

Frank Pirchmoser

FRANK PIRCHMOSER

Interviewed by Klaus Hueneke

On 6 December 1986

At Fisher, Canberra, ACT.

Frank was a technical officer with the Snowy Mountains Authority. He was based in Cooma for a time; lived at Eaglehawk, which was the camp for the building of Eucumbene Dam, and then spent some years at Cabramurra. He was at Cabramurra until 1974. The family used to shop at Sue City supermarket, and a particularly dramatic time was the winter of 1964 when the school was snowed under and they had tunnels to get to places.

FP: Well, I didn't start at Eaglehawk. As a matter of fact, I was never there, really, because ..... moved the town about then - <sup>because</sup> Eucumbene Dam - do you want to record it, or - - -

KH: Yes, yes, yes.

FP: Oh, I see.

KH: You are on the air. I am getting it all down now, is that all right with you?

FP: Yes, OK. Yes, well when we start in 1961, Eaglehawk, which was the township near Eucumbene Dam, was being dismantled because the dam was about completed then, and I never lived at Eaglehawk. I actually had never seen, only a few remaining houses and buildings I had seen of Eaglehawk. And I lived, when I started - I lived in the camp in Cooma, called East Camp, just across the railway line - for several months. How many months? Well, my family were in Brisbane.

MRS P: We waited for a house to become available.

FP: Yes, we were waiting for a house to become available in Cooma. I worked at the Tumut 2 power station, which was near Cabramurra. Then I went back to Cooma at the weekends, until finally they managed to get a house for me in Cabramurra. There

Frank Pirchmoser

wasn't one available in Cooma then, so I agreed to a transfer to Cabramurra, and my family came to Cabramurra then.

MRS P: August '61.

FP: August '61, was it? June. July, August.

MRS P: August.

FP: So it must have been about two months I was with the Authority, then. I remember I picked my family up in Cooma.

I had to come back by bus, I think, I came from Cabramurra. It was a Pioneer, Ansett Pioneer, wasn't it, the bus? Which was on a daily run between Cooma and Cabramurra, it stopped off at Ad-minaby and Kiandra, <sup>delivered and</sup> picked up mail and parcels and things. It also stopped in Cooma - the depot was - from Newman's, wasn't it, there?

MRS P: No, the Pioneer office. Pioneer Airlines.

FP: It was in a different place then. I think it was a different place.

MRS P: Near the bridge it used to stop.

FP: Well, <sup>anyway</sup> the depot was there somewhere.

MRS P: I know, I can remember. I know exactly.

FP: But anyway, they had a fixed, <sup>I don't know</sup> yearly, or five yearly contract to the Authority. I believe they ran at a loss. They supplied food which was ordered by telephone from Cabramurra, and the parcels post, from Cooma to Kiandra and Cabramurra. Later on, Kiandra closed down completely. There was a post office still operating in Kiandra until about 1967, '68 or so. There was still a post office operating.

MRS P: We knew the people well, actually.

KH: Bill Patrick, I think.

MRS P: That's right, we knew them very well.

KH: Did you? And I think he would have had some of his children - his wife was still alive then.

MRS P: One of his daughters lives in Tumut, and one lives here.

Frank Pirchmoser

KH: Yes, there's one in the Belconnen Valley, that I have been to see, the youngest one.

MRS P: Cynthia.

KH: That's right.

MRS P: I know them all. There is Patrick house in Canberra named after George.

KH: Is there?

MRS P: P-A-T-R-I-C-K.

KH: Was there anything else wrong with my introduction?

MRS P: Yes, the year.

FP: Well, I didn't stay in Cabramurra until 1974. I stayed - or we stayed until August 1967. I know that it snowed when we picked up the children at the school about 11 o'clock and it snowed then.

MRS P: We hardly got out.

FP: And we just got out of the so-called Power Line Hill, that's near Three Mile Lake. It's a very steep hill.

MRS P: I thought it was '68.

FP: '67, I am sure of it.

MRS P: Look up some old photos.

FP: And anyway we got out all right. It was a bit slushy and slippery. But that hill there, it was - that's on the present bitumen road. You come in - all curves - up and down, up and down a few times, and the last climb up, that's Three Mile <sup>Dam</sup>,...that's called Power Line Hill.

KH: Oh, is it? I never knew that.

FP: A fairly long stretch, about 200 metres. And that was known as Power Line - Power Line, that's right, because the power lines go overhead in some areas. And some tourists from it, when we managed the.....you might get stuck at Power Line Hill, so many ask for odd information. <sup>They thought</sup> there were power points on the side of road. You plug in - I don't know - you plug in your radios for the races, or whatever. And so that is how I remember exactly, we overtook the removalist's van on top. And that was 1967. And then we moved to Cooma, there,

Frank Pirchmoser

.Boona....Street.

MRS P: Yes, No 1 .Boona....Street.

KH: Oh, I see. You continued to work for the SMA?

FP: Oh, yes.

KH: But you didn't stay at Cabramurra all that time?

FP: No.

MRS P: We went on to Talbingo.

FP: I was meant to stay in Cooma, originally, but there was no house<sup>available</sup>. I waited two months and I was really fed up and com-

plained. So I was agreeable, and they had the house available in Cabramurra instead. I would have done the same job, basically

the same job, but I would have lived in Cooma. <sup>If means</sup> I would have worked the weekdays in Cabramurra, in Tumut 2 power station, - Cabramurra <sup>in the</sup> itself's township, - and go home to Cooma weekends.

But as it was now - it actually was better for me, because I lived right there. I could go home every night. And so anyway, I got to Cooma, and I did - that's right - Jindabyne pumping station was to be commissioned, and I went with another two or three guys to Jindabyne. Sometimes stayed, and sometimes we stayed in the camp there for the week, which is now the youth camp.

KH: Oh yes, on the road to Jindabyne... on that - - -

FP Yes, it just after the dam<sup>wall</sup>, a few metres after the dam wall, is a dirt road going off on the left and it goes up there. And we stayed there, oh, it must have been a year or so, until Jindabyne pumping station was complete. Well, it was put in service, there was some fiascos there.

MRS P: I don't know if you would be interested in looking at a photo of the school snowed in?

KH: Yes.

MRS P: They're only black and white.

KH: Can I leave the photos 'til a little bit later?

MRS P: Oh yes.

KH: I am very interested in - especially black and whites.

Frank Pirchmoser

MRS P: They are mainly all black and white.

KH: Can I take you back much earlier?

FP: Yes, when?

KH: What's your full name? Have you got another name, apart from Frank?

FP: Walter.

KH: Walter, that's my father's name.

MRS P: Franz is the correct name.

KH: Yes, I thought it might be.

KH: When were you born? I know you joked about this on the phone.

FP: When was it? 1896 or something.

MRS P: 17 January 1934.

KH: Yes, you tried that one<sup>on</sup> already. Where were you born?

FP: Innsbruck, in Austria, Tyrol, Austria.

KH: What are your parents' names?

FP: My mother's name - do you want the older names, do you?

KH: Yes, the maiden name. Do you remember?

fp: The maiden name was Fischler, similar to Fisher, but L-E-R - and it is S-C-H. F-I-S-C-H-L-E-R. <sup>Fischler.</sup> That was her maiden name.

FP: And Emma Lucia, I think, wasn't it?

MRS P: Emma might do.

FP: Something like that.

KH: What was your father's name?

FP: Michael.

KH: And where did you go to school?

FP: I went to school at Mils, which is 14 kilometres from Innsbruck. That was primary school. Secondary school, I went at - which is now called Hall - H-A-L-L. But then it was called Solbad Hall, because it had a salt mine, and they used the saline solution - oh, it's a long story - anyway, it used to be Solbad Hall. And I went to secondary school there, and tech college, I

Frank Pirchmoser

went at Innsbruck, and I worked at Innsbruck, too, before I came here.

KH: So you were apprenticed?

FP: Apprentice, too, yes.

KH: What was your apprenticeship?

FP: Scientific instrument making. . . Scientific instrument maker.

KH: So how many years did you do that for?

FP: About four.

KH: When did you come to Australia?

FP: 1955. We left, I think, 29<sup>th</sup> <sup>of</sup> May, in May sometime we left . . . Bremerhavn. I think it was 29<sup>th</sup> <sup>of</sup> May, and it was about four or five weeks. so must have got here July. I think 3<sup>rd</sup> <sup>of</sup> July we landed at Fremantle.

MRS P: I thought you said round the Queen's birthday weekend, in June.

FP: Well, I wouldn't know - Queen's birthday wouldn't have meant a thing to me then. But I just remember May, 29<sup>th</sup> <sup>of</sup> May, or 19<sup>th</sup> <sup>of</sup> May, or something like this, we left. And so it was four or five weeks here. So I think on <sup>the</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> <sup>of</sup> July. It couldn't have been 3<sup>rd</sup> of June, we wouldn't have been here.

KH: That was on the Skaubryn.

FP: Skaubryn, yes. MSS Skaubryn .

KH: And who paid your passage? Were you assisted?

FP: Yes, the Austrian government paid 80% and I paid 20%

KH: The Austrian government?

FP: Yes.

KH: Were you a refugee?

FP: No.

KH: What were they trying to do? Get rid of people, or something?

FP: Well, maybe. I don't know, I was only 21. I didn't worry about politics. As long as it came out here. I wanted actually to go to South America, <sup>for years to go to South America</sup> but I couldn't get in there. And then that came up. I had my name on all the lists of interested

Frank Pirchmoser

people of various consulates and diplomatic missions. Then one day, I was in the army in Austria, actually, it was midwinter then and we were just on manoeuvres, I remember. And I was actually gladdened, because it was really hard work. I got that letter from the Australian Embassy in Germany somewhere: "If you are still interested, there 's a transport leaving for Australia."

I think it was about five weeks hence. And I saw the commander first, actually, for a few hours - - -

KH: I'll say! I'd want to chew over it for a few days, I think.

FP: A few - it was really hard work, really. . . . . they had to feed us drugs to keep us alive, really savage, you know. And so - well, actually, I think it was only an hour or so, then I saw the commanding officer. I didn't know then, if I could just leave like this, and anyway, he gracefully agreed. I still remember his words - he was an old fellow, an old general, you know, he was in the German army and the Russian front, and all that. And he said, "Well, I see you want to go. Well, anyway, if you find your diamonds, bring back a bagful for us."

KH: A bagful of what?

FP: Diamonds. And so I had to walk about four hours - it was all snowed in, metres of snow - I had to walk about four hours back to there where the road was open, and the commanding officer's driver drove me back to our normal summer camp, where I picked up all my gear and then he drove me to the headquarters; all the papers were fixed up virtually the next day. In one day it was all sorted out and then I left - I got a discharge, I got still the papers with me. And then I was three weeks - I had five weeks, I think, and in one week I was all ready, it was all fixed up. It all ran smoothly,

KH: What did your parents think of that?

FP: I never asked them, <sup>really,</sup> My father didn't mind so much, but my mother, when I left, the day when I left, she disappeared.

KH: I see.

Frank Pirchmoser

FP: She disappeared, crying, I suppose.

KH: It would have been an emotional day for her.

FP: She was rather an emotional girl. Well, like all elderly European women, you know, they cry a lot and they scream, and things like that.

KH: Perhaps I should give your side of the story as well. And that 's very unusual, that you were paid for by the Austrian government, not the Australian government.

FP: No, not to my knowledge. But anyway, we had to go to camping sites. There was a camp, it was an old ex-army camp, of course. And there were hundreds of migrants there. They collected them all over Austria, and we left all on the train. There was a train full, I don't know, 2,000 or how many. We left for Bremerhaven, and we met up with German migrants, and there must have been <sup>about</sup> 4,000 people on that ship, most of them migrants. And we were in camp - I cannot remember now - but a few weeks. It must have been two or three weeks. That is why I left early, left the army early, you see, because they said you have to meet up in the camp, at such and such a date, you have to have inoculations and papers and stuff. You know, you had to have a pass for all the injections, a yellow pass, with the black H - remember that one, the International Health Organisation had their own pass. All the inoculations are registered in there. I still have that somewhere. Plus, you know, my travelling pass and papers and bits and pieces and so on. And we had to sign, for the Austrian government, we had to sign a piece of paper, that 's why I know 80%, or something like that they paid - that we write them, or fill in forms. That is right, they gave us forms, I think, two forms. The first form was sent in, I think, six months after we got here, and the second form a year after. It was a pre-printed form. You just ticked off "do you work in your promised job?" tick, yes, no. "Are you happy?" -no. "Do you get the money you were promised?" and all that. And none of us worked in the jobs we were supposed to work. None of us.

Frank Pirchmoser

KH: Did you have to work here for two years?

FE: Yes.

KH: You were obligated.

FE: But we didn't worry about that. We were supposed to work at the same job that was given us at first, for two years.

KH: Where did you land in Australia?

FP: In Fremantle. That 's where the boat landed. And then we went over to Melbourne.

KH: By train?

FP: No, on the boat still.

KH: On a boat.

FP: On the same boat. And then we disembark. That was a fiasco. That must have taken a time for us to get off the ship.

KH: Why was that?

FP: I don't know. Customs, or something, and queues of people with suitcases, in lines. I think we got there about 9 in the morning and about 5 finally <sup>we</sup> left the harbour area. And they had to put us on the train. I can't remember how we got on the train. I think that was - the train was there on the jetty somewhere. It was near the harbour area. And then they took us to Bonegilla. We got there, I think, about 2 in the morning, or so. We travelled all night, and we got to Bonegilla finally. We stopped somewhere half way, I would say, and we had refreshments consisting of mutton chops. I still can smell it - everybody go like this, "What's that funny smell?" And .crikey's, oh, terrible.

KH: Why don't you like mutton?

MRS P: Oh, never.

KH: You don't like <sup>it</sup> either?

FP: Well, it smells peculiar - - -

MRS P: Oh, I wouldn't eat mutton, no.

KH: Do you mean no chops?

MRS P: No, we never eat - in fact, never.

KH: Cutlets, I'll eat.

Frank Pirchmoser

MRS P: Never. Occasionally, Frank will eat leg of lamb, but not mutton. But very rarely. Not many Europeans do that I know. Very few eat lamb.

KH: No, they don't have roasts very much, no.

MRS P: Oh, roasts - - -

FP: But these weren't roast, there were sausages, too. I don't know, but the whole thing smelled the same, anyway. But, see, I had eaten horse - we had eaten horse, goat - quite a lot of goat. The usual beef and calf and so on. But I had never had sheep before. And so anyway we didn't - none of us, apparently, because everyone said, "What's that funny smell? Oh, it's the food that smells. I wonder what they put in there?"

KH: I think my parents would have a similar feeling about that.

MRS P: The older generation.

KH: Yes. Roasts - I love chops.

FP: Well, I didn't mind eating them. But that's what we had, actually, *everyday after*.

MRS P: But you said you had no choice, really. That's all they had.

FP: No, well, they put us - I can't remember how many blankets we had. I think three, those blue blankets and those army - those farm gates, *as bedsteads*, you know, *those farm gates?*

KH: Oh yes, the old wire frame, *yeah*.

FP: Yes, just a rhomboid shape wire mesh with the waterpipe frame and four legs.

KH: How long did you spend in Bonegilla?

FP: I don't really remember. Longer than some of them. Some only were there <sup>few</sup> *a* days.

KH: Yes, we had 10 days, I think. That was short by comparison to others.

FP: Yes, I can't really tell because for me then time did not exist. I just tried to survive the best as possible, and took in all the impressions, see.

Frank Pirchmoser

KH: Well, talking about impressions, can you think back to what you knew of Australia before you came?

FP: Yes.

KH: What sticks out in your mind?

FP: Well, we saw a film which I have seen twice since here. It was called "The Overlanders", black and white movie, quite good.

KH: Robert Mitchum?

MRS P: Chips Rafferty.

FP: No, Chips Rafferty, yes.

KH: Oh, "The Shiralee", no -

FP: It was an Australian movie produced here. And when the Japanese were threatening to land at Darwin or somewhere, or they thought <sup>would,</sup> they <sup>so</sup> they drove thousands of cattle, as far as to Katharine, and that is what basically the movie was about. And it showed scenery and all that. And that 's about - that 's right - our class teacher - I think education was very good we received. Geography was one of my favourite subjects, and I knew virtually everything about most countries of the world. But then, just about when we came to Australia, the teacher said, "We show movie, an Australian movie. Take it in, it tells you a lot about our country." And she said, "Well, basically, it 's like a saucer. It 's high on the outside and the centre is lower than the sea level," and all this. And lots of it - there is certain things like that. We knew the basic things, but they didn't tell us about kangaroos running around in Sydney and things like this, because I think we had a thorough education, after what the Yanks ..... stuff like this. So that 's about all. I had a fair idea of what to expect.

KH: Did you know that Australia had snow? Had mountains high enough for snow?

FP: No, I don't think I did, really. Because I would have brought my skis, my ski equipment. Well, perhaps not, because I had two suitcases full, and had to stamp on them to shut them, you know <sup>how it is,</sup> I remember I had two double-breasted suits with

Frank Pirchmoser

me, and I couldn't wear them on the boat, everybody looked at me, because they didn't know - they didn't have at that time double-breasted suits, and that cut, I suppose. So I flogged them at a pawn shop, I think it was, in Geelong. From Bonegilla I went back to Geelong. That was my first job, in Geelong, at the Ford Motor Company, On the assembly line. And so I flogged a lot of gear down there at Geelong, and I didn't want to be, sort of too distinct from the rest of the people, that's why I flogged them - carrying my two suitcases full of junk around was too much for my liking.

KH: Did you go to another migrant camp after Bonegilla?

FP: No.

KH: How did you find Bonegilla? Apart from the mutton, was there anything else that stands out?

FP: Well, actually no different from any other camp. You see we had been on the other side in Europe in Salzburg in the camp too, for about a week, for a few weeks. And I didn't find it too different. The buildings were different here. They were corrugated iron, corrugated roof, elevated floor. Whereas over there they were more refined, to some extent. We had - I don't know what the walls were - double plaster board or something, or fibro or whatever, compared to the corrugated sheeting here. I had never seen corrugated iron before until I came <sup>here</sup>. It wasn't used at that stage in Europe anywhere. Or water pipe for fencing, it wasn't used.

MRS P: Or outhouses.

FP: Well, toilets yes. But not that type of toilet anyway. Thunderboxes!

KH: A long drop.

FP: Well, it was a different country, and most of it was different. That's what I wanted it to be. That is why I came here, see, I did not complain about it, and neither of the other guys did. We were all single fellows. You sort of join up in a gang. We were all fellows with similar opinions of the situa-

Frank Pirchmoser

tion, and we sort of soon find each other. And you go out together to the movies and so forth. And you form a gang.

KH: Did you find it hard to learn English?

FP: Not at all.

KH: You learned it at school, did you?

FP: Well, not really. In high school we did, let me see, one year, I think, we <sup>did</sup> English. It was French mostly, three years. One year, but that was the first year. I had forgotten most of it. But in Bonegilla they had these classes and I went once.

That was more or less the test. What I speak now I taught myself. I never went to a - I was an avid reader. I read - that's how I started learning really. When they put us at the first job there, they put us - at <sup>the</sup> Ford <sup>plant</sup> - with a Ford car, a Falcon I suppose they were called then, the big 6 cylinder Ford - picked us up at the railway station from Bonegilla, once we got to Geelong, and drove us around to the various boarding houses, found us places, because none of us could speak English, see. Well, some were better than others. But I was pretty lousy. And I didn't worry about it too much <sup>then</sup>. And so they found us boarding houses. There were five of us, I think, in the car. And one guy went to a private place and the remaining four went to another boarding house and there were a total of 11 there then. That was .....Avenue, Geelong. I cannot remember the house number, very old place, double brick - rooms, I don't know how many rooms, a cellar, everything. And next day we started work, and I got lost on the way home. But I couldn't ask directions. I thought that 's it, the day I'm starting learning English. And then I went through it, three months, and then I knew most of it. I could speak better in three months, I reckon, like that Spaniard does after 20 years.

MRS P: Or our neighbour.

FP: And I could converse reasonably. I had a bit of trouble sometimes thinking of words, and all that. Of the course the accent .....sort of disappears. But even if the accent

Frank Pirchmoser

disappears, you 're still a wog, you know. It makes no difference. So I sort of got used to - I'm still a wog, I look like one, I have to have a facelift and all that. Not just speak different, I have to look different.

MRS P: I tell you something, recent. Our son lives in Braidwood and he introduced Frank to his boss's wife. And she said to our son, "Carl, you haven't got an accent." How could he? He was born here.

KH: And then after Geelong, you went to Brisbane, some stage?

FP: Oh no, I had a few jobs in Geelong, see. After six months with the Ford Motor Company - it was just assembly work, was sort of ..... They put me there more or less as a relief. When somebody was sick I had to do their job. See, I was in the metal industry, qualified, I knew how engines worked and all that. You see, it was a motor assembly plant. They just had opened that, I believe, the motor assembly plant - V8s - the V8 motor - Ford engines.

KH: Yes, right.

FP: And when we came there, about 20 of us from the same ship, we got there. There were electricians and all kinds of people, and they stuck them there assembling gear boxes. None of them in their promised occupation. And from 20 to 90 was in a week, we went. From 20 engines to 90. And then 100 in another week. They didn't give us a bonus or anything, really, they more or less exploited us. And after 6 months I was confident that I could find my way around the country, I spoke enough English, and I took off. I still have the badge <sup>I had</sup> Very high security, you had to show your badge, like a New York policeman, a big silver badge. And I took off. A few had already left before me, and of course, all the others would <sup>have</sup> left shortly after, and they got a few other jobs around Geelong. And then I took off to - I wanted to see the country, so I went up to Cairns. No, I flew from Melbourne to Brisbane, I flew. And then I caught the Sunlander, I think it was called - no, to Sydney. Oh well, maybe I

Frank Pirchmoser

was in Sydney for a day or two, and then to Brisbane. And <sup>then</sup> a few days in Brisbane, and then I went to Cairns. I took the Sunlander from Brisbane to Cairns and I had a friend there. I lived in the same place with him - we went to school. He was a bit older than me, he was in another class. But I went up there. he had been there about four years by then. I met him in Cairns but there was no work, no employment, except cutting cane, which he had done at one stage. So I got a job with the Queensland Railways as a fettler.

KH: That 's a bit of a twist.

MRS P: And him being in the sun, with his colouring.

FP: It was a place called Bullock Creek near Almaden, North Queensland. That was the exact address. And I always had Max with me - it took me about two days to get there on the plane. Right at the end, another 40 kilometres on the plane, then finished, near the Gulf of Carpentaria there virtually. Well, I got there, there was another place, I got off at the wrong station. I can't remember now, that place. But anyway, once I got off, got all my gear, bags and sleeping bag and stuff, <sup>and</sup> I spoke to the guys. They say, "No. We want a fellow too", they said. There were four-man gangs in the little hut there at the side of the railway station, making up 60 miles, I think it was, of track. 40 miles one side of the hut, and 20 the other way. And then there was another little hut with four guys. And of course, you know, they were all semi-permanent guys, they stayed there a few weeks or a few months and then took off, and they always wanted people. But anyway, I didn't like it there anyhow. So I went to my proper destination the next day on the next train. There were, I think, three trains a week, or something. And it was lucky there was another train the next day. And I went up to Bullock Creek and I stayed there for about 9 months. The food you had to order by telephone. No we didn't - by telephone - we send it in written - on the train. And then a week later it came out again. We had telephone facilities there. We were



Frank Pirchmoser

quite well off, actually, because we had a 60,000 gallon water tank, where the steam engines pulled in to fill up with water and there was a three mile - I have to talk in miles because in those days it was miles and it is too awkward to convert. There was a little creek about three miles away, and a few times a week one of us would go there, start a little diesel engine-driven pump to fill the big tank up. And we had plenty of water for showers and all that. It was much better than some of the other places. And I had a hammock then. I bought an American army jungle hammock. It was mosquito nets all round it, a water-proof roof on top, and you strung it out under the water tank, and it was beautiful and cool there always. And I slept in there most of the summertime. Water, you didn't have hot water there, because it was all solar water heating. You see, now there's a big fuss in <sup>Canberra,</sup> solar heating. We had it then, 25 years ago. It was even that hot that you couldn't stand under it.

MRS P: 25, 30, Frank.

FP: I am a bit on the easy side. I don't want to brag too much. So you had to let it cool off actually. The first few metres of waterpipe - they were near the surface, they got really boiling hot. You had to let it run until it cooled down a bit.

KH: And when did you meet your wife?

FH: That was a few years later.

MRS P: '57 and we were married in '58.

KH: 1957. So we'll jump on now to the Snowy Scheme.

MRS P: Or you'll be there for a week.

KH: What was your first job on the Snowy Mountain Scheme?

FP: The first job. Well, basically it was commissioning - what did they call it - I suppose commissioning - ....<sup>pre-</sup>testing commissioning of the instrumentation at Tumut 2 power station. That was the first job. And - that's right - the guy that was supposed to be - that was the first Christmas - it must have been Christmas '61, then. There was one alternator running, I think, and they wanted somebody over Christmas

Frank Pirchmoser

on standby, that was for 5 weeks or so. And I took that over. That was my first taste of maintenance. That was just in between more or less, over Christmas. I sort of had only started 6 months previously, so I did mind, whereas that guy who had previously done it, he wanted to go away on holidays. So a few weeks I had to stay there during the holidays and all that, on standby in case there was a breakdown.

KH: And how did you get a job on the Scheme?

FP: I applied for it.

KH: You heard about it elsewhere?

FP: Yes, that was in Brisbane, of <sup>course.</sup> Then after - many jobs, 106 different jobs after I turned up in Brisbane. I was in the army then, right? In the Australian Army. And then I got discharged there after .....and I was looking for a job - - -

MRS P: Well, I mean to say, you had to join the Army to be recognised in your trade here, at that stage.

KH: Oh, is that right?

FP: Basically, yes. Well, I still wasn't - and so anyway, I saw - I don't know where now - in the newspaper, I suppose - -

KH: That's interesting. To get accreditation, if you joined the Australian Army for a period, that was OK? Did you have to do some refresher courses while you were in the Army?

FP: Well no. Actually, I had a so-called co-enlistment, they called it. I was fully recognised. And they had got various grades in each rank, right? I think that's 13, or something, they call it stars, I think. Say, a private can be either a Star One or a Star ~~Thirteen~~ or any star in between. It depends on his skill. Say, if he is a marksman, he may get two stars. If he has first aid he gets an extra star. If he is a high-speed drummer, or something, another star on the list, right. In any rank, General, Private, or in between. And I enlisted with all the stars, full-star rating. And the darn instructors - everybody must - which is one good thing. Everybody has to go to one recruit training battalion in Kapooka. So that's basic

Frank Pirchmoser

training, British military standard training, you know, you march differently. Every army has different drills, you see. And although I had been in the army before and knew most about it, but the drill was entirely different. You see, you marched differently and all that ..... So they instruct us there, they saw my papers, naturally, and they were jealous, because I got more pay than they had. You see, I was a full-star rating. And well, actually, I had an interview, that 's what they call it there. One of the guys there - I don't remember now how I got in the army - I must have applied, of course, somehow. Well, anyway, I had an interview there and they gave me a few questions, <sup>were happy with my answers</sup> and they <sup>so</sup> they put me in. But it took about 8 months. They searched all my background for security clearance. They went to Europe - my old mother was a bit upset. She thought, you know, I had robbed a bank or something, when the police turned up with inquiries. And months later, I found out. She said, "What have you done? The police were here, and they ask after you." And that happened several times. I had another security clearance a couple of years ago and the same thing happened again.

MRS P: They wanted my clearance as well.

KH: Recently?

FP: Yes, about two years ago. So whenever you get the - -

-

KH: Is that because you were in the Austrian Army?

MRS P: No, the position, here, to do with - - -

FP: No.

KH: It 's very far-reaching.

FP: Oh yes. And I see now - if the spies, they are all done with top security cleared, <sup>right?</sup> I mean, mine was only the lowest level security. But all the spies, they get really into the classified information, top secret information, they are the spies, not the little fry. The cleaning woman can be guard of the garbage cans, and sometimes have an information source....It

Frank Pirchmoser

is all a farce, really. But I believe whenever you want a new, a higher security rating, there are various grades of security. The lowest is Confidential and then maybe it 's Classified, I think, is the next one; then Secret, then Top Secret, and cipher, and so on. And so whenever we go to another one, they go right through your background again.

KH: You would think once was enough.

MRS P: You would think so.

FP: Yes, but I believe that I would never get a top security rating, because I have relatives in Europe, see. And if you can think of the implications, that if I, for instance - not that I would ever be in the position, it 's all a fiasco, it 's a farce, really - it makes me vomit to think of the stupidity of it all. But that 's the bureaucracy. But, if there was a war, for instance, and say, I would have to fight, maybe, again; I have to drop bombs in Innsbruck, somewhere, where my mother lives, I would refuse to do it, because my relatives are there. Something like this.

MRS P: That 's getting off the beaten track.

FP: That 's why I would never get a top security clearance.

KH: Going back to the Snowy Mountains Scheme - did you like working on the Snowy Scheme?

FP: Yes, sometimes it was fun, especially on pay days.

MRS P: Don't be stupid. You've often said it was a well-run organisation, since then.

FP: Yes. Well, I have had many jobs and positions, and been around the place, and I reckon it was the best run - well, it was then, I don't know now - the best-run organisation I have ever worked for, in every respect.

KH: Really?

FP: By far and wide.

MRS P: It took years, probably, to come to that conclusion.

Frank Pirchmoser

FP: Well, I was young then, and I didn't appreciate it. But now I have come to the conclusion - in every respect, the best-run.

MRS P: And I enjoyed living there. It was really a terrific place to live and bring up children. We went there with the baby and a toddler. It really was a very good place to live. I loved it.

KH: This is to Cabramurra?

MRS P: Yes. You know, really healthy climate - it was a great place.

KH: Always fresh air at Cabramurra, I would think.

MRS P: Imagine going there from Brisbane! I had never seen snow, it was <sup>mid-</sup> winter.

KH: I see. From Brisbane into the snow?

MRS P: August. What a change of pace!

KH: Did you work overtime very much?

FP: Yes.

KH: The money was good, wasn't it, I believe?

FP: Well, it was a funny set-up. Overtime - you see, there were so-called staff - there were the wages and the staff. The wages were as it is now. Overtime - the first so many hours was time a half, or something. Then after that you get double time and then triple time. But all our overtime hours were what, I think, a clerk grade 6 gets, or something, double time. Some funny regulation. I think it was \$6.35 an hour, or \$7.80, something like this. The equivalent of what a clerk grade 6 on double time gets. But every hour was like this. You didn't get double time or triple time. But there were regulations that after, I think, 16 - not 16 hours - 14 hours or something, you had to have an 8-hour break, because sometimes it was really hectic in winter, after a storm or so. There were power lines down, machinery blown up and all washed away. Oh, it was a shocker, wasn't it? And one night we were chasing our tails all night, not getting anywhere. As soon as we finished one job, the radio

Frank Pirchmoser

player began, something else was gone. What a fiasco! And we thought we would never get home. I think we were on the road all night, from about 6 at night till next day, 8 o'clock in the morning.

KH: What year was that?

MRS P: '64 <sup>it</sup> would have been. That was the bad year. Or '68.

FP: I don't remember.

MRS P: Probably '64.

KH: What was the fiasco? What was some of the problems that you had to solve?

FP: Yes, well - that 's right, what was he called? ..... he was in charge up there, an operations engineer up at Tumut Dam. He was supplied by the Electricity Commission for New South Wales. The operating staff there were all Electricity Commission. There were some staff from I, S and C. ~~they~~. You see, after construction of Tumut Two was finished, I stayed there in Cabramurra, but I transferred to maintenance, which was the SMC - Snowy Mountains Council. And the people who continued in commissioning, that were in my section, sort of, they went on to Khancoban, the Murray One power station was the next on the go.

KH: Sorry, I still haven't got <sup>it clear,</sup> what you were actually doing?

FP: Commissioning. You see - - -

KH: What do you mean? Like ordering equipment?

FP: No. Commissioning is putting equipment into service. Testing - - -

KH: So it arrives and you have to install it?

FP: No, no, that 's construction.

MRS P: Everything was in when Frank - - -

FP: No. Let me describe it, dear. You weren't there. You were playing tennis while I did <sup>all that</sup> - that 's why she liked it, playing tennis all the day.

MRS P: Lovely life - terrific.

Frank Pirchmoser

FP: Yes. It 's much the same as Parliament House here now, and all that. And first there was moving gear. First the surveyors started. They survey everything, and then the earthmoving crews come in and then they scratch around the dirt and push it down here and fill it up and all that. And then they put the foundations in, of concrete. And when the concrete structure advances to a suitable stage, the machinery gets put in. That 's all construction, still. Then the machinery is wired up. You see, the concreting is done by the concrete fixers, and the concrete hands, and all that, and then machinery is put in by the fitters and the electricians and ~~the riggers~~ and all these, right? And then cabling connect up. And then it has to be proved if it works and if it works satisfactorily. That was our job. Once it was all there, we tested it. Well, when the machinery came, we tested it in a testing laboratory and then it was packed up again and then put on site.

KH: So it was a very specialised job?

FP: Yes.

KH: So there weren't very many of you doing that, I suppose.

FP: No.

KH: Because there 's not all that much commissioning you can do, I suppose?

FP: No. You only do it once.

KH: Yes.

FP: But then after every other job, my job would be to do it again. Because, you know, when you pull a machine to pieces, you do the same procedure again.

KH: So if they install a new turbine, at Mungah Power Station, they do it - someone else comes along and does it again.

MRS P: And then once a year, they take it apart, and it has all got to be checked. It 's a never-ending job. It has always got to be - - -

FP: Well, it 's not quite that simple. It is a very com-

Frank Pirchmoser

plex procedure, really, because with these high voltages concerned, you have to be spot-on. If you have a small fault, it 's not like a motor car. You hear a funny noise somewhere, she'll be right, you keep on driving. And after 6 months you might find out <sup>that</sup> the fan belt needs replacing because of a loose fitting somewhere. But with that machinery, you have high voltages. If there 's something that is slightly imperfect, and if you don't attend to it promptly, it can blow the whole thing out and it costs you \$20 million. Just about that time they had that black-out in America, the first one in history where people were stuck in the lifts and all that, where the whole power system was interrupted.

KH: Was that in New York?

FP: In all North America virtually.

MRS P: I think it was '64.

FP: There were people stuck in the lifts for hours, <sup>and in underground</sup> trains, and all that, there was a complete blackout because of lack of attention to detail, it was. And then I remember the big chief, he issued orders. We had to double-check everything. That definitely couldn't happen in our system.

KH: That 's what you started doing - when you were employed by the SMA - commissioning equipment?

FP: Yes.

KH: Equipment of all complexities?

FP: Yes.

KH: From tiny little motors to turbines, to whatever?

FP: Yes.

KH: So that requires a lot of - a very wide spectrum of knowledge, I suppose?

FP: Yes.

KH: Or if you haven't got the knowledge, a lot of background reading?

FP: Well, yes.

KH: Or do you get the manuals that come with all this

Frank Pirchmoser

equipment?

FP: Yes.

KH: So that you can have a step-by-step procedure that you can follow?

FP: No. The procedures were developed by the SMA. That 's what I mentioned before. They were the best organised place I have ever seen. You see, every manufacturer has to have specifications of the equipment - what it does, what it shouldn't do and how it should be done, blah, blah. But the Snowy developed their own specs for testing. We had so-called commissioning sheets. The first ones were the white sheets; they were the preliminary commissioning, preliminary test sheets. You just checked visually, wiring and all that, that it was satisfactory. Then you had the pink sheets, that was the pre-commissioning. And then I think there were the green sheets, which <sup>were</sup> the final commissioning. The pre-commissioning is, you had part of the sections of equipment running separately. And then the full test, the full commissioning, was the final tests. And then we had done. Sometimes .....But after commissioning, that 's not the end of it. You had to do efficiency tests, you know. And they are really scientific commissioning tests. And you see, you are involved there, with plant costing millions of dollars. That 's why it all has to be spot on. It 's not a darn motor or compressor, air conditioning plant that costs half a million or so. And with overseas companies and all that, they have to work in with Lloyds of London and the Bureau of .....and all this, with international insurance companies. That wasn't our job. But they went after our test reports. That was all they came for, the test reports. And if equipment was found to be lacking in efficiency as stated - you see, somebody sells you a turbine and says 88% efficient, and you find out it is only 87% efficient, they have sold you a bum steer, right? So they have to refund - give you a refund. And that has happened many times. With the whole power station, there were - after

Frank Pirchmoser

running for a few months, or sometimes years even - there was an efficiency test done after the equipment was properly tested and run<sup>in</sup> and all the parts - there was an efficiency test done. And what I did these - measure - even the water temperature - measured between inlet and outlet was recorded. Oh, there were measuring devices everywhere, you wouldn't believe it. And half a degree temperature difference, even, was recorded. And all that was taken into consideration of efficiency. And vibration of the equipment, everything, you wouldn't believe it. And that is why I can't believe - what happens - what goes on now, you know. It 's unbelievable, the people don't have a clue. Either the standards have dropped considerably, or they just don't know what they 're doing.

Frank Pirchmoser

FP: Well, there was every second week, we worked Saturday and Sunday. That was on maintenance. As I said, after the commissioning and all that was finished and <sup>the</sup> power station was put in to normal operation, I was transferred to maintenance, because I wanted to stay there. I could have moved on with the other guys to Khancoban.

KH: But certainly, for the Snowy - your job in the Snowy, your qualifications back from Austria were recognised?

FP: Yes.

KKH: And you actually worked in that area?

FP: Yes. Many of the guys there, they knew, they didn't even look at my papers. They never asked, they knew from what I had done, because they came from Europe themselves, most of them were, even though they changed their names and nationality. They didn't have an accent as broad as mine, but they had come from there, Czechoslovakia, Germany. Diesendorf, for instance, he was there. We had a top notch engineer, Diesendorf. He had some notoriety around here.

KH: Marc Diesendorf?

FP: Marc Diesendorf.

KH: Yes, he 's now teaching in the same department where I'm doing my doctorate.

FP: Yes, well that's the son of Dr Diesendorf.

KH: I spoke to him the other day, that 's right.

FP: And then, there are a few of them.

KH: I discovered that his father had worked on the Scheme, yes, that 's right.

FP: Yes. He was a real, brainy bloke, really smart. He was one of the few that was there at the beginning with Hudson. What 's his name, now? I can't remember his other name. And there were a few of these. And so, when you say to whom you worked for in Europe, he knew straight away, you didn't have to have a pile of papers.

KH: So you weren't in the thick of it in terms of getting

Frank Pirchmoser

dirt under your fingernails?

MRS P: Oh, no.

FP: No.

KH: Yours was a relatively - you were in a good environment. I mean, everything had been built.

MRS P: Frank never did any of the dirty work.

FP: Yes.

KH: You were the fine tuning?

MRS P: Yes.

FP: Yes.

MRS P: I just read a book actually, on the dirty work. Ivan Kobold - what was it? Men of the Snowy.

KH: Oh yes... So you never worked in ice and snow?

MRS P: In snow, <sup>yes,</sup> but not pick and shovel.

FP: Yes.

KH: When did you have to face the elements?

FP: Every day on the way to work when it snowed. I remember, what is now the football or the soccer field in Cabramurra, was once the transport hall. And there was an office there and a few sheds where they had the ambulance. They had an ambulance which they had to drive once or twice to stop it from rusting in. And all the cars and trucks and so on were all around the perimeter inside the fence. And when it snowed in winter, there was maybe half a metre of snow, and all the cars were just sort of bumps of snow. So instead of sort of hosing them <sup>off</sup> - it would have been too much trouble and maybe the water would have <sup>been</sup> frozen to hose the snow, so they just went with the arm quickly and made a hole in the windscreen so you could see out, and drove <sup>off</sup>. Some of the snow fell off later. And then it was back - we started usually work at the group control centre, the Tumut group control centre, it was known, which is about 3 kilometres from Cabramurra, which is the switching station for Tumut One and Tumut Two. And there we went <sup>to</sup> the operators consultant; there were three of us, special assistants to the .....guys who

Frank Pirchmoser

looked after the telephones and telemetry, and technical services, that was me. And then they said, "Oh, such and such doesn't work and that doesn't work," and then we went our own ways to fix it. And sometimes it was quite funny in winter, especially. In summer it was relatively uneventful. Once, I remember, there was an old man, and he went back to become a taxi driver in Newcastle. He married a woman there, many years younger, and her father was a taxi driver, and he must have put him on. But anyway, what I said earlier, .....the guy in charge up there, he put one technical services and a special assistance guy together, and he said, "Yes, we can fix anything that way." Because the special assistance was telephones, and was frequency channels, and we did all the machinery and all the other gear that you can think of. So we were together. So one of these nights we discussed before when we were busy all night. Well, we got a call, there was a phone or something, an alarm. All the alarms came up from Tumut Two. You see, they had these alarm bells which the Snowy pioneered, invented or designed first, you might say, all little illuminated windows, with engraved plates on it, that tells you when the whole face, all the alarms are up, you know, we have to go down and fix it, in case there is a real alarm. And they don't know if it 's real or not. So, Norm, he got a call from me and we met in the transport pool. And so we went down to T Two, I think it was, fixed that. And on the way down we got an alarm - the gates control at T Two don't work, I think. That meant we had to go right around there, down past Tumut One power station, along the river road there, and the standby diesel didn't work either, of course. That 's why the gate controls didn't work. You see, all these outstations, they had standby supplies, like diesel and batteries. And that was all normally remotely controllable from group control centre, everything, kilometres away, just pushed the button, and the gates opened and closed, the generator started, and all this. And the Tooma Dam, you're probably familiar with Tooma Dam, too, that was also con-

Frank Pirchmoser

trolled by group control centre, up at Tumut group control centre. And all the levels, the water levels from the various reservoirs around were telemetered back to the Tumut, and often they played up, especially in winter. I have seen — had a lot of funny episodes there. But anyway that night we went down to T One and the diesel battery, the cranking battery was flat. They cranked it, they didn't know if it was starting or not, so they just kept on starting and it ran out of battery. And .....found one of the three phases out, and switched the circuitry on again, opened up again, and phoned up group controls and said, "We can't see a thing; it is dark; the wind is howling; the diesel battery is flat. We 'll have to wait until morning. Just have to leave the gate closed." On the way back we noticed that one of the power lines was hanging on a tree branch. From T Two dam up to the mountain there, it 's a very long climb, and they had to use rockets to string the lines originally. They couldn't get there otherwise, it 's all rocks.

KH: They used rockets, did they?

FP Similar to what they use in the navy when the supply ship comes together. The first guy shoots up a rocket with a rifle, a special rifle attachment, with a nylon line behind it. That nylon line is attached to a heavy rope, and that to a heavier rope. And then finally the power line cable. And that 's how they strung the lines there. And I wasn't too sure with the car headlights, but one - you see, they were very low sagging, because there 's a long span, you can't stretch them straight, of course, because the towers will collapse. So you have a sag in it, a predetermined sag, that 's been mathematically determined, so you have so much sag for a particular span. And anyway, because of the sag, it was virtually like the bow of an arch. They swing in the breeze, the power lines like that. And one got hooked on the trees somewhere. And that shorted it out, of course, that made that phase inoperative. But we weren't sure, we couldn't see, we had no spotlight, just the car headlights.

Frank Pirchmoser

And that was the case actually, after. So anyway, we couldn't do much there. We went back again and something else - I think it was the Cabramurra diesel power station, they had three or four diesels down there in Cabramurra power station, out of German submarines. They were given as repatriation. You see, Germany had to pay repatriations for years after World War 2, and they did it in the form of motor cars and machinery and equipment. And those three or four diesels were attached to generators and they generated 66,000 volts plus the Siemens switch gear ..... diesel power station. I think it's still there, I believe. And beautiful equipment, full of tools and everything. I even managed to flog a few tools. They still had the swastika imprinted on them and all this. And there was something on up there. And then we were busy all night. I can't remember all the smaller details. But we were working in snow and ice. That was in 1964. Again, it was at Tumut One Dam, the operators down at the group control centre said, "Nothing works at Tumut One Dam." They tried to start the diesel up, but no alarms are coming<sup>up</sup> nothing. Something to this effect. So the roads were closed. We had no communications from Cooma, that's right, the roads were closed. There was only one snowcat operatable and that was at Tantangara, that's right. They had three snowcats in Cabramurra. One they lent to Island Bend, and that went down in the gully; one was in Tantangara with Roy ...?....and he needed it over there. There was another one somewhere, but they didn't have any snowcats in Cabramurra. So that clever boss of mine, he had the idea that we ski down. And I didn't like to use my skis on Snowy business, in case they get broken, see. And so there were the three of us. They had the hydrology guy, you know what hydrology does? They had a hydrology branch too. They go in and measure the streams, water flow and all that.

KH: Right. I'm most familiar with their work, yes.

FP: Yes. Well, what is his name, now? Bob Janata.

Frank Pirchmoser

MRS P: Well, you possibly know Bob Janata ?

KH: No, I've never met him.

MRS P: He lives in Cooma.

KH: Oh, does he?

MRS P: Unless he's moved in the last - I saw him in Canberra this year, I would say. I'd say he still lives in Cooma.

KH: Because I have correspondence with Tony Sponar, and I'm going to go down soon to interview Tony. And he told me of a ski crossing that he and Bob did from Happy Jack's Plain over to Spencer's Creek. Because, as part of their work, they went as far as Grey Mare, and then they thought, well, we might as well go the rest of the way. And I put that in my current book, because it's a book about long journeys across the mountains. And I wanted some journeys that people who were in the SMA did, you see.

MRS P: Frank went from Round Mountain to Guthega.

KH: Oh, did you?

MRS P: On his own. And I waited, and waited at the other end.

FP: Oh, I went other places, too. I am one of the silent wonders, you know.

MRS P: That was a fair hike, but.

KH: Yes, Round Mountain to - that was on skis?

FP: Yes. Well anyway, that was 1964? So there was Bob Janata - what's Joan's husband? Bob ...?..... and myself. You see, he thought he picked one, he was quite a clever organiser, really.

MRS P: But Bob .....got exhausted, didn't he?

FP: Well, pick one of each and he gets everything fixed, you know. I was the electrical<sup>expert</sup> the other one was the hydraulic expert, and the linesman, Bob .....was the linesman. So we skied down from Cabramurra, partly down to Tumut One, and then along the 11,000 volt .....line to Tumut One, all along the line to see where the line was broken, or something. It was OK. It started raining. That was in '64, because it always rained and snowed and rained and snowed.



Frank Pirchmoser

MRS P: For 40 days.

FP: And when we went down there, it rained most of the time. And we got there and they have - they call it a head, sitting outside, it is a cable coming coming out of the ground going up on the pole, and then you have three things sticking out, three insulators, where the cables are terminated and there are usually fuses, surface fuses, and then another cable goes inside the buildings, you see. The <sup>pot(?)</sup>head it 's called. And you could see that one of the fuses had fallen out. You can see them, they are so primitive. They cause a lot of bushfires, by the way. A few of the councils have been sued because of the bushfires they cause. It 's just a long piece of braided copper with a sort of a head, metal head on one end that holds a spring-loaded mechanism in place. And when a thin wire on one end melts off, which is the fuse wire, the whole arm falls out, opens the circuit, and the hot piece of wire falls to the ground. Well, anyway, you could see that straight away, that one phase was out. And I had a micrometer with me, so we went into the power station, Bob Janata said, "Well, I can't do anything here, anyway, you know, so I might as well go home." So he skied back along the road, back to Cabramurra. And it was still well-defined, the <sup>bends</sup>.of the road, but there were about two metres of snow. The road signs were only that far <sup>above</sup> sticking out. And Bob and I went in there and <sup>I</sup> measured the 50 volt battery, big, you know, big cells, <sup>glass cells,</sup> 50 volt measured, I think, two and a half volts. That 's why nothing worked. You see, it had been out for weeks. And I checked the cable going to the <sup>pot(?)</sup>head, and that was - had an earth fault on it. So the only thing to do was to start the diesel generator - they had a big diesel there. So I started it up by hand. That couldn't be started either, because the battery was so low for the remote controls to work. I started it up all right. We strung a piece of wire and had our wet gear floating from the radiator, flapping in the breeze, and drying. And then the oil cooler started to leak. They had the

Frank Pirchmoser

FP: upper part for cooling water, the lower part for oil. The oil cooler started and <sup>all</sup> the oil blowing against our clothes. I was temporarily tightening it. And all these outstations - I forgot to mention - had emergency rations, in the cardboard box, for one person for one day. And usually, all the goodies were eaten out of them. They only left the damn packets of soup and the teabags and matches and things like that. But they had quite a balanced meal in there. And we got hungry there, and we scrounged - there must have been 20 or so half-used emergency rations - to feed ourselves. And then as soon as the battery was charged up from the alternator, I phoned - I was able to use the phone to group control centre and tell them of the facts. And they say, "We'll get in touch with the chief." What was his name?

MRS P: Joe Slavacic. <sup>FP:</sup> And then maybe an hour or so later, well, he got on the phone. The diesel was still running there, flat out. Then it started squeaking - the oil <sup>speeds</sup>..which started squeaking, we had to oil with the dipstick. Oh, what a circus! And he say, "We send relief down in a few hours, " he say, "Just hang on to it, Frank. Keep the diesel running, and," blah, blah, "just hang on to it." It 's like in Stalingrad. And they came at 9 o'clock with the snowcat. The snowcat came <sup>from Tantangara</sup> back, so they loaded it up. I remember they had a Roden stove, electric stove on it; spare temporary cable, wrapped around the snowcat on the outside. You see, this high voltage cable, so that 's thick. You can't just fold it in your pocket, you have to make big loops. They had wrapped it around the outside of the snow cat. And steaks, and eggs and all that, they brought. And 9 o'clock, it was of course, pitch-black dark in winter. And - what 's his name now? He 's there again - Leo ....., I still remember him coming in with the Roden stove, plug it in the power point there, and he cooked the steaks and eggs for us. You see, we were starved, and we had been there since about 9 or 10 in the morning.

MRS P: I think Joe came or rang me to say you wouldn't be

Frank Pirchmoser

back.

FP: And it was a Bombardier snowcat, made in Canada. A real rough one, it had these rubber tracks with wooden bars on it, and with lever steering. And you could adjust the track when you go along the slope, when one track went lower than the other, and all this. But rough, you could feel every wooden slat go like this. So anyway, we had a good meal; they connected the temporary cable up ~~out the window~~ <sup>up to the pole,</sup> and then we could stop the diesel. It had just about had it by then. And we all went home in the snowcat. And I can't remember - there were another two guys ~~that~~ came with him.

MRS P: With Leo Artz...?

FP: Yes. Two or three.

MRS P: Electricians.

FP: Well, one guy was from the transport pool. The guy that did the Cossack dance always. Remember he married later on? He was the driver of it. Anyway, on the way up one of them felt really sick. "Oh," he said, "I feel sick." They said, "You ate too much steak, or something," joking like this. And next day they had to take him to Cooma hospital, he had poisoning. The exhaust fumes of the snowcat affected him.

MRS P: That 's right.

FP: They had a leaky exhaust system. I can't remember who that was now. But anyway, he was really sick.

KH: It was a wonder it didn't affect all of you.

MRS P: He was in the back, he was near the fumes, wasn't he?

FP: Well, he must have inhaled all of them. But a real rough machine that is. There <sup>were</sup> leaks everywhere. And so that was working in the ice and snow.

KH: That was one 12-hour period.

FP: Yes. And then, of course, later on we went all down again and did a proper job, doing a cable installation, and I skied down behind the snowcat. That was a normal snowcat, a Porsche snowcat.

Frank Pirchmoser

KH: And of course, you lived in the old settlement, the old Cabramurra, didn't you?

MRS P: There it is, snowed in.

FP: Yes.

MRS P: It was '64.

FP: Well, of course.

MRS P: Definitely, it has to have been.

FP: When I 'm sure, I'm sure.

MRS P: Yes, that 's when you 're right.

KH: Were the houses heated? Were those houses heated?

FP: Yes, they all had the standard Snowy convection heater, that was a 500-watt sealed element. There was a flat strip supported inside with a metal housing over it, and cold steel on all the sides. it was about that length and that size. A standard 500-watt - and every house, I think, was issued with five of them.

MRS P: Four. We had one in each bedroom and one in the hall, if <sup>remember.</sup>

FP: They weren't really efficient enough, really. I had one of these also in the single men's barracks, in the wages barracks, and they put <sup>their</sup> wet socks and things on it, and they sealed off the convection holes, and they burned their socks and all, of course.

MRS P: You also had a Wonderheat in the lounge room and a slow combustion stove in the kitchen. And your highest electricity bills would be 4 pounds.

KH: Four pounds - in pre '67. '66 was the changeover.

MRS P: 14 February 1966. And you paid, what was it? Six pounds a fortnight rent for the house, and don't forget the wood shed, so much for the wood shed, three shillings, wasn't it, a fortnight.

FP: I don't know. I wouldn't have a clue.

MRS P: No, I 'm pretty sure that 's pretty right.

KH: So you had a fire - oh yes, of course, you needed wood for the kitchen stove. And I suppose you kept that going for 9

Frank Pirchmoser

months of the year, or so, did you, at Cabramurra?

MRS P: Frank used to always, by Anzac Day, had to have the woodshed full. That was his - Anzac Day, the woodshed had to be full.

FP: One and a half cords of wood, it was.

MRS P: Plus, I <sup>can</sup> remember in '64, didn't we use something like 60 bags of briquettes, and they were one pound seven and six a bag.

KH: So you went through a lot of fuel in 1964?

FP: And once I chopped my finger when chopping the wood and I had to go to Cooma hospital. Too much in a hurry, getting the wood in.

MRS P: And a fellow he knew chopped his thumb off the week before and Frank said, "Careless ~~clot~~." And the very next week, 30 stitches - - -

KH: Swallow your own words, eh?

FP: Yes. We had an electricity subsidy of what was it? 5000 units?

MRS P: Oh, I should have said that. That 's why it was so cheap.

FP: 5000 units in the midwinter period, was it three-monthly periods? I can't remember. We had for three units, we <sup>had</sup> subsidies, didn't we? I think 1,000 in the one period, and 2000 in the other and <sup>5 or</sup> 3 in the other - something like that.

MRS P: And the phone, of course, was free, you only had to pay for trunk calls. Frank once, of course, ripped it off the wall and gave it back to them. And of course, they promptly came back and put it back in.

FP: I was fed up with getting up at night.

MRS P: Constantly.

KH: You were on call? Yes, that 's a bit like being a doctor, I suppose?

FP: Yes. Don Bartlett was the guy with the telephones. Well, it wasn't up to him anyway - that 's right, Barry Chat-

Frank Pirchmoser

field was in charge.

MRS P: This is before Joe Slaviasic(?). Barry Chatfield.

FP: But he said - I came down to T One, I was there. He said, "I have a few bones to pick with you. They tell me you ripped the phone off the wall?" "Yes." "Well," he said, "If you don't want a phone, you are no good to us," he say. He say, "Either you get the phone on or you go back to Cooma." And then they wanted to charge me with destroying government property.

KH: You could have probably reconnected it yourself.

MRS P: Of course, of course. He 'd already put an extension in the bedroom and here, there, and everywhere.

KH: So were you called <sup>out</sup> most nights?

FP: No - yes, at one stage, yes. Because I was the only one in that department, technical services. But then later on, there was a second guy.

MRS P: Lobley, Max Lobley.

FP: Max Lobley, that 's right. He went to Khancoban after. And then I was fed up - - -

MRS P: You got it a lot easier when he came.

FP: Oh yes, yes. Fortnightly, we took it in turns.

KH: And, of course, the calls would always come at the worst time, would they?

MRS P: Yes. Two or three in the morning.

KH: The worst weather, middle of the night, when you were tired already.

FP: And I remember that one. I sprained my ankle, remember, skiing? There was still that rope tow in Cabramurra. I skied around a bit, I sort of modernised the controls at the rope, though. That 's right, I even made a diagram of the wiring and all this. And then I sprained my ankle and I kept on skiing because with the good boots on it held it nicely. And then I went home, and I thought, oh good, I 'll have a nice night's sleep tonight.

MRS P: I think you unplugged the phone. And he came and

Frank Pirchmoser

knocked on the window.

FP: That 's right, yes. Knocked on the door, I think. He said, "Frank, we have trouble in T One."

MRS P: And Frank said, you couldn't go, and he said, "I'll help you."

FP: Yes. So he helped me. I had one arm around him, and then I had a ski stock upside down on the other, and then I was one one leg, like this. And I couldn't think. All I thought of was my sore leg.

KH: Did you have any pets?

MRS P: Oh, always, a dog.

KH: And cats?

MRS P: No, a dog, <sup>it's</sup> in probably half the photos there, or some of them. Always dachshunds.

KH: Always dachshunds? And it was OK to keep dogs?

MRS P: No, you weren't supposed to keep them in the Kosciusko Park. But didn't we have a special - what was the thing at Cabramurra, you couldn't have - German Shepherds you weren't allowed, unless they were sterilized.

FP: No, they didn't worry too much about that.

MRS P: But you weren't supposed to.

FP: No, not supposed. But see, the park regulations only came out - I remember when they started putting the gates - they put up the gates to Kings Cross Road. That was only around 1964, '5, or so, they started. Before then, nobody really worried about <sup>it</sup> <sub>A</sub> Everybody went shooting anyway, and all that.

KH: Did they?

FP: Oh yes. I went kanga shooting - rabbit shooting at Three Mile Lake.

MRS P: Everybody did.

FP: Rabbits everywhere. Everybody. Oh yes, and down to Ravine and all that, full of rabbits, <sup>every</sup> <sub>A</sub> evening virtually after work. But nobody worried then about the park council, until - it must have been about 1965, later perhaps, they started.

Frank Pirchmoser

KH: Well, the National Parks and Wildlife Service was formed in '67, when they became - before that it was the Park Trust. So I imagine that was the biggest change, in '67.

FP: Probably, yes.

KH: You seem to be suggesting that there were things already happening before.

FP: Yes, but not to that extent. It was not as ..... as that.

KH: So it was pretty open slather.

FP: Yes.

KH: Yes. I 'm interested in that, because there 's much more of a tradition amongst people from Germany and Poland and Austria, and so on, to go shooting. Or there was at that period of time. And they probably can't do that as much in Europe any more as they used to. But I know a lot of compatriotes of my father's - that sort of generation, you know - going hunting, going fishing, using nets, was sort of part of the scene. So it doesn't surprise me that this went on. I mean, here you had all these migrants coming to the Snowy Mountains. Here 's all this wildlife, <sup>and</sup> <sub>A</sub> introduced rabbits, and what have you - they did want to go out shooting.

FP: Well, I went hunting in Austria. I had a licence there, which is very hard to get. I had a gun licence and a hunting licence. And I was fortunate enough to <sup>have</sup> <sub>A</sub> a whole valley, I could go hunting with. But you are only allowed to shoot certain game, and in the season. You know, it 's not like rabbits here, there weren't even rabbits or hares down in the valley. Only deer and - what was the other - marmots, and chamois. But only in such small quantities. But what I did mainly, I looked after them. I was sort of like a supervisor, weekends I went in there. And I enjoyed myself, that was the main thing. But coming back to out here, and I know all about it. I even studied to be a - they call them <sup>there</sup> <sub>A</sub> - a forester.

KH: Forester, yes.

Frank Pirchmoser

FP: Here I don't know what they call them, because it is not a forester at all.

KH: No, it 's more like a wildlife officer, or a warden, a wildlife warden. Yes, I know the concept, yes.

FP: Well anyway, I am very sort of concerned about environment, and all that, although I like shooting and fishing. But, the butcher - there was Kenny's Knob - there was still a township below Cabramurra, a kilometre or two below Cabramurra, called Kenny's Knob. That was a township to all the contractors when they built Tumut One power station. And the usual township, there was a butcher, and a tailor, too, remember?

MRS P: Oh yes, and a taxi.

FP: He was a Maltese, or something, wasn't he? And he drove the taxi too. Quite interesting, really.

MRS P: When we went to Cabramurra, there was a chemist shop, a tailor, ~~the butcher,~~ the grocer, the post office. Well, we were at the old Cabramurra, of course. I don't know if you ever saw the old Cabramurra?

KH: In the distance, and from photos now.

MRS P: Did you ever go in there?

KH: No.

MRS P: We lived in the highest house in the highest permanent township in Australia. Our roof had come off twice. It was the only roof up there that had been, sort of, steel reinforced. It had stays on it. Not while we were in it, the roof came off. It came off before. But it was the highest house there, right opposite the water tanks.

FP: Yes. The ceiling had a big footprint in <sup>it</sup> in the lounge room, where, during the roof replacement, one of the workers must have broken through, but they just pushed it up and patched it around it.

KH: Did you go kangaroo shooting too?

FP: No, not up there. There weren't too many around there.

MRS P: Well, you wouldn't have had time anyhow, in those

Frank Pirchmoser

days, would you?

FP: No. Actually I never saw any - I only think once I saw them on the Kings Cross Road. And I wasn't inclined to shoot kangaroos. When I was in Queensland, I shot many. So, if there would have been great proportions - I wasn't inclined. All rabbits, it was, mostly.

KH: Rabbits and hares?

FP: Or empty beer bottles, of course.

MRS P: We never ate the rabbits anyhow.

KH: You didn't eat them?

FP: No.

MRS P: It must have been - what year did I drive - I drove a girl in labour to hospital from Cabramurra once, in winter, which was no mean feat, when I think back, June the first.

KH: Over to Cooma?

MRS P: Yes, about 68 miles. 17 years ago, 18 years ago, it would have to be. They now live at Holder. Actually, her mother is quite interesting. They owned the shop in Cabramurra until 6 years ago. They were up there for, what, about 30 years, in Cabramurra.

KH: Really?

MRS P: I 'll give you her name - if you'd like to - and they, prior to that, were at Happy Jack's.

FP: No, Island Bend first. <sup>I think Island Bend and then Happy Jack's before</sup> That was about the same time as Eagle hawk, the Eucumbene township was in existence. They were the very first structures being built. But going back to the butcher, at Kenny's Knob, well, he'd say <sup>I've</sup> he say, "Oh, Arun out of meat again. I will have to get some more steers or calves, or whatever." So he got his guns in the boot - they had a big American Fairlane, or something, <sup>a</sup> boot as big as a truck. And off they took. Wild pigs, boom, boom, boom, <sup>carved it,</sup> slaughtered it and skinned it, took it back to the shop and sold it.

MRS P: I never dealt off him. We got our meat from Cooma.

Frank Pirschmoser

KH: He would have knocked off some of the stockmen's cattle, then?

FP: Oh yes.

MRS P: Of course.

FP: And once, I believe, he had an accident. He had the boot full of calves, or something, dead calves, skinned and all that, legs sticking up. And his boot was partly open with legs sticking out, 20 calves in it, or something. He had an accident before <sup>Adaminaby</sup> on the turn off to Eucumbene (Dam) - there 's a turn off. I was shown that spot, Reg Warwick showed me. He knew all the stories because he went to the pub every night and that 's how they got the news circulated. And he turned the car over. There were carcasses lying everywhere, and that 's how the police got on to him. You see, they wouldn't have the stamp on them, the meat inspector's stamp. He had been getting calves around Eucumbene.

KH: He was the butcher at Cabramurra?

FP: Yes.

MRS P: Kenny's <sup>K</sup>Nob.

KH: How long would he have been there?

MRS P: He was there before we got there. Years probably.

FP: But he moved to Cabramurra then, didn't he? He ran the same butcher's shop there. I think he was an Italian bloke, wasn't he?

KH: Did you ever keep any chooks?

MRS P: Oh no.

FP: Nothing like that, no.

MRS P: Only dogs.

KH: Were there many pets? Were there many dogs and cats?

MRS P: Yes, most people had <sup>a</sup> dog and <sup>a</sup> cat. Oh, we had a cat at Cabramurra, do you remember? It got run over, Lucy.

KH: Do you think many pets got away into the bush? Like baby kittens?

FP: I would think so.

Frank Pirschmoser

MRS P: Kittens, maybe.

KH: Were there many - I mean, often kittens and pups get dumped at the local rubbish dump - - -

FP: I don't know, but I think - - -

KH: I 'm looking more towards the impact on the surrounding environment.

MRS P: I don't think so.

FP: Look, I tell you a few stories about cats.

MRS P: Oh, you came home with a couple of kittens once, from the power station.

FP: Yes, well, if you let me speak. Once, I shot three cats up behind our house. They were half-wild, too. Remember, with the shotgun.

KH: At Cabramurra?

FP: Yes. I just got my <sup>Mossberg</sup> three shot 12 gauge shotgun. I thought, "Oh, beauty." And I had three shots. And they were real mean-looking cats. I could <sup>hear</sup> the lid fly - rattle off our garbage can - we had two metal garbage cans behind the garage there in the corner. And one was, I think, standing on the fence next to it, and two were half in the garbage, I can remember they were out there. I <sup>got</sup> them all three with two shots. And one was groaning from inside of the garbage can out - beautiful, <sup>guts</sup> hanging everywhere - yes - three of them.

KH: You didn't like wild cats?

FP: No. And that was only <sup>one</sup> episode. In Jindabyne pumping station, they were everywhere. We started up the first pump, big blockage in the water, cooling water. Stopped the machine, found the blockage - dead cat stuck in pipe.

KH: Sorry - this is at Jindabyne pumping station.

FP: At Jindabyne pumping station. <sup>KH: The tunnel? FP: No, in the pumping station.</sup> See, you have cooling water, like in a car - - -

KH: Sorry, where is the pumping station?

FP: Jindabyne.

KH: For the tunnel that takes the water through the

Frank Pirchmoser

mountains?

FP: Yes, to Geehi.

KH: Near Waste Point?

FP: Yes.

KH: Right, okay.

FP: Where the big chimney's - that's the surge thing for it -

- -

KH: Right, okay.

FP: So I get the cat out, start up again. And there we had this funny marine-looking motor housing, made by Siemens, they had glass windows, with bulkhead openings. You know, with handles on top and bottom; they go inside the door and outside, just as on the ships. ....a glass door. There I was walking past one of them, the cat was inside, like it was terrified, hanging inside, it must have been under the rubber door seals, or something. And I went up to the operator, I said, "There is still a cat inside the motor, switch it off." Cats everywhere. And during construction, Kees von Geffen(?), a Dutchman - - -

MRS P: Who lives here.

FP: No, he went to the coast, I found out.

MRS P: Are you sure?

FP: Yes, another Dutchman told me. And he use to specialise trying to catch these cats. They were in Tumut One power station, Tumut Two power station, Murray One power station, Murray Two power station, everywhere there 's bloody cats. I don't know where they came from, but they were there. And they build special cages - you see, Kees was in Africa with the Shell Company, and they caught wild animals, and all that, so he felt suitably qualified. And they used various baits; they had a trapdoor in front with a string <sup>going</sup> back to the end with a trigger mechanism, and they had a bait attached to it. When the animal went in, they made very long cages to make sure the animal was right in before the door shut. They had fish hanging on it, everything,

Frank Pirchmoser

and they wouldn't go on.

MRS P: Too smart.

FP: And then at Jindabyne, the New Zealander, <sup>Morris,</sup> Lindsay Morris, he had an idea. He said, "Sure," he said, "I can out-smart a bloody cat." So he - on the 11,000 volt there, he had an electrode coming down on to a copper plate. And he put a sandwich there. And nothing - he checked regularly, once or twice a day, and renewed the sandwich, switched off, of course, before he went in. But then once we had a power failure for three minutes, I think. And he went down, looked in there, and the sandwich was gone, and the cat left its business behind. That drove him mad! "I have to get that smart cat," he said, "I have to get it." They must sense the electricity, the magnetic field, or something.

MRS P: Did he ever get it?

FP: I don't know. But they were shooting them. The operators at a later stage, they came from Guthega power station, they used the same operators. They used to have regular shoots there.

KH: Of cats?

FP: Of cats, yes. And he, I think, had a muzzle-loading pistol, or something. He used to practice on the cats.

KH: They were at most construction sites?

FP: Most. Then in Talbingo, I remember one now, they had steel plate, about two inch thick by say, two metres by one metre steel plate stacked outside the power station, <sup>waiting</sup> for the spiral casing. The welders just came along, took a steel plate with the ~~frange~~, ...weighing maybe each plate, maybe 3 or 4 tons or so. You see they were that thick, we get twice the size of the table stack(?) size, and they had unrigged the uppermost one, I don't know how. But I just saw a dead cat amongst it, with the head sticking out. Between the top and the second plate, there was a cat's head. I just walked past, and I could see the cat's head, normal cat's head, stick out, the eyes still open and all

Frank Pirchmoser

this, and the tongue stuck out. And the rest of the cat was that thick. So I don't know they got the cat in there.

MRS P: That 's right. Cats were everywhere, dogs, I don't think, were a.....problem.

KH: What about dogs going wild and breeding with dingoes?

MRS P: The only case I ever heard of dogs - do you remember ..... 's samoyeds were stolen, or they were missing? They don't know what happened - - -

FP: Yes. But one turned up later.

MRS P: That 's right, at Kiandra, didn't it? They think somebody sold them.

KH: The dogs you could keep track of better. Dogs have a different nature, don't they?

FP: Yes, oh yes.

KH: But cats can - I mean, I 'm asking this because of, you know, I 'm interested in the impact on the environment of the Snowy Mountain Scheme, and so if there are domesticated pets getting away into the bush, well, if this involves hundreds of cats, you 've got an impact on the birdlife, and that sort of thing.

MRS P: I would not say not much. The odd ones but not many. I mean - the impact - but dogs, definitely not. But with our dog we always <sup>had</sup> a heated kennel. We still have, now, a heated kennel. And every time we moved, the removalists would say, "We don't remember you, but we remember the kennel."

KH: And that would keep the dog at home, too, I suppose, having a heated kennel.

MRS P: The icicles would be hanging, and the dog would be - -

FP: Another cat that we saw - the one I brought home once.

MRS P: That dear little fluffy one.

FP: I think it was three cats, little kittens, maybe a few months old, outside Tumut Two power station. It was a cool day there, and I saw these three, and I chased one. They were right at the gate of Tumut Two power station. And when the gate open -

Frank Pirchmoser

you had to go inside, push a button and the gate opened - and one of them started running down along the drain on the side. On each side of the road, <sup>where</sup> there was a drain. But it ran down and it couldn't get out. So I chased it down for a while and then threw a

rag on it and got it. And Gee - it fought me savagely. I had a rag <sup>drapped around it</sup> to put it in the boot of the car - I did my business in the power station, and when I got home at lunch time, I think, I unpacked it, and we sort of got it civilised a bit. It was quite a nice cat, very long hair and all that.

MRS P: And then it disappeared.

FP: No, no, no, we took it with us to Cooma. It must have been about 6 or 8 months later, we moved to Cooma. Then in Cooma we had it <sup>a</sup> few weeks, and it was a terrible wrecker down at the house once, and then it disappeared.

KH: I have heard that if there were cats, and if there were dumped cats, they were usually around the local rubbish dump, with some of the camps - where the rubbish went that 's where the cats were.

FP: That 's right, yes. That reminds me, we went shooting there at the Cabramurra tip a few times. It was great fun.

MRS P: Where was the Cabramurra tip? <sup>Behind the wet canteen?</sup> Near the airstrip?

FP: It was a bit further, not far from the airstrip. Let me see now, they moved it a few times because the holes they used to fill up with sort of moved on. Well, past the airstrip on that same road there.

KH: That 's where it still is, I think. Up there somewhere. You go up that way to go to the ski tracks, the cross-country tracks now.

FP: I think it was on the end of the lower part of the airstrip, actually.

KH: So there certainly were some cats, and there were certainly some of them wild.

FP: Yes. And all of them semi-wild, I reckon.

KH: So it would be hard - when some of these cats that you



Frank Pirchmoser

saw, they were where you saw them because they could partly live on what they could get out of the bush, and partly what they could scavenge in the townships and the camps, I suppose. It would<sup>be</sup> hard, from that, to predict just how many there might have been in the bush, that just lived in the bush. I mean, there are wild cats now in the Kosciusko National Park.

MRS P: Of course, and you would never see them, a lot of them.

KH: That 's right. It 's very hard to estimate the numbers now.

MRS P: You wouldn't have any idea really. I mean, they are so smart. They hear somebody and hide. But the problem is, a lot of it, too, people get an animal and they get sick of it, and instead of killing it, they dump it, and that 's how, naturally, those cats have originated in the first place, isn't it, really?

FP: Not necessarily.

MRS P: A lot of them would have. You know how people tire of an animal, you know, you are better off shooting it than just dumping it in the bush.

FP: I think there are many reasons for that. People got transferred and the cat wasn't around when they moved, and they had to leave it. The cats, as you know, they prefer the locality to the people, and they might have taken the cat with them, but the cat came back again. Some funny reasons.

KH: Was it warm enough to have a garden, vegetables?

MRS P: Yes, we - not vegetables, no. But we won, I think, three years running, didn't we, a good garden award, or whatever they called it. Do you remember, Frank?

FP: Yes.

MRS P: We always had nice roses, and that was about it, wasn't it?

FP: Yes.

KH: Were you issued with trees and shrubs and things to plant at - - -

MRS P: No. In Cooma they had a nursery, but not in

Frank Pirchmoser

Cabramurra. They had<sup>a</sup> garden club, because you were the custodian of the mower, do you remember?

FP: Yes.

MRS P: We always had a nice lawn and roses.<sup>But</sup> I mean it was such a short summer.

FP: The trees took ages to grow because the winter<sup>er</sup> broke off the branches again, even though I shored it up all winter to try and protect them. It took years for a tree to grow a metre.

KH: There are still deciduous trees there now, cypresses and things. I mean, the houses have gone, but there are still a lot of things that were plant<sup>ed</sup>, especially on the sheltered side towards the east, I think, there are things that I remember growing quite well.

FP: I don't know. I haven't been there a few years now. But if it is like Island Bend, they just chopped it all down. We had a pussy willow there in the corner of the house, it was sort of like an L-shape, the house, on the inside corner, there was a pussy willow, that did very well.

MRS P: And you grew it from a cutting.

FP: That 's right, yes.

KH: So, on the whole, it was fairly hostile?

FP: Yes.

KH: And it wasn't all that good for growing things?

MRS P: Oh no.

FP: It was very windy.

MRS P: <sup>In summer</sup> I can remember some Decembers were quite cold. You really only had, I would say, three or four months of the year that it<sup>was</sup> warm, if that. You would never - you would always need a jacket. Although once our daughter got very<sup>bad</sup> burns, do you remember, on her arms, one Christmas, which is hard to believe, at Cabramurra.

KH: Because that whole hill, I think, was covered with alpine ash, with native trees, I think, before it was a township. That was all cleared away.

Frank Pirchmoser

FP: I don't know.....there was all terraces all around the hill, all terraces.

MRS P: You see, when we went there in 1961, we lived - do you know the Duke's Cottage? It 's still there. Any VIP stayed there.

KH: Just past the garage on the left.

FP: No, you go after the garage, it goes up on the hill, it goes straight ahead, up on the hill slightly. And on the right, just below the road, there 's this old cottage, a barrack there.

MRS P: Beautiful. And any VIP - while we were there, I think - three houses away.

FP: And we were sort of three houses after it, on the same terrace.

KH: You were looking north.

FP: Well, I reckon, south.

MRS P: Well, we only lived there for maybe less than a year, and then we were moved up to the top of the hill. Because our house and the surrounding ones were all moved to Khancoban.

FP: The lower ones where we were going.

MRS P: You see, Frank went at the end of a job, to these towns, so people were moving out.

FP: The construction people were already moving out and the commission people moved in.

MRS P: We were only at that house for, I would say, less than a year, and then we moved up to the top of the hill. And that first house was better because it all had double glazing, didn't it?

FP: The first had double glazing, yes.

KH: On a different tack, what was the country like when you first went, in the early 60s? What would you say was the state of the general countryside, like, the mountains? Was it, for instance, did you still see stock? Was it burnt? Was it being grazed? I 'm asking you, what you remember from when you went at the first, and then I want to <sup>do</sup> a sort of comparison to the time you left. In other words, what sort of changes do you remember?

Frank Pirchmoser

MRS P: I don't think stock grazed in the park at all. But they would on the edge of the road, they bring it down from the mountains.

FP: It was all park then? The roads were Parks, too.

MRS P: Oh yes, well it did. <sup>FP:</sup> But I remember them around Kiandra there, in the flat parts, they were grazing. Not many, maybe five, ten..

MRS P: Also towards Tumut, too.

FP: But so, have I seen them a year ago in the park - hundreds.

And two years ago. That 's right, I have seen them drive around there, where they shouldn't <sup>have</sup> and so have I driven around in there and <sup>seen around</sup> Tooma Dam, you know where the meadows are going into the water. I have seen them there when we came. And I remember seeing the stockmen on horseback. What 's that name of the hut there? It is headquarters, just near Thies village there, it was.

KH: Round Mountain Hut? Bradley's?

FP: No, <sup>it wasn't Bradley's,</sup> it was near Tooma Dam.

MRS P: On the left hand side where I picked you up a couple of years ago. You went cycling across.

KH: Paton's, there 's a Paton's hut there, near Tooma Dam.

FP: It could be, it could be Paton's hut, yes. It 's only maybe a couple of kilometres off the bitumen .....

KH: Yes, that 's right.

FP: Yes, just past where Thies Village was.

KH: There were still stockmen in there?

FP: There was a stockmen in there. He lived there because

.....

Frank Pirchmoser

FP: .....really good. It is just that people like to live in the past. It 's human nature.

KH: Can you remember the name of the stockman?

FP: No, No. I hardly spoke to him.

KH: Would you say there was much erosion?

FP: No, I wouldn't .. Of course, where roads were being built there was erosion. But they were well treated afterwards with sprayed straw and seeds and all that. And they clung for them to grow over quite nicely, as can be seen now. And even those tracks, you see, they saw a lot of traffic then, of heavy equipment. They had a gravel quarry down near Tooma Dam, several gravel quarries, and the heavy trucks moving in and out, naturally there was erosion. But nature consolidated itself, I think.

MRS P: The Snowy did a good job, don't you think, of putting things back exactly, if not better, than what it was to start with.

KH: Yes.

FP: Yes, well the greenies wouldn't agree.

MRS P: You know a lot of the places we saw, you'd never have known there'd been construction years before.

KH: Did you ever see the rivers very muddy? You know, with a heavy amount of silt and stuff washing downstream?

MRS P: The rivers were beautiful and clear up there.

FP: Jan, don't talk rubbish, you have never been past the tennis court.

MRS P: Did you?

FP: Jan, any river gets muddy when it rains. You don't have to .....Of course, they were muddy. I remember George Shelton, his name, .. he was my boss when I was commissioning, he was a keen fly fisherman, right? And talking about muddy rivers, and we were just, that 's right, we were working about 7 at night at T Two power station and George came to check it up from the river, a few hundred metres below. He said, "I just

Frank Pirchmoser

lost all my gear." He said, "They open the dam gates and I just saved my life by jumping on the rock somewhere." Periodically the gates were opened.

KH: Which dam?

FP: T Two dam. Tumut Two power station dam. It's on the Tumut River. That was during commissioning. Normally they are closed and there 's hardly water running. They had the big rocks in the river bed and he was fishing <sup>in a puddle somewhere</sup> Next minute he sees a tidal wave come in on him. So he ran for his life, see. And naturally, the water was all muddy, <sup>muddy</sup> behind him , see. .Then, the same now. All that soil erosion and all that, I think that 's all exaggerated. Still, I don't think it was <sup>worse</sup> than now, really. Since here, people now, everybody cares for their environment, the majority of them. And they looked after it then as they do now. They didn't deliberately abuse the environment. So they make wheel ruts with the four-wheel drives - there were less four-wheel <sup>drives</sup> than there are now, of course. There were just a few around, and they didn't do as much damage. But that 's all exaggerated.

KH: What do you think about exotics? The Snowy Mountains Authority used a lot <sup>of</sup> introduced species. They used willows and poplars and things to stabilise road banks and so on.

FP: Yes.

KH: What 's your feeling about that? Should they have tried to use more native species?

FP: Well, if there would have been native species suitable, they would have used them, because they had their own research done in this field. And I have seen, near Tumut Two power station, above Tumut Two power station, probably still there, they used willow twigs. They stuck them in the ground, maybe 10, 20 centimetre intervals at the severe erosion areas. They didn't interfere with the environment at all, previously. But then after they tried to help nature there, and the native species. They stuck these in severe erosion channels - I saw <sup>it</sup> by bushwalk-

Frank Pirchmoser

ing in between working hours, - because we had to walk up once - and they wove them in a sort of basketweave, bend them over and and weave them into each other. And some were several metres wide and you can see that the washaways backed up behind it and where new shoots shot out and all that. Well, obviously the native fauna <sup>and flora</sup> couldn't look after it, so they had to use willow.

KH: But in some cases, I think, branches and so on have broken off and washed downstream and colonised elsewhere.

FP: Yes.

KH: So there have been other species, blackberries and other things far worse, have done that in other parts of Australia. But, I mean, that can happen with willows. One of the worst ones, apparently, is gorse.

FP: Gorse?

KH: They planted a lot of gorse, Spanish broom, at Island Bend, and there have been several programmes of eradication and spraying with poisons and so on, but the gorse is still there.

MRS P: It 's that very thick - - -

KH: It 's in flower at the moment, bright yellow flowers, big green sort of - - -

MRS P: Very pretty, actually, yes, I know it. You, the other day, said, "Wouldn't that yellow bush be lovely near our ti-tree?" I think it 's related.

FP: That 's right, it was the Spanish broom. They have them at ANU, I have seen a few around there, near the creek, <sup>near</sup> Sul-livans Creek, there.

KH: Yes, they could have.

FP: I thought, that 's nice, the yellow with the very deep green - - -

KH: It has become a real pest in some parts of Australia.

MRS P: That 's right.

KH: It has really taken off and it pushes out the native species in some areas.

FP: Yes, well I don't see that necessarily as a detriment

Frank Pirchmoser

to push out the native species, because sometimes the native species are a pest too, like the ti-trees, for instance, around Lake Blowering and Jounama - you know, the ti-tree scrub - only the dachshund can get through under it.

KH: Yes.

MRS P: But I don't think it 's called ti-tree scrub, Frank.

FP: It has blue flowers, it gets really dry and thick.

MRS P: I don't think that 's the proper name.

FP: But that 's even worse. After a bushfire all the native scrub, it 's as thick as a jungle, you can't get through.

MRS P: You see, they had a bushfire while we were in Cabramurra, in fact, there was talk of evacuation. That would have been in '65, was it?

FP: Down from Yarrangobilly camp.

MRS P: It got up as far as Three Mile Creek.

FP: No, it went down to Adaminaby, then. Right down to Adaminaby, remember? They went to Kiandra to watch it go past.

MRS P: That 's right, and there was talk at one stage of evacuating Cabramurra township, but it didn't come to that.

KH: Yes, I 've seen information on that fire in the files.

MRS P: Everything grew beautifully. Everything took off, didn't it?

FP: And the gums there, behind Kiandra, when you go on the Snowy Mountains Highway, where the plain... finishes, all these tall trees had been burned down and you would never know now that there was a bush fire. They all recuperated. But the under-growth is so thick, it 's nasty, really. In summer you can't get through, in winter you ski over it, of course.

KH: What about if you were to compare your early time, your impressions in the early years to your most recent visits. You 're already suggesting that the regrowth is thicker now than it used to be.

FP: Yes.

KH: That 's certainly my impression, that all over the high

Frank Pirchmoser

country the regeneration has been prolific. You know, it's just been astonishing.

FP: Because there have been no bushfires, perhaps.

KH: People do tend to ascribe it more to the removal of grazing and the reduction in fires, less fires. So there 's more regeneration getting away.

FP: Well, you mean that the grassy areas and all that - - -

KH: Grass, shrubs, herbs, even the trees.

FP: Well, I couldn't tell. But I would say that the erosion hasn't been - but that 's mainly around Kiandra area where I was mostly - wouldn't have been worse, I reckon, the erosion area. That 's in the grassy areas. And the trees, well, they weren't as thick. The undergrowth wasn't as thick, because, I am sure, it was because of the bushfires, because I know that the bushfire went through. Now the undergrowth is terrible. And in Talbingo, too, along the slopes there. You need a machete to fight your way through. And before then, you had the tall trees with clearing in between, and they had <sup>maybe</sup> medium trees and all that, but you didn't have a jungle. But that has nothing to do with conservation or lack of grazing, I would say, because if - of course, the greenies will say: - it 's the grazing, the cows all the time, new shoots. And that 's why you have the jungle now, because the green shoots are not even..... But regardless of what caused it all, I preferred it before to now, because before you could walk in the bush, and now you have to fight your way through.

KH: So it 's true to say it was more open 20 or 25 years ago.

FP: More open, amongst the trees, yes. I don't know if the tree line has gone back. I don't think it has in these areas. Perhaps it has <sup>advanced, I don't know.</sup> You would have to put markers in, but by observation, I couldn't tell you.

KH: You see, in the early period, in the 50s, the Snowy Mountains Authority did its best to remove grazing. They saw

Frank Pirchmoser

grazing and burning as a big threat to the quality of the catchments. And Hudson was right behind this, and they then offered the old Park Trust the money that they would lose from the grazing leases, the SMA paid that amount to the Park Trust. So this was particularly above 4,500 feet, and especially on the Main Range, you know, the highest parts. One of the other things that people have said to me is, when they go back to try and find some of the camps where they lived - - -

MRS P: They can't find them.

KH: It 's just totally overgrown, some of the smaller camps.

FP: Yes, you can find <sup>them</sup> when you look carefully. It 's amazing - I had a look - I stumbled on Happy Jack's township. That was a few years ago now, 1979, I remember. Before we moved to Sydney, I went there - came down along from Kiandra, I went along there along the fire trail, because Happy Jack's went up the other side, and I stumbled across - right through where the township was, on the way to Boobee's Hut, and further on. And there <sup>are</sup> still remains, like bits of rubber tyre, and you still see the basic - they didn't grade it in after they had finished with the township. They cleaned it up, but they left the general area, like all the terraces - you see, they had to terrace it to put the houses in - so you still can find it. And also, not so long ago, at Three Mile camp, too, I still found old packing cases, bits of timber and things like that, if you look carefully.

KH: At Three Mile camp?

FP: Yes. Still find it. And so it would be with many of the others. I haven't bothered with the others, of course, because I don't like to dig in the rubbish.

MRS P: Kiandra was an interesting town years ago. It 's hard to believe so many thousand people lived there, isn't it, in the gold rush days, unreal. And Bill Paterick (?) told us, the snow, you know, was a lot heavier years ago, than what it is now. Didn't

Frank Pirchmoser

he say it used to often be 30 feet? He would ski from one side of the road to the other.

FP: Yes.

MRS P: He was an interesting old man, actually.

FP: But see, I think people exaggerate a lot.

MRS P: They possibly do.

FP: It 's human nature. That 's another thing, human nature, they exaggerate.

MRS P: It was maybe 20 feet, but he said it was a ..... you know.

FP: Well, there isn't much difference, it 's still a lot, isn't it? He reckons he was marvellous, but by <sup>today's</sup> standards he would have been a raw beginner, really, I suspect.

MRS P: Probably, yes.

FP: But he thought he was marvellous. He might have been marvellous for those days, see.

KH: Oh yes, people talk about him as the ski champion of Kiandra, oh yes.

MRS P: He was a big man, about 6 feet.

KH: Oh, was he?

MRS P: Oh yes, a big man.

KH: I 've got photos of him in this next book, but I didn't ever meet him.

MRS P: I used to often stop there on the way home to Cabramurra and have a cup of coffee, tea, with them. She was a lovely woman, his wife. She had a pacemaker, one of the first actually, I think the second they'd ever done in Sydney, very interesting.

KH: Yes, they had quite a few children. I think they had eight children, or something.

MRS P: Oh, heaps. There 's two in Tumut, one of them - Bill, is in Tumut, the son, and Pat, and Cynthia is here. You see, Cheryl 's in Sydney. One still lives in Cabramurra, Shirley, Shirley O'Halloran. She still lives in Cabramurra. And then

Frank Pirchmoser

there 's two or three others.

FP: Yes, I remember the first day when we went to Cabramurra when I started with the Snowy, the bus stopped there, the two girls came out of the .....

MRS P: Cynthia and Cheryl, they were always smiling.

FP: They went to school in Cabramurra then, you see.

MRS P: Get there about 11 in the morning on the Pioneer bus. Always smiling, Cynthia and Cheryl.

KH: I was going to ask you what did you when you weren't working, sleeping or eating, but I think you have already sort of told me. You went hunting.

MRS P: Skiing.

FP: Or fishing, or skiing, bushwalking.

KH: When you went fishing, there was fishing in streams was it, or fishing in dams?

FP: Yes, there was, right <sup>down to</sup> Tumut Pond, <sup>to Tumut Pond Dam,</sup> we went <sup>there</sup> a lot too.

KH: With a boat?

FP: No, from the shore.

KH: This was for trout?

FP: Yes. Oh, we would have caught anything.

MRS P: That 's all there was.

KH: What else did you catch?

MRS P: No, he 's joking, he said .....there was only trout then.

KH: No eels? No, it 's too cold, I suppose, for eels.

FP: Yes, there was a little episode. We had a relieving engineer - generating station - Bailey, what was his name, the other Bailey? George Bailey? He was in Hume Weir One site, he was in Burrinjuck and somewhere else. He was a relieving a local guy, for four weeks. And he, with somebody else on the boat, went up to the head waters of Tumut Pond Dam, I was told, and they had a gold mining area there, Nine Mile Diggings, I think it was called. And they brought back some gear they had used a long time <sup>ago</sup> for the production of gold, or winning of gold. I think mer-

Frank Pirchmoser

cury, or whatever. There were some chemicals and some *troughs* or whatever, they brought it back - - -

KH: Nine Mile Diggings?

FP: I think - the headwaters of the Tumut Pond, which are about the Nine Mile Diggings, I would say.

KH: I think after gold came out of the stamper batteries, it used <sup>to pass</sup> over a copper plate, something made of copper that was coated with mercury. And I think the copper and the mercury combined would catch the particles of gold. I think every so often they scraped all that off, and separated the mercury from the gold. Now, they may have wanted to <sup>get</sup> those copper plates.

FP: Well, they got something there, I was told. But I didn't see them, and I don't <sup>know</sup> the truth of it, but I 'm pretty sure they would have been there, because where there's fire, there's smoke, see. And that guy Bailey and a couple of others went up there. So somebody must have known. I had - by then I didn't know *there were gold mines up there* - that was at the early stage.

Maybe 1962 or so. And so I don't know what they got.

MRS P: *There's still* gold around there, I 'm sure there would have been.

KH: Did anyone go gold panning?

FP: Yes, I heard of a few. Actually, what I heard was when they built Tumut One power station they had - they called it a *..sand..* batching plant. where they found a suitable rock and they ground it into the right size, had it going through sieves, so they had a constant gauge of material, and shaking sieves and all that, a French company, I believe. And they had a little gold extraction unit amongst it. All the gravel they took out *and sold*. And they split the reward amongst the crew there.

KH: Sorry, where was this? It wasn't on New Chum Hill?

FP: No, it was when they built Tumut One power station, right? And they naturally tried to get the materials locally, they don't want to cart it for miles and miles. So they had the

Frank Pirchmoser

batching plant, it is called, always. I think they had it up below Cabramurra. I know exactly where, but I don't know the name exactly.

KH: On Eight Mile Creek?

FP: No, it was virtually on the present road between Cabramurra and Tumut Two power station. Not far below group control centre. And I think it had a name once, but apparently they got all their gravel from there to build Tumut One and Tumut Two, but first they built Tumut One, of course. And when the French crew operated it, they had that gold extraction plant there - all the gravel - - -

KH: So the gravel was crushed, went through a crusher.

FP: Yes, the rocks got crushed, and all that. And somehow they got the gold out, I don't know how, because I 'm rather ignorant in this respect.

KH: Did they get much?

FP: I believe it was quite a paying proposition.

MRS P: Probably more than they let on.

FP: Yes, oh yes.

KH: Thousands of dollars worth?

FP: Oh, I would say more than that, because they split the proceedings amongst the crew. And I know, I think *Paul Schröder*. but he is a bit of a liar. He said he went washing with the pans down the Tumut River and he got a matchbox full now and then. I heard of a few people who went panning, gold-panning in the Tumut River.

KH: And did anyone go further and actually put a plant in on any of the rivers, like, on the Eucumbene, near Kiandra, like a plant that would suck all the new silt and so on out of the cracks in the river bed and put it through a separation plant? Did anyone get up to anything like that?

FP: Not to my knowledge, no.

MRS: That was another story, with Paul Schröder, that day when the Snowy vehicle went off the road, wasn't it. On his way

Frank Pirchmoser

to work, he was - were you driving, or *Johnny...?*

FP: I wasn't in the car.

MRS P: Well, he was a neighbour of ours, Paul Schrader, and he was going to work one day. And you know when the car is all snowed over, they just make a hole - clear a hole and keep driving. Then all of a sudden, he heard bump, and he said to the driver, "Are we here?" They were 20 feet off the side of the road, landed on <sup>all</sup> fours, it did.

KH: There were quite a few people killed during the construction of the Scheme.

FP: Yes.

KH: Did you know anyone who was killed?

FP: No. Well, there were quite a few, according to that memorial in Jindabyne, what, 70 odd or whatever.

KH: On that there is 120.

FP: 120?

KH: Yes, on that memorial.

MRS P: It's on *Kobal's* book that I've got there - - -

KH: Yes.

FP: But anyway, I never knew that there were any killed, really. I heard stories of somebody saw three of them in one go, go down the shaft past him, screaming "Geronimo!" You sort of hear these stories, and say, "Oh yes, just another story."

KH: That really happened, I think. Some scaffolding went down - - -

FP: At Tumut One at *Head Race*, yes. A few in the dams, they are still there, I believe. They just kept on going, the concrete, they fell in, and they kept on pouring on top of them. They're still there. Quite a few cases, I think.

KH: Are there, you think?

FP: Oh yes. I believe that - - -

KH: Who fell into - accidentally, or - - -

FP: Yes, during concrete pouring. They poured concrete continuously. It was a continuous process. They had special

Frank Pirchmoser

scaffolding developed. In those days, they were always after records, not just standing, pouring too. They are probably in the books. And they had that moving framework - that moves up. As the concrete hardens below, they move the framework up. They put <sup>it</sup> in - what they call it now, the sections, they don't pull the whole bits up then - they just pull sections now. I can't remember - it has a name. So they pull a part up here - a block, blocks, here and there and so forth. They pour day and night, they just move the concrete. They have the big cable hanging there with the machine pouring in the concrete, and it just moves along there, and they couldn't stop, really. So when somebody falls in, they just pour it on top of him.

MRS P: What were all those cylinders used for, at Cabramurra?

FP: Testing. They took samples of each new lot. You see, they might have <sup>mixed</sup>, I don't know, 5,000 metres of cement, right?

And they mix it, I don't know, 6 to 1, or 4 to 1, or something, *that's* sand and gravel to cement ratio. And then they take samples. They pour it in those forms and then they crush it, to give the strengths, crushing strengths. And <sup>they</sup> do deliberate mixture variations and test that for a particular purpose. Then all the cylinders, so many of them are left over, and then the local employees take them for the garden <sup>ing</sup> edges and all this. And people wondered what they were for, until they blew up *when* they had them on the barbecue. The stones expanded, you know.

KH: Yes, I notice there 's a place out at Mitchell, out here, wherever it is, that does that. They have big truckloads of these things come, and they do the tests on them.

And you didn't have a pub at Cabramurra, did you?

MRS P: A wet canteen.

FP: No, a wet canteen. There was a wet staff canteen and the wet wages canteen. And you could <sup>get</sup> wet anywhere!

MRS P: And they were well patronised.

FP: No, the staff canteen, I think, if you were staff, a better person, you could drink <sup>there</sup> anytime. But if you were wages,



Frank Pirchmoser

you were frowned upon. And I suppose you could have been asked to remove your body from the premises. I saw a few of them. I wasn't a pub person, I wasn't there often.

MRS P: Frank was never a pub crawler.

FP: When I was single, of course, I was there more often, of course. I had nowhere to go. I mean, before the family came, before I had the house. And the wages people were invited sometimes to the staff on special occasions, and during special privileged sessions.

KH: You told me this on the phone, about how there were the undesirables, as it were, the ones that were uncouth, that you wouldn't sit next to at the dining table.

FP: Yes.

MRS P: Especially the Irish.

FP: Yes, there were strict separation, wages camp/  
staff camp. And they had their own mess and canteen, too, attached. And of course, if you were a jovial sort of person you went occasionally to the wages facilities.

MRS P: For the fun of it.

FP: "Oh, he's a nice bloke, he even eats with us."

MRS P: I can remember not long after we moved to Cabramurra, a woman invited me down to meet other women. And one of the first things I<sup>was</sup> asked, was Frank wages or staff? And I said, "I don't know." "What day does he get paid on?" I said, "Thursday."

"Oh, that's all right." And I came home and I said to Frank, do you remember that? "What's wages and staff?" You know, I didn't know the difference. But he was paid Thursday, so I was all right. That was staff. I'll never forget that. And do you know who asked me? Billy... That figures.

FP: Yes, it's the useless, same old ratbags.

KH: So there was a stigma attached to those who were the workers. I mean, the people who got dirty and filthy were a bit lower, looked down upon.

Frank Pirchmoser

MRS P: A friend of mine, her husband drove the rubbish truck, and I have had people say, "I don't know how you can be friendly with her." They own two hotels now. One at Coonabarabran and one at the Blue Mountains.

KH: It would be a funny twist if those people went to stay at their hotel.

MRS P: Oh, it's strange, isn't it?

FP: You know who I met at K-Mart last week, when I gave back the barrels? The guy from Talbingo, not Darby, what's the other short fellow? I wouldn't have recognised, but he recognised me, an operator. They have a house down in Kambah, or somewhere.

KH: Did you have any parties?

MRS P: Oh, they had plenty of wild parties up there.

FP: Yes. I don't remember going to any. ~~But there probably weren't that many.~~ But see, I didn't feel like going anywhere. I came home, maybe at 7 at night, you were dog tired. Then you were on standby, you tried to grab as much sleep as you can, if you were lucky.

MRS P: More or less 7 till 7, weren't they? So much work.

KH: Were there any films shown?

FP: Yes, they had films. They had housie, did n't they? You went to housie regularly.

MRS P: Badminton was very big on the Snowy. Probably they had bridge, and all sorts of things like that.

KH: Was there much gambling, especially amongst single men?

MRS P: I would say probably. Actually the fellow who ran the shop ran an SP unofficially.

KH: This is on the horses?

MRS P: Yes.

FP: Something comes to my mind, a fellow who brought up a wombat up there, in a sock. You see there was also, in 1964, spring 1964, the snow started melting and receding just from the bitumen first, because where the grader had pushed it a little bit further back, so the green shoots come<sup>out</sup> and the snow bank was

Frank Pirchmoser

pretty high, a metre, half a metre. And the wombats came in in force to eat there. And many of them couldn't get back up the snow bank, they were fumbling along the road, and got hit by cars, three or four every day. And once we found one there, a mother laying on its back dead, with a young one with the claws going like this. And the fellow I was with, <sup>LandRover then,</sup> he pulled it out. He was sort of a nature lover too. Well everybody there, if you wouldn't like nature you would not work there. You would prefer Sydney. And the people, they like country and all that. And so, I don't know how old it was, but it took years to grow up. And he brought it to work in an old sock, and hung it on a coathanger there. It was there all day, and he fed <sup>it</sup> with a bottle.

MRS P: Carnation milk.

FP: And for years and years. It must have been five years.

And it became a grey one - - -

MRS P: And it became a nuisance.

FP: And then it started chewing up - he was <sup>a</sup> wages guy, living in the wages camp, so he gave it to another guy at the house <sup>there.</sup> He had it there and it chewed up the lino, so he gave it back. And finally they set it free, and I think it went back home.

MRS P: Yes, it came back. It didn't like the life in the wild. <sup>Any wonder,</sup> It lived like a king, didn't it?

FP: I thought I saw it once, but there were probably several grey ones like that, in the snow, bowling along.

MRS P: Well, it took years to grow. I can remember you brought it home one weekend to show the children, in its sock. It was gorgeous.

KH: That winter must have killed a lot of wombats, I would have thought.

FP: Oh yes, three or four every day, just in the short stretch there.

KH: No, I mean they would have even died through natural causes because of the severity of the snow cover.

Frank Pirchmoser

FP: When it started snowing, I remember, I hit one with the Volkswagen <sup>once. I had a call and I went there,</sup> amongst the snow flakes, I could see that wombat, and I braked as hard as I could, but I hit it. I reversed back and they were all gone. There was a mother with a young <sup>one,</sup> I thought it was.

MRS P: You must have only dazed it if it moved.

FP: I couldn't see them anywhere. And one - several times we tried to help the wombats on the snowbank, but they went for you, you couldn't touch them, they were <sup>savage.</sup>

KH: They growl, I notice. They make a noise. I tried

....

MRS P: You would think they'd be quiet.

KH: I heard that there were prostitutes who used to come to some of the camps? Was that still going on when you were there?

MRS P: At Cabramurra. Oh yes.

KH: Was there much of that?

FP: Every wages payday they were there.

KH: I think someone actually came - someone used to - - -

MRS P: Mrs Stewart could tell you, the <sup>woman</sup> who owned the shop. Because I can remember - you would see the women - all the dealings went on in the shop. She could tell you.

KH: In a shop?

MRS P: Yes, well, I did <sup>see</sup> them sitting - wouldn't you, Frank? I am sure they were prostitutes.

FP: Some of them. Others they had a pimp too. You see, they got lined up before. They had sort of bookings.

MRS P: I can remember, in '61, you'd hate going into the shop, really, because there'd be all these men. When all the men were still there. It didn't matter if you had a couple of children in tow, you would still hate going into the shop.

KH: You felt that they were eyeing you off, or looking for a wife, or a woman, or - - -

MRS P: Not a wife, I'm sure.

KH: Looking for an easy time.

Frank Pirchmoser

MRS P: Yes.

KH: But you had to go, I suppose, there was only one shop.

MRS P: That 's all, and you'd pay through the nose. We used to go to Cooma usually once a fortnight. I remember once I drove down, <sup>do you</sup> remember? I took Pat Hall with me, and I didn't get home till 7 at night. There'd been a violent snowstorm. You were giving me till 7 to get home, weren't you, before you did anything. Every fortnight I would <sup>go</sup> 68 miles to shop.

KH: One lot of prostitutes, I believe, came with their own caravan.

FP: Yes. I don't know if it was the same lot, but there was one in Talbingo, remember?

MRS P: Oh, yes. And one of the Lancaster boys got charged.

FP: That 's right. He held them up and robbed them.

MRS P: That 's right. He held up the caravan and robbed the prostitutes, that 's right.

KH: I see. That 's an interesting twist. Vice on vice.

MRS P: That 's right. In fact, when we moved to Talbingo, this fellow was in gaol, wasn't it for that offence? He got caught.

FP: I don't know. There was a family there, four boys, they were all no-hopers. They were always in trouble, terrible trouble.

MRS P: One stole a Snowy car and wrote it off. Do you remember?

FP: Yes, and that one robbed prostitutes.

MRS P: No, no, that was a different one.

KH: Robbed the prostitutes.

FP: Between Tumut and Talbingo somewhere.

MRS P: Oh, some funny things happened.

FP: I don't know more details about <sup>it</sup>. But of course next time everybody is laughing about it.

MRS P: But the prostitutes, I 'm sure, would have made their fortune in Cabramurra in the early days.

Frank Pirchmoser

FP: Well, we had the hawker coming around too. He come usually the fortnight when payday was. Quite good, I bought a few things off him.

KH: He had a truck, a little truck, or what?

FP: No, a Kombi, I think he had. He put up sort of a big tent, and he had his wares hanging everywhere.

MRS P: And then a fellow would come once a month with ladies' clothes, really good quality. Do you remember that fellow? I think his name was Samosi, or something like that. Really good quality. He'd come once a month, selling. And he'd drop - you know, you'd look and you'd say, "Oh, I like those four things," "Take them." "I'll come back in an hour or two." They did well, and I'm sure other hawkers - when we went there you had bread delivered to the door. But, of course two or three years later that stopped. They used to come from Adaminaby. You always had to go - you never had mail deliveries - you always had to go to the post office for your mail, and so on. And it was a bit awkward, in a sense. We were down what, about 90 stairs we had to walk, to get to the shop, because you wouldn't always drive.

FP: Each terrace had a lot of stairs.

MRS P: So you'd go down, maybe more. And in winter it was difficult, because you wouldn't <sup>just</sup> walk upstairs, you had to fight your way up the snow.

KH: You wouldn't ski down?

FP: No.

MRS P: No.

KH: You didn't ski?

MRS P: My fashion - tennis was <sup>go out a bit.</sup> my thing. No, I would never make a skier, although I did. But the family, of course, soon left me for dead. I think Lisa started at - Frank had to make skis, you couldn't buy skis in those days, small enough for children. He made skis for the children in the early 60s.

FP: Funny, we sold them, they sold them to somebody else.

Frank Pirchmoser

And somebody else gave - they were passed on everywhere.

MRS P: They were going for years - metal.

FP: Aluminium skis they were.

MRS P: The children started skiing very young, didn't they?

Lisa would have only been two, and Carl, four.

FP: Yes, about that.

KH: What about fights? On the job or in the camps?

FP: Yes, there were always fights.

KH: What were they over?

FP: Shootouts.

KH: Shootouts? Oh, I haven't heard of those. Tell me more.

FP: There was one in Talbingo, a shootout, between the Serbs and <sup>the</sup> Croats. I think it was 17 on one side and 20 on the other side. I don't know which side - they were shooting with firearms against each other. And I think there <sup>were</sup> 6 or 7 injured.

MRS P: What year, do you remember?

FP: Well, minor injuries. You know, maybe sort of puncture

- - -

MRS P: No. What year?

FP: I'm not sure, but it must have been after - early times, 1970 or thereabouts?

KH: 1970, at Talbingo?

FP: Yes. Because it was like a small-scale war, I believe, people hiding behind various obstacles. And of course, you heard about the episodes in Cooma between the Croats, ripping the flag down off the poles and all that, the Yugoslav flag?

KH: No.

FP: Many times. They had the flags of nations there.

KH: Yes, that's right.

FP: And the Croats don't like the Yugoslav flags. You see, they want their own. So they modified the flagpoles many times. First, of course, they had <sup>the</sup> cords at the bottom, so they just took it down. And then they shortened the cords and they

Frank Pirchmoser

had various gimmicks. But I think they even cut one down once, a whole pole or something. And that was going on virtually every month.

MRS P: That was in the early 60s. Then it seemed to improve, didn't it? I don't think there's been trouble in years.

FP: Yes. Although, then I remember - I remember distinctly I read in the Sydney Morning Herald, "T-Bone Steaks stop Snowy Scheme," you know, a typical journalist's headline. That is exactly the wording of it - "T-bone Steaks stop Snowy Scheme," it said. But then, of course, you start reading, what's this about? That was in the Thiess mess, it was called, or wages mess in Talbingo, a guy had a disagreement with the cook, when he was served. I can't remember now the exact detail, but he threw the t-bone steak back at the cook, and says, "Cop this." or "Eat it yourself," or something. And they all walked out after that. Some minor incident. And they went on strike for a <sup>few</sup> days.

MRS P: So the t-bone steak stopped the Snowy Scheme.

FP: Usually a minor thing like this.

KH: I suppose after a while the Snowy would have stopped employing either the Yugoslavs or the Croats, if one of them wasn't on the Scheme - - -

MRS P: I don't think it stopped them. Maybe they tried to separate them.

FP: But see, it's not the Snowy - these people were with the contractors, the major contractors.

MRS P: Well, see, Kaiser-Perini, and so on and so on.

FP: And most of these guys were considered wages, as far as the Snowy was concerned, the Authority's staff, you know. Only there the bosses were considered staff and allowed in the staff quarters. They even <sup>had</sup> staff quarters with the Snowy. And they had a so-called major contract inspectors, also employed by the SMA. They checked up on the concreting and all that. They were very closely related with the major contractors, like Thiess, and Kaiser Perini, there were all those big American contractors. And so

Frank Pirchmoser

they<sup>had</sup> no real jurisdiction, I suppose, on whom the major contractors employed. They had to take whomever they could get. I mean, no self-respecting guy wanted to go to the Snowy and sort of, be up to his eye-balls in mud, sort of. So they had only the rough and tough types. And they have found since that in the construction sites, the labour is mostly provided by Irishmen, usually the powder monkeys, they like to blow up things, always the Irishmen. Yugoslavs, which comprise Serbs, Croatians and all that. If they say Croatians, you know they are Yugoslavs. They don't like to say Yugoslav, they are a sort of different race, they think they are. And these are the major ones, the Irishmen and Yugoslavs, do the dirty work. But they made enough, I suppose. So there you are, "T-Bone Steaks Stop the Snowy". Can you remember that?

MRS P: Yes.

KH: What about fights between different groups of Germans? Anything there? Of different political persuasion?

FP: Well, I never heard of it.

KH: Well, at Island Bend, I think, I heard, in the earlier period, in the 50s, I think there was some animosity there.

MRS P: There was a very good article on Cabramurra in what they call the Good Weekend. Do you remember it used to be in the Canberra Times on a Sunday, and they stopped it about a year ago. And I regret not keeping it. There was an excellent article, about 5 pages on Cabramurra. Do you remember about all the *intrigues*., Frank, you remember it. And in those days when we were there, it was surprising the few marriages that stayed together. You wouldn't believe that this one would go off with that one's wife, and husband, and so it went on. We had a lot.

FP: Yes, there was the fellow I worked with - he liked to - he didn't do much work, but he was the best journalist in the Snowy, I reckon. Always, "Let's have a cup of tea." And then ..... "Guess what I saw yesterday. Joe's wife went behind our house and went down to number 16, and then shortly after he came out

Frank Pirchmoser

the front door." All these stories, crikey, he didn't miss a trick.

MRS P: And when Frank went to Austria in 1969, his father was ill, and that was just about when the Jindabyne pumping station was being commissioned.

FP: Officially opened.

MRS P: Yes. And he couldn't go and he'd worked so much on it, and he'd arranged for a fellow he worked with, an old fellow, mind you, who would have been 50-odd then, to take me. And the minute he got back, this somebody went up and said, "Did you know that Wally took your wife?" And he said, "No, I didn't." Oh, I could have killed him. They loved gossip.

FP: But what about the funny thing when the travel agent called at the front door.

MRS P: I could have killed him too. He had a terrible sense of humour, very dry.

MRS P: Frank went to Austria, and he sent me a telegram, that he was arriving back two days earlier. And I just dropped everything in Cooma and drove to the airport to pick him up. Then the next day the travel agent arrived at the door, and Frank answered it, and he said, "Would you tell Mrs Pirchmoser that her husband will be arriving tomorrow at 9 am," or whatever, and he said, "Yes, I'll tell her." And here he was, he'd been home for 24 hours. Goodness knows what that fellow thought.

FP: I was in a dressing gown, wasn't I?

MRS P: That was a bad blue, wasn't it, for the travel agent? Saying he was arriving the next day and he was already there.

KH: The intrigue in a small community. At the same<sup>time</sup> it was sort of a frontier town, wasn't it? All the SMA camps, by and large, were kind of frontier places, weren't they?

FP: Well, Cabramurra was civilised, considered with some of these camps, you know.

MRS P: All amenities were there.

Frank Pirchmoser

FP: I went to some of these camps on my travels, either on the job or just during the weekend, bushwalking or so, like Twins camp - Geehi, that 's right, that was still there. I thought I had struck paradise when I got into Geehi that time. The camp was completely empty, everything was closed, the whole township still there, and the hot water was still on in the barracks.

MRS P: That was when I had to drive and pick you up.

FP: Yes, well, I sort<sup>of</sup> over-estimated how long it would take.

KH: Where did you walk?

FP: From Round Mountain - I wanted to walk from Round Mountain to Guthega power station. And I sort of changed my mind a bit. And I didn't go down the Schlink's Pass, I went over the other side to Twins Camp, that 's on the - let me see - southern, more southerly, I think. It 's like - the track forks south. You see, that side you come to Guthega; that side you come - the Geehi side, on the other side of the mountain range.

KH: Yes, along the Grey Mare Range?

FP: Yes, along the Grey Mare, along the fire trail there, down Prince - - -

KH: Yes.

FP: So I hit Geehi. Then from Geehi I hitchiked - no, that was Twins Camp, Thiess Brothers were there, they were still there. They were still building Geehi then. I hitchiked from Twins Camp to Geehi, which is about 6 kilometres or something. Geehi was a Snowy township, Twins Camp was a Thiess camp. And you see, there 's a distinct difference between SMA and the contractors. If you speak to somebody who has been with a contractor, he calls Snowy generally. It means he was in the Snowy Mountains, but he wasn't necessarily employed by the Snowy Mountains Authority. He might have been with Thiess or any of those

Frank Pirchmoser

major contractors. And that 's where the confusion arises.

KH: Yes, I 'm with you. And some people first worked in the Snowy, worked for contracts, and then went on to the SMA later on.

FP: Yes.

MRS P: Well, Frank originally, weren't you SMC originally?

FP: No, SMA.

MRS P: But you went to SMC.

FP: But there 's hardly any distinction between SMC and SMA at that - it's just a name. You do the same work virtually. It's just on paper.

KH: Do you think there was any discrimination between nationalities as to who should do a particular job? I mean, were certain nationalities chosen for one thing and others for something else?

MRS P: Didn't seem to be.

KH: It was more by individual choice. I mean, the Irish just happened to like blowing things up and so on. And the Germans, it seems to me, or people with German backgrounds, seemed to be more in technical positions.

FP: Yes, exactly, yes.

MRS P: And you find the Yugoslavs often were labourers, and so it goes on. The Swiss were technical, weren't they? We knew two or three - - -

FP: Ninety percent of electricians were always German.

MRS P: Or Dutch.

FP: I mean that 's the other ten per cent were others. But ninety per cent were German, you could say. And the mechanical staff, too. Well, you can say, as an average, about 70, 80 per cent of all the technical staff in wages were German, or German origin, Swiss, you know, or the related, Danish and so forth, Austrian, Czech, not many Czechs.

KH: And a lot of Italians were in the tunnels, it seems, drilling?

Frank Pirchmoser

FP: Yes.

KH: And concreting.

FP: They like, Italians, the rocks and stones and all that, yes.

MRS P: And the Czechs were in the hydrology - - -

FP: That 's right, yes.

.....(all talking at once!)

KH: .....Bob Janata , is a Czech, I think.

FP: Maybe they prefer that.

MRS P: They were all Czech - a lot of them.

FP: So, I don't know why, but I reckon it might be their temperaments or it suits them, you see.

KH: They almost had a national temperament that stended them - - -

MRS P: To have a certain type of job.

KH: It 's very interesting.

MRS P: It is, when you think about it, isn't it?

KH: What about the English? I mean, there some Pommies on the Scheme.

FP: Union representatives.

MRS P: Yes. I only knew one, and that was Dave ..... or .....he was an operator.

FP: Yes, they both were useless, though, weren't they? So maybe that 's why there weren't many. They both were failures, the poor devils. They can't help it, some of them are just useless.

MRS P: I don't think I ever knew anyone else English, but those two <sup>families,</sup> did you?

FP: I knew another one, Fred Taylor, wasn't it? At Cooma. He was English.

KH: But at the head level there were - I mean, the boss was a New Zealander.

MRS P: Hudson was a New Zealander.

KH: And some of the other engineers were.

Frank Pirchmoser

MRS P: Yes, Barry Chatfield would have been one of the few Australians, wouldn't he?

FP: No, there were quite <sup>a</sup> few.

Mrs P: Well, half and half.

KH: It seems at the administration level there were a lot of English-speaking people.

FP: Well, they would have to. You have to. You can't afford foreigners with an accent in administration. And the same - when we were in Sydney with an Italian company, 99 per cent <sup>Italian,</sup> but the administration, the office, the telephone, the switchgirl, and all these, they were all Australian. They have to converse in proper English in business. They can't afford to have somebody that doesn't get the meaning of things, even though they speak perfectly, like some people, they have a perfect command of English, but they don't understand it, it 's strange. They mouth it like a parrot, but they don't know what it means. And you can't have that.

KH: But you feel that the SMA really looked after you. Because, see, there was a lady called Mona Ravenscroft, who wrote a book called 'Men of the Snow Mountains' back in the sixties, and she says in there that the SMA was a hidebound, rigid, repressive and authoritarian set-up. Apparently the employees had no right of appeal, and had to live according to what head office decided for them.

MRS P: I would say that was wrong, wouldn't you, inaccurate.

FP: To some extent, it 's right. But these people have no idea of authority.

KH: She was a writer - - -

MRS P: Did she live - - -?

KH: Well, I don't know exactly.

MRS P: I have never heard of her.

KH: Yes, she wrote this book.

Frank Pirchmoser

MRS P: We've got quite a few of them. We've got - - -

FP: Well, these are not representative of the Snowy, they were just men of the Snowy, or something like that, stockmen and all this. Well, one of your books.

MRS P: Well, I will just give you an example of the Authority, for one instance. We were moving from Cooma to Talbingo. We were fortunate, every time we moved they'd paint out the house. And you could choose from - maybe five colours. It didn't suit me, so I went over there and saw Tom Judge, you remember, and I said, "Now, look, if I buy the paint, what I want in my kitchen, will you put it on?" Yes, <sup>they did.</sup> So rules were meant to be bent, aren't they, or broken, or whatever.

FP: But they didn't do that all the time either.

MRS P: Another funny case - maybe I should not say. Do you remember I had very rough concrete tubs at Cooma? Very rough, you know, and they'd snag the clothes. And I knew they wouldn't replace them until they were .....  
(end of tape)

Frank Pirchmoser

KH: Oh, don't you? All right.

MRS P: Oh, Joe Blow - I can't remember his name, which is unusual for me, I really can't - and I said, "My tubs are broken." He said, "What happened?" I said, "What do you think? I jumped in them." And I had. I just thought, I'll keep going and going and going. He thought that was a huge joke. What was his name? Hungarian fellow.

KH: Did the SMA take kindly, if you made suggestions as to how things could be improved or better work practices?

FP: Well, I believe they did. I never put the ideas in. But they had <sup>a</sup> suggestion scheme, whereby people got bonuses, money out of them. One that comes to my mind now, is at one stage, with station waggons, the safety net between the person area, bench seat, and the luggage compartment. And they started fitting up those nets similar to what Volvos have now. And somebody, I believe, got \$500 - it must have been for that. And suggestions like this. As I say, I never had any. So obviously they took advice - yes, that was it. There are always people who don't, sort of, get along with management, somehow. In every company, always <sup>have</sup> sour grapes or an axe to grind for some reason, maybe because for some reason just don't <sup>get</sup> on and maybe a person like that didn't get on and reported his shortcomings. It's possible. But I'm sure that the majority of people are agreeing with what I say.

MRS P: For instance, when we were at Cabramurra, you could have been transferred to Khancoban, you didn't want it. Well, he wasn't forced to go. You could have been, couldn't you?

FP: Yes, that is right.

MRS P: You weren't forced to go. They could have said, "Well, you are going, and that's it."

KH: Yes, that's right.

MRS P: Frank said, "I don't want to go," so they sent Max....., you remember?



FP: Yes. Well, I could have stayed there at Cabramurra during the day, but I was there about 6, 6 and a half years, and I thought, oh well, I want to move somewhere else.

KH: You lived at Talbingo then.

FP: No, Cooma.

MRS P: Talbingo was last.

KH: And how long did you spend in Talbingo?

FP: January '71 until '74, April '74.

MRS P: He could have still been there if he wanted to. But he requested to finish.

FP: You see, another thing which knocks that statement on the head, is really I had about three years' notice of retrenchment.

KH: That 's pretty good.

FP: I was still actually - it 's a disadvantage, because it's too early to find another job. You cannot say, "Please, if I am successful in this job, could you keep it for about three years for me?" Things like that. It has disadvantages and advantages, in some respects. Some people left straightaway, of course, and I hung on.

KH: '74 was practically the end, wasn't it?

FP: I still remember in Cooma, I was, when I got the letter, and then I finished off in Talbingo. I had an extension, I think, actually.

MRS P: And then they still wanted you to stay on, I remember, but you declined.

KH: I want to ask you a few more general sort of questions. You think that it was a good idea to direct the waters of the Snowy through the mountains and out west for irrigation?

FP: Well, of course. Or it runs into the ocean and goes to waste. And they need water inland. It 's much cheaper than towing icebergs from Antarctica, isn't it? As somebody suggested. They say it has become feasible now, with present technology, to tow icebergs to cities like Adelaide, where they have acute water

shortage there apparently.

KH: No, it 's just that - they now have problems with irrigation too, with the salt, salt rising to the surface, and areas becoming impossible for farming for crops now. So these are things that you don't necessarily discover whilst the Scheme is being built.

FP: That 's right, yes. Yes, but now they are finding crops that are resistant to salt, too.

KH: The crops?

FP: Yes. They are doing quite well, now. Wheat and all kind of things, that are salt resistant.

KH: Is that right?

FP: Yes. we saw it on 'Countrywide', I think. And I see Israel has that problem too. They have been doing quite well.

KH: But they have more a form of drip irrigation, I think. It 's when you irrigate and you raise the whole water level, ground water, I think, that 's when you have the worst problem.

FP: Probably yes. They waste a lot, too, that way. They could probably, if they would not waste so much - see the Australian farmer is an uneducated, ignorant bloke as a whole. He ..lives.. off the land, doesn't want to <sup>put</sup> any money back. If they would waste less water, they could use more for the rest, develop new canals, or so. They haven't built a single canal here, yet. They are all over Europe, canals, for the same purpose, communication and water supply. They could do much more and utilise the water to better effect. But they just do it the easy way. Let it flood everywhere and then when they think they have had enough, turn it off again.

KH: But you certainly feel that the Snowy Scheme was a good thing even though, I mean, on one hand it was quite an impact on the environment, in that valleys were flooded; there were roads went in; tracks, power lines especially, they cut down a lot of trees; some of the rivers are almost dead, at least for a short length, because there 's no more water flowing down them.

You would feel that - well, you feel that that was worth it in terms of the benefits elsewhere?

FP: Yes, there wouldn't have been any other benefits because nobody would have gone there to look at these *dumps*, ... some bushes cut, there is nothing to look at. It would have been so far out, there wouldn't have been roads leading there anyway. You would have needed to walk for a week to get there. I don't know about Tasmania, I haven't been there myself. Obviously from pictures, it 's much more beautiful than the Snowy.

KH: Where 's that?

FP: Tasmania, .....places like this. But there is no place anywhere on the Snowy that 's as nice as that. It would not have been worth saving. So flooding it, it 's only the farmers who owned land there who complained. Because apparently they didn't get enough compensation, so they say. But otherwise, beauty-wise, there 's no loss. And other - water-wise, there is the flooding again. And as I say, even for bushwalkers, it takes you a week to walk there, there wouldn't have been roads there, either. They are specially built for construction. And then even they have been closed since, many of them, except the dirt tracks, <sup>remain.</sup> So there is definitely a gain and no loss whatsoever.

KH: Do you think that the Scheme could be built today, in today's climate, with opposition groups, and so on? Do you think that such a Scheme would get off the ground today?

MRS P: But there was trouble, wasn't there, originally?

FP: Well, I don't know. You see, I was relatively new in the country, and I didn't know about the politics, so I could not compare the times.

MRS P: But I would say there would be trouble.....

FP: I couldn't say. I reckon today's politicians would be incapable of organising something like this - I think so. Again, I didn't know the politicians in those days, see. I was only here a few years, fairly new in the country. But they had

technical problems then, and perhaps now they would have them too. You see, Eucumbene Dam, which was the first in the Scheme, was started off by the Sydney - what was it called now - New South Wales Works Department, I think.

KH: Or was it Water Conservation and Irrigation?

FP: Could be that too. But some mob, and they couldn't complete it all. They had some real serious problems. That was before the Snowy was started, anyhow. And the Snowy completed it then. And they also build it at the wrong spot, or they started building it at a different spot at the beginning. And by the way, you can see that when you fly over it, it 's obvious. And another place is Murray Two power station, too. They started excavating at the wrong place.

KH: Did they?

FP: You fly over and you see that funny tip where they started. And then half a kilometre further east, I suppose, that is where the present one is.

KH: I think I 've driven there. Yes, the lower one.

FP: Yes, only a few kilometres from Khancoban.

KH: Yes.

FP: It 's in a trench, the power station 's in a trench. And before you get in there - maybe one isn't aware on the road, but from the aeroplane you will see it as clear as anything.

KH: Do you think - I mean, the Scheme was sort of a post-war thing. It attracted migrants from all over the place. do you think that it was one of the foundation stones of the New Australia, if you like, the new multi-cultural Australia? So many people, so many thousands of people came through.

MRS P: Well, I would say so.

KH: The first thing they knew about Australia was the Snowy Mountains, in a sense, and the work they did there, was sort of the gateway through. And then they moved on elsewhere.

FP: Yes.

MRS P: A terrible lot are in Canberra.

Frank Pirchmoser

KH: Yes.

MRS P: Was your father on the Snowy Scheme?

KH: No.

MRS P: Oh, he wasn't. KH: Like, I 'm asking more about the place of the Scheme in our sense of national identity, or in the post-war reconstruction.

MRS P: Well, it was the start, wasn't it, really, of migration to Australia from overseas, from Europe.

KH: Well, it was a big phase. There had been migrations before, but this was a particularly big one.

MRS P: Well, they were enlisting people from Europe, weren't they? *You know that? For the Snowy Scheme.*

FP: Like Jennings did, the Snowy did the same.

MRS P: They went to Europe. We had several people - - -

KH: The Jennings building firm.

FP: Yes, the Snowy, they had what, 700 or something, German carpenters or something. Or 1300, I don't remember. Somebody wrote a book about it - for Jennings here in Canberra, to build government houses. The Snowy did the same. They recruited them there and then and brought them over. Paul Schröder was one of them.

MRS P: And you know we met - I cannot think of his name, the friend of Nicole's, that German guy.

FP: Oh yes, yes. A few hundred of them. But anyway, well, I don't know really. I haven't thought about it. I don't feel nationalistic like that, you know. Perhaps it gave Australian industry confidence, that it could be done here. They, in future, might build a similar project of that size, as they say on these BHP ads, Northwest Shelf- what do they say - it is three times the size of the Snowy Mountains Scheme or whatever. Whatever that size means. You know, you can twist statistics anyway you like. And so maybe that was the beginning, because that was the first large project built here, wasn't it?

KH: I think so.

Frank Pirchmoser

FP: It took a lot of design planning, design, and all this, to get it altogether. And mind you, all the early design was done by the United States Bureau of Reclamation. I have seen the drawings there. I worked on the drawings still, from the United States Bureau, and Tennessee Valley Authority - what was it now - they run the Niagara Falls power station, and all that too. It is the Tennessee Valley Authority, I think they call themselves. They designed Happy Jack's Dam .....were designed by them.

MRS P: You've probably still got the maps, see, Frank is a great map collector.

FP: Oh, the maps. I am talking about the design, the civil design and all that, and specifications. But the Snowy didn't even bother changing the titles of it. It's still there like that. Just the stamp: "SMA". "Property of SMA" on it.

KH: So that was the original big technical input?

FP: Yes. That started it off, because obviously they were incapable here. And apparently they have similar schemes there, and they might have been copies, just a few alterations of dimensions, perhaps.

KH: Yes, the Snowy Scheme, I think, helped to launch Thiess Brothers.

FP: Yes.

KH: That was an Australian firm.

FP: That's right.

MRS P: Thiess is originally from Brisbane. One of his sons was killed on the Snowy Scheme.

KH: How was he killed?

MRS P: A freak accident. He was standing, wasn't he, on a hill, and what came and hit him?

FP: They were blasting, or something, a rock or something.

MRS P: A tree. Thiess originated in Yeronga in Brisbane.

FP: But about Thiess, I mean, you come to speak to various people employed there, you go together on the bus or somewhere.

And a major contract supervisor, he was supervising, I think, the rock fill, because Thiess had a particular contractor, and instead of giving him the ..... they have all that old World War Two yank army junk trucks they bought up cheap, and they were still running them, and they were breaking down all the time and they couldn't fulfil their quotas. You see they couldn't keep up with the contract. They had to deliver so many thousand yards of dirt here and there, and the inspectors were checking up on them, and he said he was fed up with them. And anyway, I know for sure they got another contract after that, so they must have kept up with their quotas.

KH: I've generally finished with questions. I can have a look at some photographs. But I just have a couple more. Can I ask each of you what was your best experience and what was your worst experience, if you can - Can you single out -? I mean, you may not be able to single out anything at all.

MRS P: All in all, I liked living - it was a good life, I'd say, on the Snowy, all in all, wouldn't you?

KH: What was the worst thing that happened to you?

MRS P: Nothing bad, I don't think, happened, that I can think of. You were in hospital once, but I mean, - one of the children fractured a ligament skiing, and one broke an arm. But, I mean, you couldn't say it was a terribly bad experience, could you, really? Nothing traumatic, really.

FP: Well, to me, nothing ever happens, good or bad. Life is one big bore.

KH: Big bore?

FP: Yes, bore.

KH: Now you're being facetious.

MRS P: Yes, very. No, I'd say they were good years, really.

FP: No, you can't think back and say, blah, blah, blah, you know. It's living in the past, isn't it? Better things are ahead.

KH: Good, thank you very much.

[Looking at photos]

MRS P: That, for instance, was our house, winter 1964. Now, under that flag was buried a car, and it stayed there all winter. And the flag was there so that the snowcats wouldn't - - -

FP: The snow plough, wouldn't damage it, right?

MRS P: It was a darn nuisance, of course, when the snow melted the roof of the car was completely scratched to pieces from - people used to ski over the top. That's just after a blizzard. That looks like the same photo of the house. That's the mess; the recreation hall.

KH: Have you any photos of you at work or - - -

MRS P: Clearing the roof of the mess. That's .....group control centre.

FP: Oh, there's one there, somewhere.

MRS P: They were painting it, you can see they were painting it the previous summer.

FP: Painting it?

MRS P: Yes, look at all the different colours. Obviously, it was in the process of being painted, Frank, it never looked like that.

FP: You can't tell me - - -

MRS P: Yes, of course.

KH: You mean to say the cracks were - - -

MRS P: Yes, they were painting it. And they never finished it before winter.

FP: I don't recall that. Yes, the fellows are up there shovelling the snow off the roof.

MRS P: The garage after it had been cleared. Frank and a friend did it three times and each time - - -

FP: That's the back of the house where we were, there.

MRS P: That's the house, from the top of the Land Rover.

KH: This is all '64?

MRS P: Yes. This is the school. That's the street sign, but that's the school.

FP: Isn't that the school door?

MRS P: No, that 's the corner.

FP: That 's from work, there. Yes, that 's the guy, Norm O'Neill(?) and myself, that 's at the Cabramurra diesel power station. And do you see the fence, the top of the fence, 6 foot fence here? You see, it 's just the top sticking out. The rest is all flat snow.

MRS P: It 's not you, it 's the guy who found the wombat.

FP: Oh yes, that 's right. I took the photo.

MRS P: I can't think of his name, not that it matters.

KH: What a contrast. And I just noticed <sup>Wombat?</sup> wombat, oh my God! That 's Australia all over, isn't it?

MRS P: That 's right. That 's slightly higgledy-piggledy, by the look of it. Frank always built a nice snowman. In fact we used to have Pioneer buses come and stop. See here? Always a beauty. Photos are a bit messy.

FP: Well, they 're better than yours, aren't they? Yours are all floating around in a pillow case. No, Lisa gave me a photo album, don't you remember?

FP: Yes, but you haven't stuck them in. That 's work.

Mrs P: Jindabyne.

FP: Yes, that 's during commissioning testing. Oh that 's - the pipe collapsed.

KH: This is just below that surge tank?

FP: Yes. That 's three quarter inch high tensile steel, that is. And that was two weeks before the official opening - -

MRS P: See the big boss scratching his head.

FP: That is Wally Shellshear - I don't know if you know him. He was the president of the Model Railways Society here, he was. I don't know, I think he died since.

MRS P: Funny, you are so correct with your spelling, I mean, after writing manuals, and you have got 'collapsed' with one 'l'. That hits me in the eye every time.

KH: Wally Shellshear - I think I rang him up some weeks ago.

FP: Yes, that 's Jindabyne. That 's from the aeroplane.

MRS P: Yes, Cooma East in the foreground. Cooma from the air.

FP: Maybe there is something else in front there.

MRS P: Oh here, Pretty Plain Hut. Frank would have a lot of hut photos.

FP: There are a few more Jindabyne ones.

KH: Yes, that 's Jindabyne, but these are Austria. I would be quite interested in anything of that era, especially from the mountains. Any photos of you fishing or shooting?

MRS P: There 's a nice one of Cabramurra to Kiandra cross-country ski race 1971; Tuross Falls.

KH: They were taken with an old Rollei ..... or something, were they?

MRS P: A Voigtlander.

FP: A Voigtlander. I 've still got it.

KH: I notice the square format.

FP: Yes, 120.

KH: The Voigtlander has a 120 film too?

FP: Yes.

MRS P: Here is some of the alps.

KH: Oh, <sup>this is Grey Mare,</sup> there 's Grey Mare Hut.

FP: There is where the Southern Cloud crashed.

MRS P: Oh yes, the Southern Cloud, 1965. And that 's when a swan went to Cabramurra, landed in the neighbour's yard.

KH: That 's a pretty rare photo. You don't get vehicles - you 're not even allowed to spit in the <sup>Jagungal</sup> wilderness anymore, let alone drive a car to Grey Mare Hut.

MRS P: That 's <sup>in</sup> 65.

KH: Yes. My God, that is sacrilege now.

MRS P: See, the Snowy discovered the wreckage of the Southern Cloud.

FP: No, the guy was employed with the contractors.

MRS P: Oh, I 'm sorry, he was. That 's right.

FP: And during the lunch break he went out to take photos and - - -

MRS P: But I mean, you can still thank the Snowy for it, because he was with one of the subcontractors.

FP: Yes, but it wouldn't matter if they never found it.

MRS P: Oh no, but I suppose it is nice to know that that 's where it ended.

KH: Yes. Oh yes, it 's a major event in terms of the history of the region, I suppose.

MRS P: There 's Karl, our son, with his first rabbit.

KH: Any of you - oh this is - I see - near Adaminaby.

MRS P: That 's our son. That 's his first gun. That 's going back a few years - that 's a nice fish that he caught at five and a half years old. That would have been at Tantangara . There was some nice fish at Talbingo.

FP: Oh yes.

KH: I haven't seen any of you yet.

FP: I used to take the photos. Oh, these are Tumut <sup>Pond</sup> Dam,

.....

MRS P: There would be some of you in there, probably. These are old ones, Frank - where is it?

FP: These are various ones along the Khancoban-Cabramurra Road - just little dams. It 's written there, anyway, Junction Shaft.

KH: Oh yes, I 've been there in winter. Yes, I 've skied down to there.

MRS P: And the bridge was blown up, I can remember, the day after that photo, do you remember here?

FP: Jindabyne, yes. Just wait, one at a time.

KH: Oh, I've got shots just like <sup>those of</sup> me and my brothers and sisters. That 's all Austria, Austria. They're nice prints.

MRS P: They are, aren't they?

KH: Yes. They have kept very well. Sometimes old prints like this go yellow because they're not fixed properly. But these are really good. Did you do these yourself?

FP: No.

KH: Oh, there 's that one again. I am quite fascinated by that. The forces at work must have been incredible.

FP: We have an eyewitness there, an eyewitness account. There was an Italian subcontractor just building the wall up on top there. It 's not there now, I would think. It 's there now, at the time it wasn't there, this wall where they have the plaques. And he was just working there when it happened. And, well, there was an emergency shutdown in the power station. I was operating the ...craft(?) and according to him, he said, "She went this way and she went that way, and then she stayed that way." Like a beer can apparently, it went in and out a few times and then it stayed that way.

KH: Incredible. And this suggests that you really need a surge tank which is as long as this, even with this - I mean, this seems to be just a memorial more than anything else.

FP: No, well, it maybe, well, doubles this one. But the reason for that was that the pipe is reduced in diameter, going in there, you can't see it, just after the fault, it is narrowing down, and that caused the restriction, to prevent enough air from being inhaled. You see, the water goes up and down and up and down all the time, especially during start-up. And then on shut-down, the water rushed madly back, and it didn't allow it to flow in quickly enough through the orifice, through the narrowing, and that caused a partial vacuum and sucked the pipe in. And they put empty vacuum valves in the sections there after this, of course. Apparently it happened in Murray One when they tested it, too. They had the same trouble. You see a hole in there? Just like a beer can, it breaks in the corner always, just in there.

KH: Amazing. I wouldn't have believed it if you'd told me. But I've seen it now. Anything else in here that's Snowy? Oh, there's - Cabramurra to Kiandra cross-country.

FP: Tuross Falls. That's a fire look-out at Black Jack, I think, isn't it?

MRS P: Big Talbingo.

KH: I've never been there. That's a dramatic view. I must try to get there. Oh, Buddong Falls, yes.

FP: A few Talbingo ones there.

MRS P: Karl and his trout.

FP: Oh, here are a few. Yes, well, we had a party there, you see. We are pretty well under the weather. We worked closely together with the Japanese, because they were the supplier of the equipment, Toshiba and Mitsubishi. And the Japanese, of course, they like their photos, click, click, click.

KH: Yes, that is right.

FP: Gee, those colours are ghastly, aren't they?

MRS P: Shocking.

FP: I don't know if they turned that way or if they always were that bad.

MRS P: I would think so. I would say it's the developing, actually.

FP: It's all blue. Here are a few more. I took the Japanese around to the older power station where we were in Talbingo. They didn't <sup>know</sup> then that we had others.

MRS P: That's a boat that Frank built.

KH: This is a bit of - like a mystery hunt for me, because I never know what people have got.

MRS P: No. One big mess - - -

KH: Until I look through it and suddenly I see something that interests me.

FP: Yes. Well, the same for me, really. I haven't looked through it for long years.

MRS P: The launching of the boat. Lisa in her dirndl.

FP: Her kilt, yes. No, I have seen it all, I reckon.

MRS P: I like <sup>that</sup> photo of Frank up there. Our son took it. And also he did one in colour, didn't he? But the colour doesn't look as good as the sepia.

KH: Have you got that in smaller - in here somewhere?

MRS P: Yes, in colour. Oh no, no. I've got it in colour, smaller. It's not nearly as good. It looks better in the sepia. He developed a very large one. I never saw it, did you?

FP: No.

MRS P: Half the size of the door, he said, blew it up.

KH: That's a wedge-tail eagle, isn't it?

FP: Yes, <sup>near Adaminaby, I think, we shot that one.</sup> It attacked us.

KH: Really?

FP: Yes. We were shooting rabbits there and - Karl and I - there were rabbits everywhere. You know, sometimes you go to these paddocks on the farms, they are just one hole after another, and you fire one shot and the country is alive, like in the old days before myxomatosis. That was one of these places. And we were walking along there after the first few shots, there were all the holes, and all of a sudden shshsh - it clipped me by the ear, it went between the two of us. And I had the combination shotgun rifle, and I let him have it with the shotgun after being so cheeky.

KH: It must have had a nest nearby. It must have been wanting to protect something. I'd be interested in copying one of those. Can I take that out of there and borrow it?

MRS P: It's written on the back, there you are, February 1968.

KH: Terrific. The collection of photos that Cynthia Richards - Cynthia, Bill Patrick's daughter, still had, was all in a brown bag, and she just sort of dropped it on the table and the corners were bent. I got the best out of them but they weren't very well looked after.

MRS P: I can well imagine.

FP: A pity.

KH: Which is a pity, yes. There were some others in here.

MRS P: But these are pretty good for 68.

KH: I'll say, they're terrific.

MRS P: But I have got a feeling you always used to get them developed - not Kodak - what was the other roll name, you would always get - - -

FP: Ilford.

MRS P: It might be marked on the back.

KH: Very good, these are very good.

MRS P: I know we used always to go to a certain chemist who used - - -

FP: It says Kodak paper.

MRS P: That's Kodak. But I know you didn't - you never bought Kodak films, that's what it was.

FP: No, Ilford I always bought. <sup>matters,</sup> It's the paper that, not the film.

KH: But you haven't got the negatives any more?

FP: No.

MRS P: No, I would say, about five, ten years ago, you had a big clean up and - - -

FP: I have a few negatives, but I am too lazy to look at them. Some of the really good photos, I kept some negatives, the really good ones, I thought.

KH: That one's stuck in, I think. <sup>FP:</sup> Because that is our collection.

KH: My word. You never know, there might be someone else - - -

FP: We might get some money out of it.

KH: Yes. They're terrific. I mean, that's a marvellous collection there.

MRS P: Beautifully developed there. They were done in Cooma.

KH: A nice cream in that paper.

MRS P: Aren't they lovely old buildings?

FP: That's a beautiful photo of that boulder, isn't it?

MRS P: Wonderful, Frank.

KH: You have got to look through all that. <sup>That's Grey Mare Hut but</sup> that's stuck in too. Leave it otherwise. I mean, I do have photos of Grey Mare Hut, but that one's just so unusual because it's got a VW there.

MRS P: I have got a feeling, Frank, that that's in something else.

KH: Now, there were some colour ones back here of you with those Japanese guys.

MRS P: ... I was just going to show you - yes, that's the SMA office in 1961. It's a bit different now.

KH: Oh, right.

FP: That's the same still, isn't it?

MRS P: No, I meant the surroundings are different.

KH: Yes, they are now putting up the new building on the other side.

MRS P: Kiandra '61.

FP: Cabramurra. That's the old township on the hill. Are these the only photos of Cabramurra?

MRS P: There might be, I think, a couple more. No, they're army ones. That's when we first went to Cabramurra.

FP: That's from the plane.

MRS P: Upper Tumut .....station.

KH: There is Perisher.

MRS P: That's our house, the first house we lived in in the process of being moved. That's how they used to move them.

FP: Cut them in half and away they go. That's <sup>Duke's</sup> Cottage there.

MRS P: It's still there. And these are the stairs from the first houses.

KH: That would keep your legs fit and heart pumping.



Frank Pirchmoser

MRS P: Carrying a pram up and down - I think that 's all.

KH: Oh, there 's Round Mountain... No black and whites of you at work?

FP: No.

KH: You 're a bit like my father. He was always behind the camera. Lots of photos of us, but -

FP: I 'm a bit camera shy.

MRS P: That ridge was blown up the next day or the next week.

KH: At Jindabyne, yes. Is that you?

FP: Yes, and the two offsprings.

KH: That 's quite a good one, in its historical setting. ...

MRS P: They 're only of the children at Cabramurra. ...

KH: There 's a photo of you.

MRS P: That 's when they were both in .....  
Well, actually she was out of it. One of them was out of it, and we just put it on for the photo, I can remember.

KH: Can I borrow that one?

MRS P: That 's old, heavens above.

KH: Yes, well, it 's sort of - and that one of Jindabyne, the earlier one at the Jindabyne bridge. ~~MRS P:~~ That would have been - I can tell you the year if you want it. Lisa is 25 and she was 6 then, so 19 years ago, isn't it?

FP: But it 's recorded, anyway, when the bridge was demolished.

MRS P: Oh yes, it would be.

KH: 19 years ago, so, 1967... Sorry, it's Karl on the left, is it?

MRS P: Karl with the car, yes.

KH: Can I put it on the back?

MRS P: Yes.

KH: Left to right: Karl, Frank, Lisa, Pirchmoser, at Jindabyne. Yes, that must have been just before it <sup>was</sup> blown up.

FP: Yes, I remember seeing it on television, the 109 Construction Squadron, which was the Snowy accompaniment of CMF then.

Frank Pirchmoser

They had a practice run and blew it.

MRS P: While you 've got your pen in your hand I suppose we might as well get your autograph in your book. How does that sound?

KH: Oh yes, that 's easy.

MRS P: I have got so many - might as well, Lisa bought it for her father.

KH: Yes, why not?

MRS P: You see, Frank's book, you wouldn't want to autograph manuals, would you?

KH: It wouldn't be appropriate.

MRS P: No. I mean, he wouldn't. If I remember, she had trouble getting that book. Where did she buy it? The Canberra Times. Were you selling them from the Canberra Times?

KH: Yes, they had a special.

MRS P: That 's right. I can remember. Was it Christmas she bought it? Yes, it must have been <sup>the</sup> year it came out, was it?

KH: Yes, that 's right. It 's now only in paperback... That's just about - that 's pretty good. I have got some of your recreation activities.

FP: But that 's not me, mind you.

KH: No, no, that 's your son.

MRS P: Yes. But, I mean, there is none of you, is there?

FP: No.

KH: They 're the sort of shots of the Snowy you didn't take because they weren't interested in that sort of thing.

MRS P: ... Here 's one of him standing - oh, that 's terrible, anyhow, with glasses on. That 's only last year.

FP: You see, that 's why I didn't take photos of myself. Jan says it 's terrible.

MRS P: That 's the best one of Frank, the one Karl took.

KH: You haven't got a small one of that, though?

MRS P: Yes, only in colour.

KH: Yes, but that can be - I wouldn't mind having a look

at that one. And do you mind signing - - -

FP: I did sign.

KH: Oh, you have already. Great - 3 November, I am a bit late, aren't I?

FP: Yes, I thought you would never come.

KH: Oh no, I just had other people to interview and other things came in the way.

MRS P: That 's one of our dogs behind the tree.

FP: That 's on Mount Tintangara, near Kiandra there. ...

KH: Yes, I 've been very busy doing some interviews and also trying to finish this other book, you see, this book of long journeys. So it takes a while to get around to everybody.

FP: Yes, of course.

MRS P: That 's another one. -- I like the snow on the trees here. Everyone looks for something different. Typically Australian, isn't it?

KH: Oh yes. Where 's that? Where is that little place?

FP: That is also up there, at Mount Tintangara.

KH: Oh that 's Tintangara Hut.

FP: They call it Harvey's Hut. That 's one name.

KH: Harvey Palfrey, yes. He 's the guy who is supposed to have built that, I think.

FP: Yes.

MRS P: Oh, Harvey Palfrey. We could tell you some tales about him. What was it, the Holy - what do you call those holy coins he used to put in - was it the phone box, or something, when his phone got cut off at Kiandra. You 've heard some tales about Harvey Palfrey, or we have, haven't we?

KH: Did you meet him? Yes, he was around, wasn't he?

MRS P: Yes, of course. And Fountains Lodge. Have you heard of Fountains? They used to own the lodge there. I can't think of their names.

FP: Fountains, wasn't it?

MRS P: Yes, their Christian names - Fountains Lodge. Do you

remember it was there in our time? Great friends of .....

FP: Down at Delegate.

MRS P: Delegate or Dalgety?

FP: Delegate.

KH: ..... kept a dog in there. That 's pretty amazing.

FP: Yes, oh yes. He worked up there. He loved the snow.

MRS P: Was it Rudle?

FP: Yes.

KH: I don't think these will come up so well, copied from this. There 's too much contrast, I think to - - -

MRS P: If you wanted the negatives, Karl would still have them. It 's up to you. You 've probably got enough.

KH: Yes, well yes, I do.

MRS P: And besides, Tintangara isn't in the area that you are talking about, anyhow, is it?

FP: It is, Tintangara Dam.

KH: Oh yes. It is just that - yes, oh yes. Well, thank you very much. I think that might do for today.

FP: It was a long session.

KH: Yes.

FP: It is tiresome, just talking even, isn't it?

KH: After a while, yes, that is right.