

Frank Erpic

FRANK ERPIC

Interviewed by Klaus Hueneker

On 14 November 1986.

Frank worked on the Snowy Mountains Scheme from 1951 to 1967. He came here from Yugoslavia in 1951. He came as an assisted migrant, but did not go to Bonegilla Hostel. He worked for private contractors; he worked at Thiess Village, Jindabyne; and Bogong Creek at Blowering, and Talbingo. His son was also on the Scheme for 2 or 3 years, and he took a lot of photos. Frank worked as a miner, fitter, surveyor's assistant, and then later on as an inspector of works.

KH: I thought I would start, Frank, with your full name first. What is your full name?

FE: Frank Erpic.

KH: Do you have a middle name, too?

FE: No.

KH: Does Frank stand for anything in Sloven? Is it a shorter version?

FE: Franz, it is for.

KH: Oh, right. Like the German Franz?

FE: Yes, yes.

KH: And when were you born?

FE: 5 March, 1914, in Slovenia.

KH: Can you remember the place?

FE: Oh yes. *Shminil Prinovamista(?)*

KH: And what are your parents' names?

FE: Father was Josef or *Yosa*. And mother was Francisca or Fransca.

KH: And where did you go to school?

FE: Where or when?

KH: Where?

FE: In *No. amista* it is very close to my birthplace.

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KH: And what level did you reach at school?
 FE: Matriculation.
 KH: That is like - - -
 FE: High school.
 KH: Year 9 or year 10, is it?
 FE: Most likely. I am not quite sure, because I do not know the system in Australia. But anyhow, matriculation. And I enrolled at univervity. But I was only one year at the university and studied agriculture, and then the war started, and I was obliged to finish my studies.
 KH: So you could not - you applied to go to university?
 FE: I enrolled.
 KH: Oh, you enrolled?
 FE: Yes. I enrolled for one 1 year, I was enrolled at the university in Belgrade, which is the capital of Yugoslavia.
 KH: And so you did agriculture instead.
 FE: Yes, agriculture, I study it, agriculture.
 KH: At university?
 FE: At university.
 KH: Oh, I see.
 FE: First year.
 KH: Just the one year?
 FE: Yes.
 KH: Then the war came.
 FE: Yes, that is right.
 KH: And then what happened during the war?
 FE: During the war I was at post office, but I already started in Yugoslavia, at the post office, and studied part-time,. actually. And wrote and studied part-time.
 KH: Did you finish anything in your studies?
 FE: No, no exams, because I was in the post office, the same in Belgrade. And then when the war started - just before war started, I was transferred to Slovenia. And then came the occupation and I was three months without employment, unemployed.

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And then I was again taken by the German administration as a post officer.
 KH: When the Germans took over.
 FE: When the Germans took over, I was, after three months - three months was a certain waiting period, one could say - but we were paid from Yugoslav administration ahead three months. When this time elapsed then we were taken back to the post offices, but under German administration.
 KH: And then what did you do after the war?
 FE: After the war I was in the refugee camps in Italy. From Italy I fled to France, and from France I migrated to Australia.
 KH: From France?
 FE: Yes, from France, yes.
 KH: Oh, I see. And what year was that?
 FE: That was 50.
 KH: 1950.
 FE: 1950, yes.
 KH: And did you get married before you came to Australia?
 FE: Yes, I was married. But my wife remained in Yugoslavia with three children.
 KH: With three children?
 FE: Three children, yes.
 KH: So you separated at that time?
 FE: Yes, we were separated, yes, that is right. And then later I got - in the beginning - it was in 55, 45, 46, 47, that was impossible to get ^{the} family. And beside that, we parted with my wife, you see. Because she left the children with my sisters, and then I did not want to know much about my wife, anyhow. And then I got another one.
 KH: Oh, I see. Did you get another wife here in Australia?
 FE: Yes, here in Australia.
 KH: So your wife is Australian?
 FE: No, no. Actually in France already.
 KH: Oh, I see, you came together.
 FE: Yes, together. We came together. We know each other in Italy in the camps. And then in France we started to live together.

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KH: And have you had children with your second wife?
 FE: Yes, three children.
 KH: So you came to Australia in 1950?
 FE: Yes.
 KH: You came by ship?
 FE: Yes, the SKAUBRYN.
 KH: And who paid for your passage? Was it assisted?
 FE: Assisted, that is true, IRO, International Refugee Organisa-
 tion.
 KH: Not the Australian Government?
 FE: No, no, no.
 KH: And what was your idea of Australia before you came? What
 did you know about Australia before you came?
 FE: Not much. I knew that there are plenty of sheep here and
 rabbits; that is all.
 KH: I see. But you knew enough to want to come, did you?
 FE: No, I did not know much about - but I was only interested to
 go away from Europe, because there was always a big talk about war - that will
 start a new war, and so on. And I got enough - one war - I go as far away as
 possible. And then, actually, and where it will be possible to go, because it
 was not very easy right away after the war to find a country that will take
 you. And Australia took us. I applied for Australia.
 KH: Did you spend any time at the Bonegilla Migrant Camp?
 FE: No.
 KH: Or at any other camp?
 FE: No. I have not been in the camps at all, because I got
 enough money to - I got to show that I have 50 pounds cash money on the ship,
 and then I was allowed to disembark in Melbourne, with a friend. My friend
 gave me accommodation and one kind of guarantee that I will get employment.
 He helped me anyhow to find employment.
 KH: Did you learn any English on the ship coming out?
 FE: I learned English already in France, before I come to
 Australia. And then on the ship, naturally, I took the course of English.

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KH: And when was your first - when did you get to hear about the
 Snowy Mountains Scheme?
 FE: About Snowy Mountains Scheme, I hear in 55. And I read in a
 newspaper, News Weekly - in newspaper I read article how much they earn and
 what are conditions for living and so on. And then I got a friend who was al-
 ready in a camp by Cabramurra, and I wrote to him and he sent me a letter back
 that it is possible to get employment, but I have to come up there, otherwise
 it is impossible to do anything. And then I packed everything, what I got,
 and I go myself. My wife and kids, they stayed still in Victoria, that was
 South Dudley.
 KH: Is that in Melbourne, is it?
 FE: By Melbourne, that is about 70 miles from Melbourne.
 KH: So you got a job on the Scheme through a friend?
 FE: Yes, through a friend, yes, that is right.
 KH: And what was your first job?
 FE: It was labourer, first it was labourer, and then miner in
 the tunnel. And from that I was in workshop as assistant fitter. And then I
 shifted to the survey department - actually it was not the survey department,
 it was the surveyor's - chainman,
 for about one and a half years, as chainman. And then I start to study sur-
 veying by correspondence. The company, that was ^{Kaiser-Walsh-}~~Perini-Raymond~~ they paid fees
 for everyone who want to study something, you see. And then, like that, you
 see, I start to do surveying. That was one reason. The second reason it was
 for the company got - it was very hard at this time to get qualified surveyors
 on the job, especially in the tunnels because the job is pretty dirty. Be-
 sides that, American foremen, they were fairly rough, and surveyors, they were
 treated like other men.
 You see there was no difference between ^aminer or a surveyor. Actually a minor
 was somehow better - better looked after than surveyor, you see. And the job
 has to be done quick, you see.
 KH: Surveying in the tunnels?
 FE: Yes, surveying in the tunnels, to give a line, you see, ac-
 tually to bank the face. It was firstly necessary to put a centre line, and

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then from the centre line measure the face and mark the face of the tunnel. And that was required to be done very quick and accurate. And surveyors usually - 25 surveyors - they were more or less slow on the job, and they want to do the way they wanted, but foremen, *was not satisfied* usually, with the way. They were doing and then they just sacked them, or surveyors left themselves. You see, the money was not very high for surveyors. It was good money but not too attractive for a qualified surveyor. And as they could not get qualified surveyors they start to train people who was interested and paid for them, even these fees for the international correspondence schools. And when I sent my examination papers, I got to send the papers to Sydney, to the school, the school always notified the company and myself, you see, how I pass. And I got pretty good, very good marks, actually, more or less. Nearly all, they were very good and excellent marks.

KH: So you became a qualified surveyor?

FE: I have not been qualified, but I was surveyor, but never bothered to get qualifications because I got the same job, the same money as surveyor, you see. Because to get qualification it would be necessary to go to Melbourne or Sydney or to any technical school, you see, to pass the examination. But I have not had time. I did not want to spend the time, you see. It would be necessary to maybe a week, maybe two, you see, to go for qualification. But I have not been interested because I got a job, the same job, you see, and the same money as qualified surveyor. And then I was, for the time being, when I started, I was instrument man, you see, and then I was surveyor. Assistant surveyor and then surveyor.

KH: And did you live - where was the first place you lived when you were on the Scheme? What was the first camp?

FE: The first camp below Cabramurra - I cannot remember the name. They changed - it was different name in the beginning than later.

KH: Was it some place called Kenny's Nob?

FE: Not Kenny's Nob, no.

KH: Not *Sue* City?

FE: That was later.

KH: Later, yes.

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FE: That was in the first place, T 2, was built up there, you see.T2, from Tumut Pond, to T2, you see. A contract got - a French company, CITRA.

KH: That was your first job.

FE: The first job there, it was with CITRA. But I did not last long up there. I was *in the tunnel*, I think it was - not miner - labourer. But I was not fast enough for them and they sack me.

From CITRA I got sack and then I gone over - it was just over the mountain - on the other side, on to Tumut Pond. In Tumut Pond they were Kaiser, *Walsh - Perini*, - Raymond, company, and I was waiting for a while in the camp with a friend. It was very hard to get job, actually. You could get job if you came at the right time, you see, when there was vacancy. If there was not vacancy, you got to wait. And I was waiting maybe a week, I do not know exactly. And then I got a job with Kaiser in Tumut Pond, Kaiser, *Walsh - Perini* - Raymond, in Tumut Pond. And I *stayed* up there, until the tunnel was finished, or well after that, until the contract was nearly finished.

KH: And what was the camp like? Did you live in tents there, or

- - -

FE: There were barracks.

KH: Oh, little barracks.

FE: Little barracks, yes. Little barracks, that was in Tumut *Point*. That now, I think, everything is covered. Is nothing more to see. In these barracks we lived, yes. That was, I think, in 55, when there was that much snow that we could not get any supply from Cooma. We worked for nearly - more than ^{one} week - cut off from the rest of the world. And the supply run off, even we had no bread. Well, actually, they bake it themselves in the kitchen.

KH: Oh, you had a kitchen?

FE: Yes, a kitchen, but they did not have much food, you see. And then after about one week, or something like that, you see, then they clear the roads and supplies started and we start to work. There was that much snow that on one side of the barracks, you see, was the snow rolled from the roof, touch the ground, and formed tunnels. We got to walk under the snow into the barracks, on one side, because the barracks, they were on the hill.

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On the top side of the hill, you see, there was that much snow that it formed a tunnel.

KH: And where did you move to - what was your next camp?

FE: From up there, I gone to Thiess village, yes, to Thiess Brothers.

KH: Near Round Mountain, was not it?

FE: Yes, Thiess village, that was Dividing Ranges between Murray River and Snowy River. On one side you see, the water runs into the Murray River and on the other side ^{into the} Snowy River. And that was towards Khancoban, you see, on the way from Cooma to Khancoban on this road.

KH: Who were you working for then? That was for Thiess?

FE: Thiess Brothers.

KH: Was that a tunnel, too?

FE: There was dam and tunnel. And I was working on the dam.

KH: Is that the Tooma Dam?

FE: Tooma Dam, yes, Tooma Dam, yes. I was up there nearly up to the end again.

KH: And Thiess village would have got snow too, wouldn't it?

FE: Thiess Village?

KH: Sorry, your camp.

FE: Yes, camp was called Thiess Village, that we were living and we were working on Tooma Dam.

KH: Yes. That was fairly primitive, too?

FE: Not so. Actually, in Tumut Pond, there was already a pretty good living conditions. We got - not primitive - primitive it used to be before the American companies came and got the contracts, you see, in the Snowy. They were primitive. But later on, the Americans, they brought pretty good conditions. They gave good conditions., anyhow.

KH: But you were still, all this time you were still living there as a single man, you did not have your family?

FE: Yes.

KH: When did you bring your family up?

FE: That was impossible to get family, because I had not had a

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high enough position. You see, if I would held a higher position, you see, then I would be able to get accommodation for family. But I have not that, and actually, I have not been interested much because to get a higher position, I would feel obliged to work day shift. And day shift did not - I did not like it, you see, because if you work day shift, then you got only one day during the week off. And in one day you cannot go home and back. I prefer to work shift work, and at the end of when the shift changes over we work three weeks, start with afternoon shift, then day shift and night shift. When the night shift finished, that was Saturday 8 o'clock in the morning, until Monday afternoon 4 o'clock, we got off. We call that long weekend, and I was after that, you see. And I would always choose the job, you see, that I was on the shift that I could go home. Besides that, I did not want to get the family to my working place, because the kids, they were bound to a school, school bound, and I did not want to disturb them. And I knew exactly if I get the family, the job will last two or three years, and then we have to shift. After new contract is finished, you have to shift again, you see. That is what I did not like.

KH: So most weekends you went down home to Melbourne, near Melbourne?

FE: Well, Wonthaggi or South Dudley, yes.

KH: Were the little barracks that you lived in - were they heated?

FE: Yes.

KH: What, from a central - - -

FE: No. I think a heater - here - a little heater. That means we got - in the beginning we got little heaters, you see.

And then, later on, the new barracks that was in Eucumbene - I was in Eucumbene too, you see - when I was in Tumut Pond when the tunnel was finished - actually was when break through to Eucumbene, then I go to work in Eucumbene too. And I got on each side of the tunnel - I got one room, you see.

KH: Oh, I see.

FE: Because I was surveyor, you see, I got to survey, especially later on for - to put kerbs in, and then for lining the tunnel, I got to work

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the whole length of the tunnel. And sometimes I got to go from one side - that was from Eucumbene - sometimes from Tumut Pond., you see.

KH: And when that tunnel was finished, then you went to ~~Tooma~~ Dam?

FE: Yes, when that was completely finished, yes, then I go. I shifted to the other company because Kaiser was - they did not have any more contract, then I shifted to Thiess Brothers, and a completely new contract.

KH: How long were you with Thiess Brothers?

FE: Thiess Brothers - I was in ~~Tooma~~ Dam, then I left Snowy; just before contract was finished, I left Snowy for about one year and I was in - again with Thiess Brothers, but in Victoria, in Yallourn. That was a small tunnel and a dam too, they built. It was for about one a half year, or something like that.

And then from up there I started with Utah. There was a period when the contracts - they finish ahead.

KH: Oh, I see, yes, they were so good.

FE: *There was no job.* And when the new contracts came out, that was - the new contract was in Island Bend. I got Utah contract and one engineer with whom I used to work before, he sent me a telegram in Yallourn, that ^{the} job started, that I can come back again if I wanted. And then I gone to Island Bend. And from Island Bend - that was Utah. Why I left Utah I have just forgot.

Oh yes, I left on my own, because the ~~Tooma~~ Dam started and ~~Tooma~~ - it was somehow closer for me to go to Melbourne than Island Bend, you see.

KH: Oh, yes. You had to drive out and around.

FE: That is right, yes. When I go ^{from Tooma} to Corryong it was shorter, and another thing, it was - I ^{shifted,} sold my house in Wonthaggi and bought a house in Wangaratta, and ^{it} was closer for me to go to home, you see, then I shifted to Khancoban. *To Tooma.. firstly,* ..and when ~~Tooma~~ was finished, then to Khancoban.

KH: Did you have any pets, like a cat or a dog?

FE No.

KH: Did you keep chooks or anything like that anywhere?

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FE: Impossible. The only thing what I got was a little patch of garden. Yes, I got a little bit of a garden, especially in Khancoban. In Khancoban, you see, I got - and later in Talbingo, too, a garden I kept.

KH: In Khancoban and Talbingo.

FE: Talbingo, yes.

KH: But not in the camps in the mountains?

FE: No.

KH: What did you plant in the gardens?

FE: Lettuces and parsley, and on one occasion, broad beans, but just for fun.

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KH: So the gardens you had in Khancoban and Talbingo were a bit bigger and you had a bit more space?

FE: Yes, well it was very small, always very small patch, you see. There was just that much that was possible to get a little bit of - a few lettuces. But I did that more or less for fun, and not that much for use.

KH: I see. It was not enough to live off?

FE: No.

KH: You did not plant any shrubs or anything like that? In those places.

FE: No, no, because that was temporary, everything. I know, that was just for the time being.

KH: And did most of the things that you planted - did they survive?

FE: Yes, in summertime they grow all right. But winter was very close, you see, always. It did not grow, long time.

KH: No. Would there be long enough to grow tomatoes in Khancoban?

FE: In Khancoban, yes, but I did not grow them. But, oh yes, in Khancoban it was good climate.

KH: So nobody you knew in the camps up in the mountains - no-one had very many plants or anything like that. There was no - - -

FE: They grow some, but I did not - in families area, you see - because the camps they were always separated. Single men, separate. And then there were married men, with families, they were always a little bit separated. And those who got families, they could get gardens, they kept gardens, small gardens.

KH: What did they grow?

FE: They grow such vegetable which does not require much attention, lettuce, carrots, potatoes, you see. A little bit tomatoes, they grow too.

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KH: Did they plant any trees or shrubs?

FE: No, I did not see them.

KH: Did other people have ^{any} pets? Like dogs or cats - other people in the camps?

FE: Most likely they got - some of them, they got cats and dogs. But only the ones with - not single men - not in the camp where they were single.

KH: They were not allowed?

FE: Yes. Probably not allowed - I don't know.

KH: Married families - - -

FE: Yes, family camps.

KH: Were more likely to have pets?

FE: Yes, that is right. Not likely, I am sure that they got them. Because sometimes, you see, I go sometimes in the married quarters and I saw cats and dogs around.

KH: Did any of the pets escape and go wild in the bush?

FE: Cats.

KH: Cats.

FE: Cats did that. They were especially in the area where they dumped rubbish. There were plenty of cats up there, I would say.

KH: So that each camp had its own rubbish - - -

FE: Rubbish tip.

KH: Separate.

FE: In every camp. The camps, they were like, say, small towns. There was a lot of people, you see. In Talbingo, for sure, was a few thousand.

KH: But what about the smaller camps, like Thiess Village? And Tumut?

FE: The same, the same.

KH: There was a rubbish tip at those places?

FE: Yes, there was separate rubbish tip, you see. There

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FE: was a camp manager in every camp. And he got to manage the camp and *naturally look* for refuse and such things for the places; and collect the rubbish from the barracks and dump that. It was like villages in the country, country places. It was the same. It was not much different, you see, it was nearly the same. Schools, there were in every camp, too. There were churches, too. Places - in some places there were churches, but the other was usually in the mess.

KH: The rubbish dumps, did they cover them up later on with earth?

FE: For sure. Today you cannot see where the camps were. I used to be in Tooma Dam, by Tooma Dam, you see. Maybe it is about 6 or 7 years ago. I could not recognise the place. I could not remember even where the camp was. It was all regrown and they replanted too. It was one officer from the Snowy, just in charge, only for planting the area which ^{they} were excavating, before, or just before, you see. I knew him because I work maybe a month or two for him, too, when it was a slack period in the contract, you see. But they cannot have other jobs, for one to stay - they gave him - Snowy gave him employment. And that was maybe a couple of months with him.

KH: With regard to cats, I suppose whenever anyone had any unwanted kittens they were taken down to the dump, were they?

FE: Most likely.

KH: And then they went wild, I suppose?

FE: Oh yes, they went wild.

KH: There were no rules about not having pets. I mean, that was all right?

FE: As far as I know, not.

KH: Because it was all National Park, all around.

FE: Yes. It was not yet National Park at this time, I think.

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KH: Oh, it was State Park - State Park and it was managed by - - -

FE: I think it was Crown land. I am not sure. But it seemed to me that at this time it was Crown land. Then later on there was proclaimed National Park. But at this time, at the beginning, that was Crown land, as far as I know. I have never been interested in it, but it seemed to me that it was Crown land.

KH: And what - when you first went to the mountains, did you remember seeing any grazing in the mountains? Grazing cattle or sheep?

FE: Yes, grazier, oh yes. Every summer, you see, they brought cattle. Especially in Tooma Dam I saw - in the area of Tooma Dam I saw a lot of cattle which were grazing in the bush.

KH: Did you meet any stockmen?

FE: Yes, saw them. I did not meet them. I saw them, yes.

KH: Do you think there was much interaction between the stockmen and the Snowy people?

FE: I cannot say that. because I was not interested, and I do not think so that there were any complaints about that, especially in the beginning, for sure not. Because in the beginning there were no *roads*.....there were only bush tracks, and nobody was much interested for the bush at this time.

KH: Do you remember, was the bush - what was it like? Like, had it been burnt? Did you see much fire, bush fire?

FE: I did not see any bush fires at this time where I was. But I saw a lot of burnt-off areas, which was burned one year or even more years before. But you could still recognise that must have been a bush fire up there.

KH: Had a lot of the country been burnt?

FE: Quite a lot. Especially between Talbingo and Kiandra, along these roads, you see. Along these roads I saw traces of

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bush fire. Some bush fire - no, I do not remember. I do not remember any bush fire when I was up there.

KH: So there was no threat to any of the camps from fire?

FE: No.

KH: While you were there?

FE: No, not in the camps where I was. But I heard, I think, in ~~SUE~~ City, close to ~~SUE~~ City most likely there was. But I just hear it from other workers. I think they were engaged in bush fire - - -

KH: Fire-fighting?

FE: Fire-fighting, yes.

KH: Were they?

FE: Yes, they were. Not only Snowy people, but even contractors people. But I myself, no, never.

KH: Do you remember seeing any logging trucks? Was there any logging at all? Any timber being cut and taken out?

FE: Not in this area.

KH: Did you see any soil erosion?

FE: Soil erosion - I could not say that I saw that. But in ~~Tomma~~ Dam, I planted. You see, I was just engaged with this team which planted some special trees to keep the soil in area. But that was the soil which has been used for building the dam. To retain the soil we planted special branches - sticks.

KH: Do you remember what kind they were?

FE: Some willow.

KH: Oh yes.

FE: Some willow trees. We just pushed them into the ground and that was - it took nicely. I saw them later. A few years back I drove past and I was interested. And that was growing nicely.

KH: So you did not see very much soil erosion? Not in the mountains where the grazing was, did you notice?

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FE: No, no. No, that was not much. Besides I did not see much of the area, only along - not roads. Especially in ~~Tomma~~ there was just only bush, the tracks. When I going home from ~~Tomma~~ towards Khancoban, Khancoban and Corryong, I drove always through the creeks, at least three times I go to pass the creek because there were only tracks, no roads at all. Up there the soil was eroded, that is for sure.

KH: Where the - - -

FE: Yes, because there were creeks.

KH: On the tracks?

FE: Yes. There were creeks and then there was - the traffic at this time was heavier than before, and in the wet weather you could not pass.

KH: In bad weather, no.

FE: In the wet, when it was wet, you see - at one occasion I come back from Victoria to the Thieess Village, or to ~~Tomma~~ Da but I did not make it, because it was too wet, and I got Volkswagen, but I could not come through. I got to walk to the camp, more than a couple of hours, I walked to the camp. And then next day, when it was sunshine, I asked a friend of mine, he brought me with his vehicle to my car, and then I made it easy because it was dry. But the day before it was raining, impossible to pass.

KH: The winter must have been the worst, I suppose?

FE: In winter we did not try. We knew that it was impossible. But in summer time, you see, in summer time when it was raining you could not pass because it was so steep and clay roads. And if it was wet, we had to have chains, and unless you had chains on you could not pass.

KH: Was there much pollution of the creeks and the rivers with the silt and the washing from the roads and so on?

FE: From the roads, yes. Yes, that was, but that was ~~nature~~

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FE: That was a lot. But not from the workings.

KH: Not from the workings?

FE: Not from the workings, no.

KH: Do you remember if they planted any native species when they were - after they finished the workings?

FE: In Tooma Dam, I am sure they planted, because they - on the place where it used to be camp, there are only native trees.

KH: Because they planted a lot of exotics, did not they? A lot of introduced willows and poplars. But do you think they also planted some eucalypts?

FE: Oh, eucalypts, native trees. Willow tree - that was only, I think, planted on the new areas, you see, where there were quarries, or where it was expected heavy erosion, because the willow trees, they keep the best soil at one place.

KH: Did you see if any of the species that were planted, whether they spread downstream or - like, sometimes if you bring a new plant in, it can then multiply?

FE: In Tooma Dam, yes. The willow trees, they spread. They spread enormously. But I did not see in other places. I have not been in other places.

KH: So that was down the Tooma River?

FE: That was towards the Murray River, I think.

KH: Yes, the Tooma runs into the Murray, yes, that is right.

FE: Yes, Tooma River, yes, that is true.

KH: The Tooma River runs into the Murray - - -

FE: Tooma Creek it is better to say, this is not a big river.

KH: Yes, that is right.

FE: That is a creek.

KH: When was your last visit to the mountains? What year?

FE: It must be 75, that was the last time, 75, 76, some-

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thing like that.

KH: How do you think, between '55 and '75, how did the environment change? Like, how different from your earliest memories to your last visit, what changes do you - - -

FE: It was altogether different than when we came. I actually noticed mostly roads, because I was driving through the country when I arrived to the Snowy, and I saw the area only around the camps, around the working places. In the rest of the area I did not go much. But this time, all roads - there were many roads, only tracks, only bush tracks, and dirt road from Cooma to Cabramurra there was a dirt road all the way through. From Cabramurra to Tumut there was a dirt road. I used to drive from Cooma to Tumut ^{Pond} in three hours, always took me three hours driving. The same from Tumut to Cabramurra, three hours, you see. And now, when I go, everywhere bitumen, nice roads, replanted everything, and so on. Big difference.

KH: What about - in terms of the vegetation, in terms of the tree cover, does it seem more or less, or - - -

FE: Not different. It was only new roads in the beginning the batters - they were - - -

KH: The road batters.

FE: They were naked. But last time when I was up there, is hardly to notice that the roads had been built anew. It is all grown over, no bare places are more to see. This time there were, yes, everywhere. But now, last time, when I was - you could hardly notice, and hardly recognise the places. Especially, I could not - there might be somebody who could recognise there better, but I did not.

KH: That means that there has been a lot of regrowth, a lot of new shrubs and trees?

FE: Yes, a lot of changes.

KH: And what did you do when you were not working, sleeping

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or eating. I mean, you went back to Melbourne, you went back home on the weekends, did you go fishing at other times when you had spare time?

FE: No fishing at all. I did not do any fishing. I was not interested in fishing. I studied.

KH: You studied.

FE: Yes, I studied.

KH: You studied surveying.

FE: Surveying. And then when I finish surveying, I studied civil engineering.

KH: I see, part-time.

FE: Not Part-time actually, by correspondence.

KH: Did you go skiing at all?

FE: No.

KH: Not a skier?

FE: Not a skier. But at this time when I was - you see, the skiing just started. And the main skiing area was Kiandra, what today is nothing there. And the first - how do you call - we call that in French, "cable", but it is not cable.

KH: The rope-tow, ski bar.

FE: Rope-tow, yes. T-bar, yes. They were built by Kaiser engineers, you see.

KH: At Kiandra?

FE: Yes, at Kiandra?

KH: Oh, really?

FE: Yes, yes. But I do not know if they build for - their own people only, or for the rest of the population, I do not know exactly, but I know that carpenters which work on the project in Tumut Pond, they worked - that was very simple, that was very simple thing, you see, just one wheel, like fly^{ing} wheel, and - what is it called - lines.

KH: Rope.

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FE: Yes, the ropes.

KH: Then you have the pulleys and the wheels up the hill along the posts.

FE: That is right, yes. I was just watching sometimes, that was all. But I never ski myself, because even at home I did not ski.

KH: Did you go to the local towns, like Cooma, to have a drink sometime?

FE: To Cooma very often. I pass through Cooma when I work in Tumut Pond, when I going home. I usually pass on the way back. I sometimes stayed overnight in Cooma, that was all. And if I got some special thing to go to shop, then I go into Cooma but not much.

KH: Not very often.

FE: No, not very often. I pass through Cooma, yes, but I did not stop in Cooma.

KH: Did you have any parties?

FE: Parties, yes, we go to parties, but ^{only} which the company gave. When we made good jobs, especially when we got broke ^{bre} a record in tunnelling. There was a big party. Christmas party every year. And for some other occasions, when we finish a job ahead, you see, the company throw usually a small party.

KH: And they supplied the drinks.

FE: They supplied everything, yes. We did not used to pay anything. That was always supplied by the company.

KH: Did you have any films at night? Were there films shown, like movie films? Did anyone come around with films for entertainment at night?

FE: No, as far as I remember, no. Maybe there were somewhere, but I cannot have been interested, you see. I wasn't interested.

KH: Well, you were on nightshift too, weren't you?

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FE: Yes, I was day shift, night shift, yes, on shift, and there was no time for any entertainment. When it was - I do not think so that there were entertainment at all. You see, because we cannot have time. During the week you worked and for the weekend you were away. I do not think so that - even for other personnel was any entertainment.

KH: Was there any gambling?

FE: Gambling, yes. Oh yes, gambling. There was two-up. Then most of the gambling - there was two-up, manilla, they called, but I do not know the game itself. What else? Oh, there was big gambling ^{every} pay day. Every pay day night there were the games, they go on in the barracks or during the day in the open in the yards, behind the canteen, you see, usually there was two-up, and in the barracks, and cards. There was a lot of gambling.

KH: Did they bet on the horses at all, or anything like that?

FE: Oh yes. There was a bookmaker.

KH: You had a bookmaker?

FE: Bookmaker, especially came from Sydney, employed himself. He was employed in the tunnel, probably as a miner. But his job it was only - he prepared explosive for the tunnels. Because it was not actually a full time job. There were, I think, two or three men on this job, and that was an easy job, but must be done. And the bookmaker came just for this purpose, he came possibly just to have a look, possibly to do business, and he noticed that it will be possible, and then he employed himself and he was all the time - and he make that much money that he bought a farm between Cooma and Canberra. But I forget his name. I do not know his name. But he was not the only one. But I knew this one.

KH: And then you listened to the horse race on the radio, I suppose?

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FE To the horse race, I do not know how they did, because I never bet. The only bet I did that was for ^{the} Melbourne Cup. I got the slip, and I never won, but I took a place every year, you see, that was customary everywhere, and for the time off for the races in Melbourne, the job stopped.

KH: Apparently there was some visits by prostitutes from Sydney sometimes?

FE: Oh yes, a lot of them. Yes, there were, especially after the pay day. After the pay day they came. It was one Italian who brought them, but they caught him and - - -

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KH: There was a reunion, was there?

FE: A reunion, yes.

KH: Yes, I knew it was on.

FE: Ah, you knew.

KH: Because I went - two years ago I went. And they send me when it is on, they tell me. But I have got so many people to interview now, I thought, well, I will give it a miss this year.

FE: Because some of them, you see, they know much more than I do, about life, because I myself - I was long time, but I have not been interested for any other things, just job.

KH: Yes.

FE: That was job and studies. In spare time I study at all times, not all 16 years but most of them. Beside that, my job it was pretty demanding, especially later, when I was on survey, I was on call, more or less on call. I did not do much, but I ^{must} be always ready. I was always ready, even in night time they call me out, to show some points, especially when they were concreting the tunnel, some foremen did not know where to start - certain point was necessary. Then at night time they pull me from the bed and I got to go. I was pretty busy all the time.

KH: With regard to the prostitutes, were there very many prostitutes that came?

FE: Oh yes, there were - when they came, usually was only one, as far as I know.

KH: Oh, only one?

FE: Yes, in the camp.

KH: Oh, I see, in the small camps.

FE: Yes, in the camps. But a lot more there were in Cooma. In Cooma they came - that was customary every pay day, you see, they came, in certain places. And I know two men - they were from Yugoslavia, Yugoslavs, they married prostitutes. They found them, they paid them first, and then they married them.

KH: Yes, well, they liked them? They liked them enough to get married.

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FE: Yes, they must have. Yes, that is right. One thing, and the second thing, I think it was the second reason, especially in the beginning it was very hard to get a woman, you see, for marrying, because there are not many here in Australia. In the first place they took most of migrants, only men, not women. And then naturally everyone was good, ^{for seeing} the men.

KH: Yes, that is right. Yes, I heard that sometimes the prostitutes would come in a bus to Cabramurra, apparently.

FE: Could be.

KH: Could be?

FE: Could be, yes. But I do not know about that...

KH: And they operated right next to your barrack, you said?

FE: Next to my room.

KH: Next to your room?

FE: Yes, that was in Tooma Dam.

KH: You would have an interesting sleep, or you did not sleep very much?

FE: Oh yes, I slept. In the beginning, not, you see, but when you are - when it is late, you are get in late, you see, you sleep in and nobody will wake me up.

KH: Did you go rabbit shooting at all?

FE: No.

KH: No shooting, no kangaroo shooting?

FE: No. Oh, there were some hunters.

KH: There were some?

FE: Oh yes, there were some.

KH: So people in the camp had rifles?

FE: Yes, oh yes. Rifles - there were quite a lot of men with rifles. There were quite a lot of them.

KH: Did they go kangaroo shooting too?

FE: I do not know if - I did not hear about that, but for rabbits, yes. Rabbit shooting, yes.

KH: Foxes?

FE: Foxes too, they got foxes too. And then they throw

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away.

KH: Did they eat the rabbits?

FE: I do not think so.

KH: Just for the sport?

FE: Yes, just for the sport, because they had not had the opportunity to cook them, and not necessary to cook them because in the kitchen, you see, the food was plenty, and many variety of the food. We got usually three, four, different kind of meat. Anyhow, the food it was plentiful. Nobody was interested to get his own food.

KH: Were there many rabbits?

FE: I did not see rabbits myself, but burrows, yes, must be.

KH: Burrows.

FE: Burrows, yes, that is all.

KH: Were there more than last time you went? Do you think there were more in the early days?

FE: In early days, yes, for sure in early days there were more. But in last days I did not see at all. And this extermination of rabbits, it came later. We were already working in the Snowy when they start to poison them.

KH: Did anybody go duck shooting, or anything like that?

FE: Yes, they go. I heard from the workers, you see, that they go duck shooting, especially in Tdama.

KH: Tdama?

FE: Yes, in Tdama. No, Tuoma Dam. There were a lot of ducks up there.

KH: Oh, were there?

FE: Yes, there were a lot of ducks.

KH: What was the fishing like for the people - - -

FE: Fishing was perfect, very good, anyhow. My son, he caught-I do not know - maybe about 18 or even more in one afternoon, by hand. By hand, the trout. But that was just breeding period, you see. And a small creek, and it was very dry this

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year, you see. And the trout, they go upstream, and he went, just with the hands, he caught them. We eat quite a lot of fish.

KH: Was that on the Tuoma River?

FE: That was in Talbingo.

KH: That was at Talbingo.

FE: In Talbingo, yes, when we were in Talbingo.

KH: That was on the Tumut River, that comes through there.

FE: Tumut River, yes. Trout in Tumut River, but I think it is called Talbingo Creek. There is a creek, you see, in the creek, because trout at a certain time in the summer they go upstream for breeding. Big ones, they came from the river, but into the creeks. And at this time he caught them.

KH: That was a lucky afternoon.

FE: Yes.

KH: Were there any fights on the job, or in the camps between men?

FE: As far as I know, that was just between the Serbs and Croats. They fight each other, not much, but anyhow. The shift which I work on, they were mostly Croatian. The management of the - the contractors management, they tried to put the same kind of men, the same nationalities together on the shift. It was good for the safety reasons, you see. And they work still better, they got better progress anyhow. And they put as many Croatian or Yugoslavs, you see, they call Yugoslav everyone who is from Yugoslavia. It does not matter whether they were Serbian or Croatian or Slovenian - together. But they did know that the Serbian and Croatian, they do not go together. And then there were not many Serbs in the camps. They were mostly Croatian. And on one occasion I remember well, there came a Serbian, but he did not last maybe a week. He want to leave. And he complained towards me, about a surveyor on the job, and he complained that it was impossible to work with these people, "because they will kill me. It is better that I go - like, leave myself." And then he gone away. And then later, I never heard about any Ser-

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bian to come to work in the tunnel. Because usually a team which started to work on one shift, stayed nearly all the time, maybe a year or two together.

KH: Oh, I see, that long.

FE: There were not many changes. They just keep working, you see.

KH: Until the job was finished.

FE: Until the contract was finished, and then shifted on to another place.

KH: When there were fights, what were they about? If people had a fight, what was it about?

FE: About politics.

KH: Back in Europe?

FE: Yes, back home. But otherwise I did not hear about fightings among the rest of the workers, say that would be - never heard that would be between Germans, or Australians, or something like that, owing to the nationalities or the language or something, never, never, never.

KH: Some people said that at Island Bend sometimes there was fighting between different Germans, different groups of Germans.

FE: Island Bend - I did not hear.

KH: Did you hear of any other fights?

FE: No.

KH: So the camps were quite peaceful?

FE: Oh yes, very peaceful.

KH: And work?

FE: Very peaceful, and we understood - understanding between different nationalities, you see. Not differences, because if one nationality - we just ask, "Where from do you come?" That is all, and it was all - - -

KH: I suppose most of the time you had to think about what you were doing? I suppose most of the time you had to think about your work?

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FE: Yes, that is right.

KH: You were totally - - -

FE: Yes, that is right, and most of the people, you see, that was just interested to get the job done and to get bonuses.

KH: Make more money.

FE: Yes, how to make more money. That is right, that was all.

KH: And did many of the men save up their money? Or did they blow it again at the pub?

FE: Most of them, they blow the money. A lot of them, anyhow. There were some which - they came up but they did not stay a long time. They came up into the Snowy, saved the money, enough money to get deposit on the house and left. A lot of people was like that. That was, I think, in general nearly - might be 2,000 or even more, just like that. Just came to make enough money to put deposit on the house and then left, or bought a car and he left. But I knew quite a lot of them too, which they work only from pay to pay. And the pay was usually gambled. And still today I meet some of them here in Canberra, they do not have anything.

KH: They are still the same, are they?

FE: Still the same, yes. From pay to pay, it was quite a lot of them.

KH: But you saved your money and - - -

FE: I saved a little bit, yes, that is right. I saved and I spent too on family, mostly on the family.

KH: Well, you had three children.

FE: Yes, three children here and three children in Yugoslavia and one I got from Yugoslavia. He came here - I think I paid - no, I did not pay journey for him. But anyhow before he came here I always sent to my sisters, you see, for keep.

KH: The children were with your sister?

FE: Yes, with my sister.

KH: She brought them up?

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FE: Yes, she brought them up. And I always sent money and parcels.

KH: So you had to support six children?

FE: Yes, six children.

KH: My goodness, you have a big family.

FE: Yes, big family. Three here and three up there, you see. And that is why I needed money.

KH: Yes. Was there any discrimination between different nationalities by the Snowy? Was everybody treated equal?

FE: By the Snowy, itself - I cannot, ... no.

KH: Or by their contractors?

FE: By the contractors, probably to Australians they were a little bit better looked at than the rest. We got - the dirty job - it was usually always put on Italians or Yugoslavs, or something like that, you see.

KH: So were the English and Australians more in the professional side?

FE: Yes, on the professional or specialised jobs.

KH: Oh, I see. Easier jobs, maybe?

FE: Yes, easy jobs.

KH: So the new Australians got the dirty work?

FE: The dirty work we got, yes, always.

KH: Sometimes the dirty work paid better?

FE: Oh yes, that is right. Yes. But that is why, you see, we were interested for money, we worked. When it was necessary to do it, the Italians or Yugoslavs or any other ones, they ready to do, but the other one, you see, they were not that much interested for money. But they were looking for an easy way out.

KH: A lot of the people who were on the administration, on the professional side, are still around now. It is very hard to find the people who worked in the tunnels. It is hard to find people like you, because they moved on to other jobs.

FE: To other areas, yes. Some of them, they gone even to South America, to New Zealand, everywhere they gone from here.

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With the companies, you see, they work with, especially Utah, they have contract. I myself, I was offered twice a job in New Zealand with Utah, but I have not been interested, you see, I did not want to leave. And other ones, they were a lot of them, you see, which they just followed the company. And whenever they got a contract, they gone. In Western Australia, I was once in Western Australia for about three months, two. And I meet quite a few people, we work together in Snowy and they were in Port Hedland.

KH: Did they have families or were they mostly single men?

FE: No, single men. ^{If} They got families, they left them, they came as single, you see.

KH: Apparently there was a time when the last - on one of the tunnels - they were going to do the last blast, and someone put an extra dynamite in, and apparently all the officials came and all the hats blew off, all the hard hats, you know. Were you there? Someone played a practical joke?

FE: No, no.

KH: No.

FE: I did not hear about that.

KH: They put a little bit of extra dynamite - - -

FE: Even if he would not put enough of the dynamite in, if they were not far enough from the face of the tunnel, it would blow the hats off, too.

KH: Oh, I see.

FE: Oh yes, easy.

KH: It would be very - because the air could not go anywhere, just stay in the tunnel.

FE: That is right. I did not hear that somebody would put more. It was not so strict, about gelignite, you see. You just fill up the holes, that was all. It was not so strict, there was a certain amount, but if you put a little bit more, it did not matter. Nobody cared about it.

KH: Was it ever too much that it was dangerous? I suppose

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they always cleared the tunnel, did they? When they blasted, they cleared the whole tunnel?

FE: Yes, that is right. Not the whole tunnel, certain area.

KH: Oh, I see.

FE: Certain area, it was always safe limit. Up to there, all people - the foreman knew exactly how far away he has to pull all crew. And up there, you see, we took a little bit of shelter, not much, usually we stood beside the walls, and they blasted. But as far as I know, anyhow, at the time when I was working there was no accident at all due to such blasting.

KH: No, no accidents. Not from that sort of thing.

FE: No, no accident at all, caused by the blasting itself. There were, on other shifts, there were a few accidents. But not on my shift.

KH: Because the big Memorial in Cooma has a list of 120 people who died on the scheme.

FE: Yes, that is right.

KH: Did you know anyone who died?

FE: Well, yes. I saw him, and he had cracked his bones.

KH: Who was it?

FE: It was - Kurent, was his name, was up there. They shifted - you see, when they muck the material which was blasted, out, for this purpose it was a mucker machine, we call it, you see.

KH: A mucker?

FE: Mucker machine. A big machine which could be called a front end loader. Outside, they call front end loader, but that was bigger, stronger, in the tunnel. And this machine was powered by compressed air, yes, compressed air, it was. And when the truck was full then he pulled, the operator pulled the truck back and there were always switches on the track. On one push the full truck, on the switch, on one line, you see, and on the other line there was a loco which approached the empty truck.

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And to approach the empty trucks it was necessary to drive pretty fast and then stop, but the force of the impact drove the empty truck towards the mucker machine, you see. And then somebody was up there to hook it on. And this man, how he came up there, I do not know. It was at the end of the mucking cycle, came between the buffers of the empty truck and the mucker machine. They squeezed him here. He was - I do not know - there was no reason actually to be up there.

KH: So he was standing on the rails, where he should not.

FE: Yes.

KH: And it was dark, I suppose, You could not see the - -

FE: It was light, not very clear, but anyhow, what he did, I do not know, but he should be up there at all. And nobody could expect him to be up there, and he died, naturally.

KH: Did anyone else die, that you knew? Or any other accidents?

FE: No. For accidents I feared a lot ^{of} them. But most of them they were on Mondays, when the men, they were tired. Most of them happened like that. It was after the long weekend, they drove home to Sydney or anywhere, and then - I myself I did the same. I start, usually Sunday night, to drive, and arrive on the spot, at about 2, 3 o'clock, mid-afternoon, and then just shifted and go on the shift, afternoon shift, at 4 o'clock. And I was tired all right, not only myself, the rest too. And when you work in the tunnel, if you are tired you just do not pay much attention. And most of the accidents happened this way. Or they drove fast, ^{they mention how many were killed} altogether on the job. But the reasons, you see, of the accidents - and where the accidents happen they do not ^{have} the statistics - - -

KH: Yes, they do, I think. A lot of them were killed on the roads.

FE: On the roads, yes, that is right.

KH: Or with accidents with cars going off the roads.

FE: Off the roads, yes.

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KH: Yes, I think on ~~the~~ construction - I heard a figure of about 60 killed in the actual construction.

FE: In the actual - yes, that could be.

KH: And the rest were on other things, on roads, and other accidents on the way to work.

FE: On the roads, that is right. But most of them, as far as I knew, I knew the people, they were more or less due to tiredness. They were tired and drove back and that is what happened.

KH: What was the name of the man again that you saw killed?

FE: Kurent, that is K-U-R-E-N-T. In ~~Točma~~, there was his burial later, in ~~Točma~~, he is lying there.

KH: What nationality was that?

FE: He was Slovenian.

KH: Oh, was he?

FE: My country man.

KH: So you knew him?

FE: Oh, very well, very well.

KH: And the contractors, did they look after you?

FE: Oh yes. I could not complain.

KH: You could not complain?

FE: No. I could not complain.

KH: Did you actually work for the Snowy?

FE: For SMA I was working since 65, I think, to 72, for the authorities. I was with private contractors as long as they did not start when I asked for job, you see. Was a vacancy, you see, and I ask for the job, as long as they did not start to ask "How old are you?" And then when they start to ask me "How old are you?" when I came before nobody ask me. Nobody asked me, they only asked me what I did. I told them this and this job, I did, here and here I ~~worked~~ OK, I got job. And then later, you see, when I come to a new job, and when I ask for the job they start to ask me, "How old are you?", And I say now is time to get a

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steady job and more secure than private contractors. And I applied for Snowy Mountain, for the course for the inspectors. I applied for this job.

KH: So what year was that? When did you start?

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KH: Yes, that is right. You then started to work for the SMA?

FE: SMA, yes.

KH: In the last - what year was that again you started?

FE: '65 to '72.

KH: Right, the last 7 years.

FE: Yes, 7 years.

KH: With SMA.

FE: Yes, SMA.

KH: They looked after you, too?

FE: Oh yes. I got even accommodation then. I got the family with me.

KH: Oh, I see. And that was down in Cooma, was it?

FE: No, that was in Talbingo.

KH: Oh, right, the new township.

FE: New township, yes, that is right.

KH: Some people have said that the SMA was rather rigid, was repressive, it did not allow enough individual freedom. I do not think there were any unions, or things like that.

FE: Not for us. No, we got complete freedom. I was in major contracts. Maybe the people who was in Cooma, that could be. But I did not hear about that, any complaints. But for us, with major contracts, never had any - - -

KH: Could you change your working conditions? Like, if the working conditions were not safe, or if you thought something could be improved, were they likely to take on new ideas?

FE: Oh yes.

KH: Improve conditions?

FE: They would. But as far as I am concerned, I never complained, and never found any conditions that would not be safe.

KH: You did not?

FE: Never.

KH: Not with the contractors either?

FE: No.

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KH: The tunnel operations and the drilling was all - - -

FE: Always, according to my experience and my thinking, it was always safe, always. They looked after safety.

KH: They did.

FE: Yes. There were some who complained, but I could say that these people - you see, they were - or they had not had enough experience, or they were plain lazy, they did not want to work.

KH: I see, right. But do you think it is true to say that during the 25 years of the Scheme, that things got better and better?

FE:: Oh yes.

KH: Things must have been fairly primitive at first.

FE: They improved quite a lot. Not only between 55 and 72 when I worked, but even on each job which we do, each operation, I mean, in the tunnel, we never finish the same way as we started. It was always improvement, always. Any job we started. I was quite interested in the job. The way it was worked, you see, but I never noticed that we would finish the same way as we started. Always improvement and much quicker. And they pay attention to the ideas of the workers, you see. If somebody suggested - got a good suggestion ^{if} was followed, was taken on, and then followed. And this way of working was kept later.

KH: Did you make any suggestions?

FE: I did, yes, when I was in the workshop. A certain way of changing the brakes on a little loco. Usually they were always two, a fitter and one assistant, to do this job and to change brakes it took usually two hours. Then I was looking at the job, thinking about it, and found a way and I make smaller pliers (?), but I forgot what it was already - smaller pliers that - instead to use two men, one man can do and usually in about three quarters of an hour it was finished. And since then, you see, always when the brakes - because the little locos, they use quite a lot of brakes, the brakes they are from steel, steel

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brakes, you see. But they are worn out pretty - not soon, but anyhow they were reasonably quick. And to change them, in about three quarter of an hour one man could do easy.

KH: Did they give you ^a bonus for that?

FE: No, they did not. The ^{only recognition,} it was that the boss of the mechanical department, asked me if I would like to take supervisor's job in the mechanical workshop. But I did not know much about this mechanical job, you see - fitters. I helped with the machines, with the - assistant fitter I was there before one year, that is right. And I knew some jobs, but basic jobs of a mechanic I did not know. I was not able to use oxy - - -

KH: Acetylene, welder.

FE: That is it, yes. But not to use, you see. And then I thought if I take supervisor's job and I have to ask someone, that is a small thing to do and I cannot do myself, but ask someone to do it, it will be unpleasant for me. Besides, surveyor's job seem to me it was very cleaner than this mechanical, you see. Especially in the tunnels you get only big machines, simple, they are very simple. That is very easy to change the parts, because there is actually no repair or something like that. If one part is worn out, they throw the part out and go to the store and get a new one and put in. That is all, that is easy. That is why, you see, I was able to do all these jobs, mechanical jobs in the tunnel. But I did not want, I stayed with the survey.

KH: Do you think it was a good idea to change the direction of the waters from the Snowy into the Murray and the Murrumbidgee?

FE: That is for sure. That is for sure, because it was - especially at this time, I think still today, you see. But at this time it was very important for Australia, for irrigation purposes, and then for electricity. In my opinion, it was a good idea.

KH: You did not mind them - I mean, it meant that the Snowy

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had to stop flowing, they had to put dams on it. So the Snowy is a very different river today than it was 30 years ago.

FE: Oh yes, that is right, that is correct. But Snowy is in any case a very short run.

KH: To the sea?

FE: Yes, to the sea. And she runs through the country where rain is plentiful. Up there, there is no shortage of - when driving along the east coast when I go home, and ~~back~~ back.....nearly always raining, not always, but nearly always.

There is a lot of rain. And the Snowy - I do not think so they changed much. When I was last time up there, Snowy was in - where is called the place - Bairnsdale - no before Bairnsdale - -

KH: It flows through Jindabyne and then it goes past - you mean the Snowy River?

FE: The Snowy River, yes.

KH: It flows past Dalgety, is it?

FE: I just forgot the place - Cooma - - -

KH: Berridale.

FE: Not Berridale - oh yes, this way, but down.

KH: Bombala.

FE: Bombala, Bemm River. By Bemm River, I think, I always crossed.

KH: Oh, that is at Orbost, I think. At Orbost you cross the Snowy River.

FE: Orbost, or Bemm River, somewhere round there. Orbost, it will be, yes. But it did not change much.

KH: No. So what do you think of irrigation? Do you think it is good or bad?

FE: Well, this time it was for sure very good. Today probably it is a little bit different, I do not know. They are not that much interested any more in farming there.

KH: Well, one of the problems is with irrigation, is the salt. They have raised the water table in large areas and it brings the salt out of the ground, it brings it to the surface.

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KH: And that then poisons the plants, so it is not very good for cropping.

FE: Yes, that could be, yes, but that was probably not known at the time when the scheme was done, for sure.

KH: Right.

FE: This time, I know that everyone was interested^{just} to get enough water - they wanted - for the irrigation.

KH: But the Scheme, today it is a national park, but the scheme did cause a lot of damage. I mean, the dams and roads and power lines - today, in today's climate, people might think differently about that. Do you think, for instance, do think that today the Snowy Scheme could be built today? Do you think the governments or the people would let it?

FE: Most likely not. Because today there are different means to get electricity. But again, I do not know. That is a very hard question to answer. What is more economical, uranium or water? What will do more damage to the environment, that is the question.

KH: Well, in Sydney a lot of the power stations run on coal. They make electricity through coal.

FE: Yes, that is all right. But the coal, in a certain period of time, it will - - -

KH: It will be gone.

FE: It will go. Water will not go.

KH: That is right.

FE: And then again coal makes more pollution than water. Water does not do anything, any damage to the environment at all.

KH: Only the dams, only the flooding of the valley.

FE: Yes, that is all, yes.

KH: The power lines a little bit. It affects probably stream life, fish life, more than anything else.

FE: That is - probably, yes that is probably.

KH: Especially very large dams like - - -

FE: Eucumbene.

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KH: They have flooded a lot of farmland, too.

FE: Eucumbene Dam, it was not much farmland. There were only pastures. They were not - they were only paddocks up there and bush, and such things. It^{did} not flooded much of farmland, there was not much farming up there. It was really held pretty high. Tumut ~~was~~ nothing.

KH: No.

FE: Tumut was nothing. Toome Dam the same. I do not think so that it would be any considerable damage to the environment.

KH: Do you think the scheme has made a significant contribution to our sense of national identity? To, you know, in the post-war period, do you think it - - -

FE: Probably, yes. The people, they were very interested of this time. And a lot of people, they were just talking about Snowy. And newspapers, you see, they wrote about too, a lot of Snowy. And especially to get migrants, you see, they used the Snowy scheme for - somehow invite the people.

KH: Do you think many people knew about the Snowy scheme in Europe? back home in Germany. Do you think they heard about it there?

FE: Well, they must hear from the people which were working here, for sure.

KH: And they wrote back? They wrote letters.

FE: They wrote letters, yes.

KH: Do you think many people came out on that basis?

FE: Most likely, because there were a lot of Germans, they were working. I was working with them.

KH: What jobs did they mainly do?

FE: They were mostly professional. They were tradesmen. Mostly tradesmen, surveyors. There was one lawyer, it was too, but he worked as a surveyor.

KH: Oh really?

FE: Yes, yes, was lawyer. Timberman - - -

KH: Timberman? Oh, a carpenter?

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FE: Carpenter, yes. Nearly all carpenters, you see, they were Germans, you see. There are still some here in Canberra, they used to work - they were carpenters up there, and they still work here in Canberra. I meet them sometimes.

KH: Do you know their names at all?

FE: Only first names, not second names.

KH: Do you think that the scheme was one of the foundation stones of a new multi-cultural Australia?

FE: Could be, that could be, because that was the first place where there were so many different nations came together, work together, and know each other, without any tension. I would say that there was no tension at all between the nationalities. No differences.

KH: That seems amazing.

FE: Yes, no difference at all. What you are - - -

KH: Do you think that in a big project today, do you think that that would be the same?

FE: Most likely.

KH: Is it because - - -

FE: Because the men, they are interested only on the job and especially if the job, if the conditions are reasonable or good, they are just interested that the job will be done and that they earned the money. All the rest

KH: Yet in the cities where different groups live you get friction.

FE: Yes, friction. That is different.

KH: Children being nasty to each other at school.

FE: Oh yes, that is right. But here not, here it was not. I cannot say how it was in the family camps, because I never was.

KH: Because those children went to school together.

FE: Yes, yes.

KH: There ^{were} Australians and English and German and Italians.

FE: Yes. But they had probably - probably there was some friction among the women, which they did not work. That could

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FE: be. But in single camps there was no friction at all.

KH: So. What about in Talbingo, when you lived in Talbingo as a family? Was there any?

FE: I did not hear much about, but I should want to ask my wife, if she was - anyhow, we were too busy, too busy. And Sundays, you see, which you go with the family, you got one always round the country, round the mountains. They were always going somewhere, you see. Anyhow, concerning my family, I know exactly that we did not have any inconvenience at all or any friction between - but there were Yugoslavs, there were German families, there was one American, was a neighbour, one was Englishman, English family neighbour too, on one side, and Italians there were too.

KH: All at Talbingo?

FE: All in Talbingo, yes.

KH: You must have had a bit more time then for going fishing and things like that at Talbingo.

FE: I could have a little bit more, yes. But I was not interested.

KH: No, that was when you had a garden.

FE: Yes, garden, I got my garden. And then in wintertime, you see, again I got to prepare firewood, making all the firewood.

KH: You used to go and cut wood?

FE: Yes, cut wood.

KH: With a chain saw?

FE: Yes, chain saw. Sundays, that was usually my free time, you see, when I go to make firewood. And otherwise garden. And I spent a lot more time in the garden than it was necessary, because I just like it, you see.

KH: You still like it, don't you?

FE: I still, yes.

KH: And you say - from Talbingo you worked on Blowering Dam, did you?

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FE: Yes, in Blowering Dam. Firstly, I start on Blowering - on Blowering Dam - up there I was still in the camp. But then when the Talbingo - how it is called? There are two ^{dams} in Talbingo, that is - - -

KH: Was one of them Jounama?

FE: Jounama, yes.

KH: Yes, that smaller one.

FE: Yes, smaller one. On this one I started. And this one I worked front to bottom up the top. When it started, I came from Blowering, and started on this one. When that ^{one} was finished, I started Talbingo Dam. [Turn + 3]

KH: So you went through all three of them?

FE: Yes, through all three.

KH: As an inspector?

FE: As inspector, yes.

KH: What does that mean?

FE: Supervise excavation, grouting, then concreting, mixing the concrete in laboratory, checking the soil, checking the sands, you see, and such things. I was in the laboratory, too. I got to go through all - the whole jobs, you see, ^{one in one part of} concrete plant, you see, put up concrete plant. And then when the plant was finished, you see, mixing concrete - for mixing the concrete you have to prepare formulas, how much water and cement and different kind of sand, grading the sand, you see. The sand grading is before that. Oh, there was quite a lot of jobs.

KH: And if you were to look your whole time on the scheme, what was the best time? What was the best period or what stands out in your mind as - - -

FE: Dams.

KH: Dams?

FE: Dams, yes, surveying on the dams. That was the most interesting for me and most satisfying. ^{Because up there when they fill} the dams, each shift at least once or twice you go to survey, to put points, how far they go to fill, you see, because they go up

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the slope. And you have to put the stakes to points for the operators, and see that they know how to fill. And then again when that is done you have to check. The job was interesting, but not hard. And in the open air, always.

KH: You liked it better in the dams than in the tunnels?

FE: Better, yes. More interesting than tunnels. In tunnels, one time is quite all right. But then you get used to the job and tired of it. Every day exactly the same; put line, mark the face and set the rails, that was all. And then that you do, you have job for ^{about} half an hour, and you have to wait, the miners drill,, mark out. All this time you are idle, you do not do anything.

KH: A lot of waiting.

FE: Waiting, but when these operations are finished, you have to work, but you have to work quick. You must work fast. Half an hour, and that was usually on every shift, three times. Twice or three times. It all depended on how many rounds the miners did, you see. Sometimes only two rounds. If they put two rounds, you work actually only one hour, while the rest was waiting. But for me it was quite all right, you see, because I got a small office, portable, not an office, it is a - - -

KH: It is a dog box.

FE: Yes, something like that. And then I study. I got books, and I read the books and make my examination papers. That is why I got certificate(?) - nearly all I did very good and excellent, because I got a lot of time. I spent a lot of time on that. Firstly my English was not perfect, I got to use dictionary sometimes, to see that I understood. But I got to understand properly, you see, and then answer the questions. I spent a lot of time.

KH: And what was the best camp that you lived in? Of all the camps?

FE: Talbingo.

KH: The township, the little village.

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FE: Yes. Talbingo.

KH: Yes, it is a nice spot there.

FE: Oh yes, that is nice, very nice. That was just above the lake.

KH: And what was the worst moment?

FE: When I got sack.

KH: You got sacked? You mean in 1972? At the end, you mean?

FE: No, no, no. before too. A couple of times. We crossed somehow with the foreman, you see. And there were no questions at all, who is right, who is wrong, and I did not speak well English to explain myself. I just - the manager believed the foreman, and I got to go.

KH: What year was that? When did that happen - early in your time?

FE: That was with Thiess Brothers - which camp was it? I think it was .ṭ.ṭ.ṭ.ṭ..camp. ..ṭ.ṭ.ṭ.ṭ... camp, I think it was. But about a couple of months later, they send me letter to come back. That was the hardest moment.

KH: So you did not have^a job for a couple of months?

FE: Yes, that is right, because I did not know what for actually I got the sack. But there was not any explanation, you see. With private companies, you see, when you work, it does not pay to argue or something like that. That is the best - about a couple of months later they sent me telegram to come back. I did not go on the same job. A different job and different foreman. But they want me back.

KH: Well, that was good. So that was the best moment, I suppose, going back?

FE: Yes, that is right.

KH: That is very good. That has just about answered all the things that I was going to ask you.

FE: Ok, thanks.

KH: Yes, I think I have just about covered everything.