in Valentine recently. And went down to Valentine Falls. And 40 years ago, people took horses down there, led them down there. They'd never lead horses down there. The scrub there is terrific, down the steep ridge, it's about 200 metres, Valentine Falls.

KH: On the, what, the northern side of the falls?

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DC: On the northern side of the falls, yes. Very steep and - Elyne Mitchell was with me the last time I went down, and she said it's amazing the scrub that's grown up there.

KH: Was this in summer, with her, or - - -

DC: Yes, only recently, only in the last two or three weeks.

KH: Oh really?

DC: Yes.

KH: Walking?

DC: Yes.

KH: Oh, I didn't know she was still getting around.

DC: Oh, she does. She's amazing.

KH: Where did you walk in from?

DC: We walked in - we went across Valentine River up on to the little ridge above Valentine, and then we walked out onto that ridge and then crossed down that steep face towards the falls. We ended up under the top fall. There's three falls actually, there, if you come to them.

KH: Three?

DC: The main fall comes off the top, it's a beautiful waterfall, it comes down and it sends up all this mist. And then there is bit of a rapid, and it dives down again, down there, and then it runs out into a bit of a rapid again, and then it dives down. So you've got three falls. When you see those from a distance, it looks one fall. But when you come in onto them, they're actually separate falls.

KH: But where did you start walking from?

DC: We came - we started from the ridge on the northern or northwestern side of Valentine, walked along the ridge, more or less following Valentine's flowing here, and then it turns fairly sharply to the right, and then there's quite a sharp drop down in the falls area. When you get down that steep area, you can hear the falls and you can judge where you're going in. If you are going into the top one - - -

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KH: That's very steep clambering out there. That's awful country.

DC: Oh, it's steep. Because I was a bit concerned about Elyne, she had a bad knee. And she said, "I've got to be terribly careful when I'm going down. If I have a fall or anything, and wreck that knee, I've had it. But we got down to the bottom of the top fall. "Fantastic," she said, "fantastic." Took photographs, and had Pat Bold from Thredbo with her. Pat took photos, and I had a little haversack, a little American haversack, and I had the three, they had quite big cameras, cameras and gear and stuff in it. And I said to Elyne, I said, "Do you want to go further down?" She shook her head, she said, "No." She said, "I'm going to go straight out." I said, "God, it's steep." She said, "I don't care." She said, "I'm going straight out. I'm all right going uphill, I'm no good going down." And she clambered out, she amazed me.

KH: So am I amazed. I didn't know she was getting around to that extent.

DC: Oh yes.

KH: It was just a visit to Valentine Falls?

DC: Yes, she wanted to go back there.

KH: Yes, I have photos of that country with a party of horsemen coming out of that face there, with a lot of dead snow-gum around. The country is very open.

DC: There's a lot of saplings, and scrub. Oh, scrub!

KH: But it's all right, I think, to walk in from Grey Mare and walk up to the bottom of the falls.

DC: That's right. Go down Straight Creek, the last creek flowing in there. You haven't got much scrub. That's what I was looking at with Elyne. I thought it'd be better for her with her knee. But she said, "No, I'm going straight out." And she did. Well, that was my second trip down there in - I went down there about 3 weeks, 4 weeks, previously, with the chief, the regional engineer, who's new here. And it was following a heavy



rainfall in the area. And there was a <sup>lot of</sup> dead sticks, wet, and it was terribly slithery. And we got down, I went to the bottom of the top one, and he went to the bottom of the second one. And I'm there, leaning over a cliff, and I said, "Ken, are you coming back up here?" He said, "Yes, I'm getting some shots down here." I said, "I want my camera." I had my camera <sup>in the pack he was carrying.</sup> And we took quite a few photographs that day down there. But coming back out, I said to Ken, <sup>I said,</sup> "What do you want to do?" He said, "Straight out." And we went straight out and it was wet, all wet sticks, and he went out there like a rocket.

KH: Awful country.

DC: Awful country, yes.

KH: Even worse in the wet.

DC: I said to Ken, <sup>I said,</sup> "You want to look out too, there's a ghost just across there." He looked at me, he said, "What?" I said, <sup>I said,</sup> "A ghost. That mountain there."

KH: People used to ski down The Ghost.

DC: The Ghost, yes.

KH: In the forties, I read in the Ski Year Book. You couldn't do that today.

DC: No.

KH: So where else have you noticed changes like that? What about other places that you go to? I mean, would you say it ~~was~~ a similar story everywhere? That there is a lot more regeneration.

DC: Probably scrub-wise, I think I have, a bit more.

KH: Do you think the tree lines, in the frost-prone valleys, do you think the tree lines are coming down? Like up in the northern areas? Around Kiandra and so on.

DC: Could be. I haven't noticed, really. There could be.

KH: And what did you do when you weren't working, sleeping or eating? Did you go fishing? Were you a fisherman?

DC: Yes. I did quite a lot of trout fishing, yes.

KH: So you would have fished before the dams were built?

DC: Yes.

KH: So there was more river fishing then?

DC: Oh yes.

KH: What, for trout?

DC: Fantastic, yes.

KH: It was good fishing?

DC: Good fishing. Murrumbidgee was good.

KH: Now, some of the rivers have been dammed, so in some cases there's very little flow below the dams.

DC: That's right.

KH: But further down, is there still fish?

DC: Yes, there'd be still fish in the lower Snowy, I think, below Jindabyne Dam, further down. That was good fishing before the dam went in.

KH: But now the fishing is mainly lake fishing, isn't it?

DC: A lot of lake fishing, yes.

KH: Would you say that there's a hell of a lot more fishing now than there used to be, <sup>I mean in terms of the</sup> .....number of fish?

DC: I don't know. I don't know that there is. I think river fishing, there was a lot more fish in the early days than what you have now. The Murrumbidgee River, right, I thought there was some very nice fishing in it, below where Tantangara's built.

KH: Right yes. And it wouldn't be so good now, because - -

DC: Not so good now, but it those days it was good. I was fly fishing, and I caught 27 fish there, in <sup>the</sup> part of a day.

KH: Did you?

DC: On about two flies. When one fly got mangled, I put the other fly on the new - they were wolfing it. Good size fish, too. Not real big fish, but good fish. But Crackenback River was good, there was good fishing in that too. I don't think it is as good now.

KH: Was, no. Why do you think that?

DC: I think the reservoir has probably messed the streams up a bit.



KH: On the Crackenback? Which reservoir?  
 DC: The one that flows into Jindabyne.  
 KH: Oh, I see, you mean with - - -  
 DC: Yes. I don't <sup>think</sup> the fishing is as good as what it was, in the river.  
 KH: No. Did you ever fish the Gungarlin?  
 DC: Yes, I have caught quite a few fish in the Gungarlin?  
 KH: Is that still good?  
 DC: I think it's still all right. Not real big fish, but they're quite good. When I was a kid I used to catch fish in Sawpit Creek. That was quite good.  
 KH: Did you?  
 DC: Yes, it was good fishing.  
 KH: It might still be good fishing.  
 DC: Might be still all right, yes.  
 KH: There were <sup>oh, falls and things up there,</sup> .....and things.  
 DC: Nice eating fish. Not real big.  
 KH: Do you catch them well up?  
 DC: Oh yes, we used to catch them up above the road, the present road, yes.  
 KH: So they had to come up those falls?  
 DC: Yes, yes. Whether they - they possibly stocked it higher up. But I used to catch fish there. It was a bit difficult with limbs and things, hanging over the stream, you had to short rod, flick it in here, or flick it in there.  
 KH: Did you have parties at the camps, or - - -  
 DC: Yes, Some parties, not a great lot.  
 KH: Did you ever go to any films? Apparently, the SMA used to come round and - - -  
 DC: Yes, film shows, yes. We'd go to those.  
 KH: Was there any gambling?  
 DC: I think there was some gambling. But you didn't notice it, sorry, you didn't notice it. I never noticed gambling, but I think it went on.

KH: You didn't?  
 DC: Oh no. *Never gambled.*  
 KH: Apparently there were prostitutes who used to come and visit some of the camps, do you remember that at all?  
 DC: Yes. There was two prostitutes operating from Piper's Creek.  
 KH: From Piper's Creek? Was there a camp there?  
 DC: They had a caravan there, and they were working towards building flats in Sydney. But they used to go down to Island Bend, <sup>into</sup> the big construction areas.  
 KH: What was at Piper's Creek, oh, where the Summit road - - -  
 DC: They reckon there was a track there, cut about a foot deep into the - - -  
 KH: Oh dear. Yes, I have heard of this caravan.  
 DC: Yes.  
 KH: And you reckon they were paying off some flats in Sydney.  
 DC: They reckoned they were building flats in Sydney, yes.  
 KH: With the proceeds?  
 DC: With the proceeds, yes.  
 KH: Did you go shooting at all?  
 DC: Yes.  
 KH: Rabbit shooting?  
 DC: Yes, rabbit shooting.  
 KH: Were there more rabbits then than now, or - - -  
 DC: Probably there's more rabbits now.  
 KH: There must have been a lot before myxomatosis came in.  
 DC: Yes, there was, yes.  
 KH: Was the country still being over-run in the 40s when you were <sup>a</sup>boy?  
 DC: Yes, areas of it, yes.  
 KH: But what about higher up?  
 DC: The Snowy Plain had rabbits. *but not so much higher up, I don't think*

KH: Did you see any pigs? I mean, early on. How would you  
- what would <sup>you</sup> say about - - -

DC: Not very many.

KH: Some people say there's a lot now.

DC: Yes, there is a lot now, I think.

KH: Has the SMA ever been concerned about pigs?

DC: No.

KH: Because they turn over a fair bit of ground, don't they, when they get going?

DC: Yes.

KH: So, you reckon rabbits are on the increase again?

DC: I think so, yes.

KH: What about duck shooting?

DC: Yes, a bit of duck shooting.

KH: Do you think many of the new Australians, who lived in the camps, do you think many of them went hunting?

DC: They did, I think, yes.

KH: Because, you know, in Europe there is quite a tradition of going out shooting.

DC: yes.

KH: It is frowned upon now, in the National Park now.

DC: That is right, yes.

KH: Although there is probably a bit of illegal shooting goes on.

KH: What did you do when you had a holiday? You must have had annual holidays.

DC: Annual holidays, yes.

KH: Did you leave the mountains altogether?

DC: We did, yes.

KH: Well, you were pretty involved in skiing for a while, in wintertime.

DC: I was involved in skiing, yes.

KH: Were there any fights? In the camps or on the job?

DC: Occasionally, but nothing really much, not to speak of, really. A drunken skirmish or something, but nothing really, that I can relate to.

KH: Did the different groups <sup>of migrants</sup> get on with each other?

DC: Pretty good, yes. Oh yes.

KH: You must have had all sorts of nationalities working with you and under you.

DC: Oh yes.

KH: And when you were supervising at Cabramurra.

DC: Yes. A lot of Czechs, some Poles, Italians, oh yes, and Dutch.

KH: Any fights between the - what did the Yugoslavs - they like to - - -

DC: Yes, they were very wild.

KH: They had got old political things to settle, hadn't they?

DC: Yes, that's right, yes.

KH: Do you think there was any discrimination between nationalities as to who would get a particular job?

DC: I don't think there was, really. No, I don't think so. No, I think they were very fair.

KH: Do you remember any practical jokes? Apart from yourself?

DC: There was.

KH: What sort of things were done to practical joke?

DC: I'm just trying to think. My middle son, David, he was keen on snakes. He could catch snakes. And he got a snake, and he had it in a bag in the back of the car, an XP Ford. And he went looking for it, and he couldn't <sup>find</sup> it anywhere. So he was going into a movie show in Cooma, there was two girls and two chaps. They went into the movies, and they were coming out, and one of the girls jumped on the seat, and she said, "There was something slithered over my feet." David said, "Don't panic."

Just relax, just sit down there." <sup>He said,</sup> "In 5 or 10 minutes we 'll be in Jindabyne." So he pulled in underneath the lights, and he 's looking round, and in the finish he grabbed him by the tail and pulled him.

KH: Really? That was a practical joke that could have gone wrong, I reckon.

DC: Could have gone wrong, yes.

KH: Did you go to church?

DC: Yes.

KH: Were there churches around?

DC: Oh, there was.

KH: Were there places where you could go for spiritual worship?

DC: Yes.

KH: They had a church at Island Bend, I believe.

DC: They did, yes.

KH: Did you have one in Cabramurra?

DC: Yes, we had a church there. I was pretty involved with church. I was a warden here at Jindabyne. And I was connected with the building of the new church just down there, now. I went to Canberra to buy tiles. Yes. You would get quite a following.

KH: Were the churches - what is the word - various denominations, when you go to the one church?

DC: Yes.

KH: You must have had all religions represented .

- - - C of E,

DC: Oh yes, yes. A Roman Catholic, Presbyterian. United now, that 's very popular.

KH: What were you doing when you met Robbie Kilpinen?

KH: We were doing a snow survey at Four Mile <sup>Snowcourse</sup> I think was the name of it.

KH: Near Four Mile Hut, Four Mile Creek?

DC: Yes.

KH: Out there with a snowcat were you?

DC: Yes, I think so. Yes. Just checking water content in the snow, <sup>density percentage</sup>. We had quite a few snow courses out through Grey Mare, Smith's Lookout. We had another <sup>one</sup> near O'Keefe's Hut. One at Round Mountain, Deep Creek. And then we had them in the other way, Crook's racecourse, there was one there, <sup>that's in</sup> going towards Happy Jack's Plain.

KH: Yes, I know <sup>Crook's</sup> racecourse, yes.

DC: And we had one at the Eucumbene Lookout, one at <sup>McKeanhies</sup>, one up at - on the top before Happy Jack's Road, Pigeon Springs, we had one up there.

KH: Some of them are still going, aren't they? You can still see the <sup>poles</sup>...

DC: Oh yes, they are still going.

KH: So they are still being checked?

DC: Yes.

KH: Why is the SMA doing that? Do they want to know whether the seasons have changed?

DC: Yes, they 're looking at the concentration of water in catchments.

KH: I think there 's one at White's River, the poles are still there.

DC: Yes, White's River, Duck Creek.

KH: That 's right.

DC: Yes.

KH: And then some of the little stations are still there too. The one near O'Keefe's, there 's still a little building there with various contraptions.

DC: Yes, that 's a <sup>pluviometer</sup>.

KH: What does that measure?

DC: That measures rain. A recording rain gauge, that one.

KH: Do you think that the SMA looked after you?

DC: Oh yes.

KH: Because apparently the unions weren't very strong in the early years.

DC: Oh no, no.

KH: So you kind of had to accept what the SMA said you had to do.

DC: Sort of, yes. You did, yes.

KH: Was there much room for appeal for - - -

DC: Not really. But I don't know. I think we were better off that way than what we are now, myself.

KH: Right. You liked a touch of rules and regulations and get on with it.

DC: Yes. We come under ADS, the union people, and we were out on strike for - gee, we were out for quite a while. Oh, it was weeks, and the Authority got cranky with us. They said, "You're a crooked lot, you're this, you're that."

KH: When was that?

DC: This was a while back, a couple of years back.

KH: What's the union you belong to now?

DC: ADS.

KH: What does that stand for?

DC: ADSTE - is survey and - A-D-S-T-E- it is a technical, it's survey and draftsmen, and all of that.

KH: Oh right, yes. What did you go out for?

DC: I think we went out over a salary rise.

KH: But in the early days, there wasn't any of that, was there?

DC: No.

KH: You just accepted the pay you got, the conditions you got.

DC: Yes, that's right. But I think you were just as well off.

KH: Well, they were certainly interested in getting on with the job, by the sound of it.

DC: That's right, yes.

KH: They had incredible drive, some of the guys who were running the show.

DC: Yes.

KH: Did you ever make any suggestions as to how things could be improved or solve problems in any way?

DC: Occasionally, yes.

KH: I mean, the people who actually did the work in the field must have been the ones who could see whether something worked or not.

DC: That's right. We were involved in different forms of search and rescue.

KH: Oh, right. You took that on as a sideline, in the winter time.

DC: In 72, the Authority contacted us, and they said, "We've had a fatality on the Main Range. Can you deal with it?" I said, "Yes." And they said, "Take a Porsche." And I said, "No. We've got a Trackmaster vehicle, it's capable of all terrain." And I said, "That's the vehicle I want for the search." They said, "If that's the case, take the Trackmaster." I said, "Good. Leave it with me." So we got the Trackmaster all fitted out and we got a Park officer and a policeman, and Don Gower and myself, two Authority blokes. And we went in, we loaded up and we went into the electrical hut on Schlunk's Pass. We stayed that night, and it was cold, oh God, it was cold. And then the next morning we popped up over the ridge, and we dropped down to Tin Hut and the young chap, Greg Retallack was there, with one of the girls from the club. And I said, "How do you feel?" And he said, "Not bad." And I said, "What do you want to do?" And he said, "I want to get my mate out." His mate had died of hypothermia. And I said, "Fair enough, we'll do everything we can to get him." So we went out, left Tin Hut and sort of went north towards Jagungal. And we pulled up out on a flat, and Greg and the girl were in the vehicle, and the four of us went out on top of this - it was a huge cornice. And we were up on top and we were probing on this thing. And we were probing for a while. Greg Retallack looked at it, and he said, "It's 50 yards that way



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or this way."

KH: A lot of snow to cover.

DC: Anyhow, I said to Don, I said, "This is like looking for a needle in a haystack." I slithered down off the cornice, and I went across and I chose - there was a very <sup>thin</sup> long run ski there, and I chose that. And I just came into this - it was very tall - I came into it and I pushed it in twice. And the third time I pushed it in it sprung out. I said, "Come on, down you come." What he had done - Greg dug the cave and took <sup>Edenborough</sup> in there and worked on him and couldn't get him round. He put a ski, a stock, a ski, a stock, out from the snow cave. And when this wind swung round to the sou'west and .....was drifting in, it covered the whole lot up. Covered all the poles and skis up. There wasn't a thing there. And when I pushed in with the long run ski, it hit one of the poles and swung back out again. And I said, "Righto, we dig here. Get some shovels." It took about two and a half hours to get him out. My guess was lucky.

KH: My God. I'll say. He could have easily been there all winter.

DC: Yes, yes. It was a jolly miracle, you know, that we got him. Yes, well they had actually came from O'Keefe's Hut, and climbed <sup>up</sup> over east of Jagungal <sup>and they were heading for Mawson's Hut</sup> and couldn't find it, in bad weather, really bad weather. It was a Thursday, I think. And Retallack said, "Right. We'll head for Alpine." So they left the area they were in and they started to head across towards Alpine Hut. And Greg Retallack dropped a ski off and it ran down the slope. And said to <sup>Graeme Edenborough</sup> he said, "Look, stay here, don't move while I go down and get this ski." So he went down and found the ski. When he came back to Graeme, he was already incoherent. His speech was gone, and he was showing signs of hypothermia. And he got him into a snow cave, and warmed soup and stuff up. He was only a young bloke, 22 or 23.

KH: How far was it from Alpine Hut? Could you see Alpine Hut from there?

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DC: No, no. Probably 2 or 3 kilometres. They were on the plateau, up here. Mawson's would be down underneath. But really they would have been a lot better if they had dug a hole in the snow, or made a cave long before they did.

KH: That's right. What do you reckon has happened to this other fellow? This Crean fellow?

DC: I have a bit of an idea he might have left the area. They've had such a search for him and haven't found him. I've got a feeling he has gone.

KH: Where has he gone?

DC: I think he has skipped out.

KH: How did he do it?

DC: I think he could do it. He could come back into Perisher and get a lift out of there, and nobody'd take any notice of who he was. Someone up there day skiing, or something.

KH: Wouldn't you have other suspicions, like, if he had transferred money just before, or anything like that? I mean, to leave without any clues, it's pretty - I mean, in this day and age, I don't know. Lots of people - that was the first thing that went out.

DC: But I think his secretary removed funds. A set-up.

KH: His secretary?

DC: Yes, in Canberra. It's a good idea, that something funny was going on. That was what I heard.

KH: Because we have had a summer now, and nobody - there is a lot of people get around the countryside now.

DC: Yes. No, nothing.

KH: I mean, it's not like the days of Seaman and Hayes. They didn't find Hayes until a summer after, practically 16 months after. But that was in the 1920s when there were less people around.

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DC: People around, yes.

KH: There have been very few fatalities in our high country, in the New South Wales Mountains, in terms of cross country skiing. There have been some fatalities in the resorts.

DC: That's right, yes.

KH: There have been a lot more in Victoria, but very few here, considering the number of people who go cross country skiing. Were you ever involved in any trip where anyone was in danger, or - - -

DC: Oh, <sup>in</sup> search and rescue.

KH: Only through search and rescue.

KH: Do you think the Scheme was worth building, in terms of, like, the memorial in Cooma, has a list of 120 people who died during the building of the Scheme. Do you think it was a good idea, building the Scheme?

DC: Oh yes, I think so, yes.

KH: Did you know any of the people who died?

DC: Yes.

KH: Do you remember any of the events, why they died? Or how they died?

DC: There was a chap living next door to us, down in old Jindabyne. He was killed at Guthega power station, and he was a carpenter, <sup>he was</sup> doing carpentry work. And he fell down into the main floor.

KH: Where was that?

DC: At Guthega power station.

KH: Quite a few people ran off the road, too, I believe. There were a number of road accidents.

DC: I knew the two Harvey girls that were killed in the Pilatus Porter, with Howard, the pilot. The Porter was coming in to land. I think it came from Khancoban. And he was circling Polo Flat airfield. And he'd been flying with the Authority - Jack Howard - he'd been flying with them for a long time, and he thought, "Oh, I'm right to come down." So he came around, and he hooked

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his wing on the main aerial, the 2XL aerial, tore the wing off and crashed into the ground, and the thing caught alight, and incinerated everyone in it. Terrible turnout.

KH: Yes.

DC: Well, <sup>the</sup> Harveys were living next door to us in Kurrajong Street in Jindabyne. It was their two daughters. They were home on holidays, and went across there for a trip to see some friends, or do something. And I think there was another girl with them, that was incinerated then. They didn't have that many really bad - oh, they had a Beaver that was taking off from Geehi airstrip, and he failed to take off and ran in between the yards and broke the wings off.

KH: Oh, did he?

DC: There was a bit of burning, I think. One woman got her leg burnt or her arm burnt, but there was nothing - nobody killed in it. But really, for the amount of flying they do - I'm trying to think of the chap from Thredbo, <sup>they had a</sup> winter house - Cliffords. Vic Clifford was flying - he was a 707 pilot with Qantas, and they built quite a big lodge, a winter house, at Thredbo. And Vic started flying for the Authority. And I was doing a trip, I was going across from Jindabyne to Khancoban, and there was a young admin fellow in the plane. And when we got out over the tops, and we were just not far from Murray One power station, I gave Vic a bit of a nudge on the shoulder, and I said, "Gee, that's interesting, isn't it, Vic?" He said, "Yes," and he just flung her and he flipped the plane right over, like that. This admin chap said, "You bastard. You put him up to that." I said, "No. I just wanted to have a good look." Oh dear. He was a good pilot.

KH: They must have been good pilots, flying mountainous country with short landing strips.

DC: Yes. But poor old Jack, he forgot about the aerial. Did two circuits and came in and came too close. They were a good plane, the Pilatus Porter. I was standing on the airstrip

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at Khancoban one day, and I could see this plane coming in, but it wasn't making any noise. I thought, "Geez, that's queer." Anyhow, the bloody thing come in. And I said to the pilot, I said, "How come you were so quiet? The Porter's usually got a fair whine, it's a gas turbine. It's usually got a fair whine about it. He said, "Oh, I cut the fuel pump off at Geehi Dam," he said, "and I <sup>From there to here.</sup> glided in. I just glided, and I glided in to land."

KH: From Geehi Dam?

DC: Yes.

KH: Could he turn it on again?

DC: Oh yes, he could start it up again.

KH: Oh, I see.

DC: I think - what's well worth doing, is a glider up here, the power glider. That's well worth the run. I did one run with him up to the Ski Tube - where the Ski Tube starts, up over the Ram's Head Range. And he said to me, he said, "Have you ever flown a plane before?" And I said, "No, never." Got dual controls in it, this glider. He said, "Right. You get your thumb on the joy stick, you hold it there." And he said, "You watch your wings, and also you watch your nose." He said, "Righto, you're flying her." So I flew it from Ram's Head down here over the dam... "By Geez," he said, "You've never flown one before." No. But what I found, you over-concentrate with the joy stick. I'm watching the jolly wings; I'm watching the nose to see it doesn't drop too much, I'm not losing height too quick. And in the finish, you get that way that you are gripping this thing, and you are thinking, "God!" you know, when you should be relaxing more. But he does a trip out over the western face, and I think that would be a beauty. That is 80.

KH: \$80.

DC: \$80. It is \$50 out over Ram's Head, which I thought wasn't bad.

KH: Oh, I see, you can go out on flights.

DC: Oh yes. It's got a little German 2 litre motor, I

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think, and he can - he gains height with that, and then he glides. Beautiful wings on it. I said to him, I said, "Those wings, have they got much strength?" He said, "They're good for 5 Gs." I said, "Geez, they're all right..." They are really sort of slender, but they look strong. But it's well worth doing.

KH: Do you think the Scheme could be built today? I mean, like, it's a different situation now, with the environment groups and what have you. Do you think such a thing as the Scheme would get off the ground in today's world?

DC: Oh, it probably would, but it would be more difficult, I think. Too many controls and too many - and I think - Sir William Hudson was the man that put the Scheme on its feet. In the early days, it went through a very bad phase, regarding stores and where stuff was kept. There was nobody <sup>had</sup> a hand on what was - there was a lot of stuff being misplaced. And things weren't the best, but eventually he got everything going well, everything on its feet. And he did a fantastic job. He lived the Scheme. He used to really work right into the night, he wouldn't give a hoot.

KH: Apparently, out west, in the irrigation areas, they have now got problems with salinity. I mean down on the Murray too.

DC: Oh that's right, down the Murray, yes.

KH: So that's one of the things that they didn't know in the early 50s.

KH: Apparently some areas are useless for crops now, because of the salt.

DC: The salt, yes.

KH: Would you say, would you agree that the Scheme was one of the foundation stones of a new multi-national Australia?

DC: I think so, yes.

KH: You've lived it yourself, too. All this life.



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DC: That's right, yes. Yes, I think diverting all this water through the west is a big thing, into the irrigation areas, and the power that they get out of the Scheme.

KH: In terms of experiences, what would you say was your best experience, and what was your worst over the last 40 years? Is there anything you can single out?

DC: I think - it was interesting - in the early days, the Authority did a lot of commissioning on their plant. And when I moved to Khancoban they were commissioning Murray One power station. And with Murray One power station, you've got the three main pipelines coming down into it. And on top you've got your main valve house with three butterfly valves. And what they did, <sup>and what they did,</sup> they were commissioning, <sup>and what they did,</sup> they did a total load reduction. There was ten units running there with 7,000 cubic feet per second of water. And they just plunged the red buttons and the whole lot, - the valves actuate up on top, these butterfly valves - there was about six of us, I think, in the station at the time, up on top. And it's hard to explain the vibrations when these valves start to close, when they start to close down. Closing against all that force of water. And the whole place was shaking. Everyone was looking at one another and thinking, "Is he going to pike, or am I going to pike?" Well, I thought that was a pretty - that was pretty harrowing.

KH: The valves run up to the top of the pipes. That's where they were closing them off?

DC: Yes.

KH: So there is less water coming down into the power station.

DC: It shuts the whole lot off. You go from full load to nothing. It's a total load reduction, they call it. They have to have these setups with these stations. If you get a ruptured line, or something down below, unless that can be closed off very quickly, you could get damage to your main turbine building, or it could play hell, because there's so much water coming through

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these pipes.

KH: But it withstood the test?

DC: The test, yes.

KH: So that was a bit frightening.

DC: Ooh, yes. You see, they go to a lot of trouble to get the air out of the water. There are surge tanks at the top of every, say Murray One - you've got surge shafts. The idea is that you get as much of the air out of the water as possible. Because if you get a pocket of air compressed in water, you get untold forces created. The water forces the air into a mass and <sup>then</sup> the whole lot just goes "chung" and you get these forces, terrific forces.

KH: So your pipes have got to be pretty strong - for the turbines.

DC: Oh, gee, yes. Just to give you an idea, we were putting a flow meter in Snowy Geehi Inlet/Outlet structure, up at Geehi Dam. We had a huge <sup>aero-</sup>foil frame, and the meter screwed into the bottom of it. And it signalled, when it was put down in its position in the tunnel, it sent signals, red signals back. So we lowered this thing down. We were looking at the rev counter, and it <sup>was</sup> <sup>rev-</sup>revving over, and then all of a sudden it just went "bump" - it stopped. "Well," I thought, "that's queer." So we kicked this winch over and brought the frame back up. The meter was gone, ripped out, not a jolly sight of it. So we rang Hydrology in Cooma, and said, "Gee, we've lost a meter." A beautiful .....magnetic coupling meter. And they said, "Look, put the frame back down." This was on the Thursday or the Friday," and bring it up on the Monday morning." So we did that. When we brought the frame back up, one of the diagonal sections was all torn. You wouldn't credit it! So Operations said, "You blokes are not going to put anything down there again, I can tell you that." But it was a mess, you would credit this jolly frame went - how it was torn about.

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KH:           What was your best time?   Your best experience?  
Or is it yet to come?

DC:           Hard to say.