

ERROL SCAMMELL - Interviewed by Klaus Hueneke, 5/3/1982.

This is an interview with Errol Scammell at his home in Corryong on the 5 March 1982. Errol has had a long association with the mountains, he was born in Khancoban 72 years ago. I first read about him in Elyne Mitchell's book, 'Australia's Alps' where she described journeys up Hannells Spur on horseback and then her setting off on skis as soon as they got to the snow and skied to the Chalet whilst Errol took the horses back. I've heard about Errol from various other people so it's good to finally get to meet him.

KH: If we could start Errol with the sequence of events at Geehi Flats. It seems from the various things you told me this morning and last night that you can virtually rattle off the whole series of events there in terms of white man being in that area. You were saying that the first hut was in ... ?

ES: 1887. Harry Tyr_ell lived there with his wife and children.

KH: He was the selector?

ES: No, Bears was the first, down at Bears Flat, he would have taken it up if he could of, but it was already taken up. His brother Frank took up Franks. They built a hut up Geehi Creek which was burnt down...

KH: This is Tyr_ell?

ES: Yes, and the chap that burnt it down, we made him build another one. He built the other one, well then the Tyr_ell boys built a hut down on Franks, which later Nankervis' shifted in its natural state too, down on to the river.

KH: When you say up on the bank, like ...

ES: Between two creeks it came down, straight up towards the road.

KH: Above the landing strip?

ES: Into the left. There's a fence that runs up - is it still there? A fence runs from the river under the hill and back into the river!

KH: It could do.

ES: It's about a 100 yards to the right of that - Nankervis' - it was too far from water. You'd have to carry water 80-100 yards. Why they built it there nobody ever knew.

KH: All those people went up this way, they went up from down Khancoban way.

ES: Yes. The Tyr_ells - well I didn't know he'd selected it that long and he sold it to Nankervis' in 1923. They didn't know anything about the bush at all.

Errol Scammel

KH: They came from out west somewhere didn't they?

ES: No over here, up here at , their families are still there. When they split up - they bought Geehi - I helped them in with their first lot of cattle, then they bought Groggin and I worked for them for a good many years. Arthur sold out to the other two boys and bought Bringenbrong Jim told you all this I suppose?

KH: He told me a few things.

ES: Then Jim of course and Ken got their father's land and one decided to take the low country here and Jim took the Groggin country - he'd tell you that. They tossed to see which one would take which. Then Jim sold out to the Snowy authorities. They bought Jack Reid's out - they finished up they owned all of Geehi.

KH: They bought that Bear Flat area too!

ES: They bought it early in the piece. He bought that - I never knew anybody else, I just said to Jim - Tyr_ell who - I said, 'Why didn't your father select Bears Flat or some of the good country'. He said 'Because it was already taken up' - that's in 1887. I said, 'A bloke called Bears' and he said 'Yes'. Then Harry Tyr_ell bought him out and his brother Frank took up the other side, he had the lot of it. They used to run about 300 head of cattle through there in the good times. The lease country - the Bogong Creek was better country then than the flats, they used to run a terrible lot of cattle up in that Bogong Creek, well it got no good at all.

KH: What happened to it?

ES: Well none of the bush was any good after the '39-'40 fires. Harry Tyr_ell at one time bought 300 bullocks up north somewhere and he didn't want them to eat out his flats so he put them up the Geehi Creek and he got me to go in there every day for a week and take a bag of salt in and make sure they stopped on this - it run the 300 herd of cattle up in there until such times

[Interruption]

KH: You were talking about how the country went bad.

ES: Yes, after the '39-'40 fires all that country between Geehi and Khancoban - the Penders and Bringenbrong used to run hundreds of cattle through there - it burnt it out and it was never any good after - there's no cattle run there now.

KH: It's all National Park now.

ES: Yes, I know, but there's been no cattle run there since then, since about 1940, in that bush country. In my father's time, between Geehi and Khancoban was all open country, there were no trees on it.

KH: Really.

Errol Scammel

ES: If you look through that country, when you're going through there, it's all young - well it wouldn't be young now - but in my time they were all young trees.

KH: You mean over Geehi walls and through there ...

ES: To Geehi wall back to Khancoban, down through there to Waterfall Farm, that was all open country.

KH: Where Clews had his place?

ES: Yes. There's an old hut just above Clews, there's an old hut there - I would say a chap called Bill Barry squatted there, one of the first settlers coming to Khancoban and I'd imagine in my time it was an old hut and I'd imagine that's where he lived.

KH: Because there's a lot of fruit trees around there.

ES: Clews put them in.

KH: Oh did he.

ES: But up the ground in that cleared area there was an old hut, in my young days. Dad told me that that country was all open - it's all freehold you know - that's country's taken up in blocks. There's about 3,000 acres of freehold country there and the same across the river in Youngal, that was all freehold. Goldsworthys bought it from Bringenbrong and Galbraith bought it from Goldsworthys and it cost them 20 pounds an acre to have it cleared - there's a beautiful station there now - that's on the other side of the river above Waterfall Farm.

KH: Oh above Waterfall Farm?

ES: Yes, on that side of the river. That was all drawn the same as this other - no good at all - after the fire, very poor.

KH: Around Clews, were there any other homesteads in there?

ES: No, no. That was just about 40 or 50 acres of clear country in my time - Back Creek they call it. They used to run the road from Khancoban straight through down the Geehi wall. Clews had a hut there where he used to - well it was a toll gate but more or less you had to get permission to go through - he was the bloke that issued the permits. Then he shifted up the creek and they built him a hut up there, or he built himself one and he lived there and planted fruit trees. I haven't been there for years.

KH: There's a hut with stone walls and there's one with - they started to add to it with mud ...

ES: Well up in there, I would imagine, there was this old hut that Bill Barry built - the first selection. That would be around about the 1850s - 60s. When the selections came up they opened up the free land on Khancoban

Errol Scammell

- my family were the first to take up selections there and Bill Barry and a bloke called Chapman - I'm wrong here. It was Chapman who was there and Bill Barry was in Groggin - you'll have to correct that. Bill Barry took up land in Groggin - the first squatter - back in about 1850 that would be. And Chapman and his wife came to Back Creek squatting. When the selection land came up they took up about 1100 acres where Mowatts are. My father - I could never understand this - my father used to sometimes call it Barrys and sometimes call it Chapmans - I only found that out the last few years.

KH: Who was the first one at Clews?

ES: Chapman.

KH: And from there they went on through to Geehi flats?

ES: Well I suppose Tyrells came then.

KH: That was Bears?

ES: Bears yes, he must have come to Geehi and took up - Tyr_{ell} took up where he was, this other land was already taken up.

KH: So Bears probably started in the 1870s or something like that?

ES: Harry Tyr_{ell} was there in 1887, so he might have been there any time before that.

KH: Do you reckon those flats were covered in timber originally?

ES: No.

KH: You reckon they were clear?

ES: Yes.

KH: Like frost hollows were they?

ES: I don't know what they were, but you see in Dad's time all that country right through Back Creek was clear, so that would be clear too. It would be just naturally cleared - no timber came on it.

KH: Unless the Aborigines did a lot of burning and so kept it back!

ES: I know by the trees in my young days, well the 20s and 30s, it was only saplings all over Back Creek. The first rabbit that my father ever saw in the district was up there, between Geehi and Khancoban.

KH: And then he saw a few more after that I bet.

ES: I'd reckon - kangaroos. That was like the first trout that was ever caught. My brothers and I caught it at Khancoban - the first trout and we didn't know what it was.

KH: So we have Bears, then Tyr_{ell}s, who came after ...

ES: Jack Reid, and my uncle Tom Scammell - that's the lot of them. This land that the syndicate built their hut on was Crown land and down that Round Flat was Crown land and the Long Flat right down was Crown land but Nankervis' had it leased - what they call the Long Flat. All that land

Errol Scammell

then from Bears Flat up the other way, was all selected.

KH: And whose was the hut that was down below Barlees?

ES: Jack Reid, that was the second hut built up there.

KH: That was a slab hut?

ES: Yes slabs and shingle roof.

KH: That would be Alpine ash I suppose?

ES: No, no mountain ash down that low, it would be built out of peppermint - there would be plenty of that there. I don't know why those flats were clear like that, there was a fair bit of that black thorn and rubbish along the rivers, but it grew up with tea tree and blackberries, got to the stage you couldn't travel from the lower end of Geehi up to Jack Reid's for blackberries.

KH: Were there blackberries there when you were a boy?

ES: The only blackberries that were there were across on Bears Flat just below Arthur Nankervis' hut, on the bank and they weren't the kind of blackberries that we grow nowadays, they were those little - real tough things to kill - they rooted everywhere. The other kind of blackberry grows high. Nankervis and Tyr_{ell}s always just salted them - chucked rock salt - the cattle kept them there. When Nankervis' got the place there was only blackberries there, there was none anywhere else in Geehi.

KH: The whole place is covered now.

ES: Yet Groggin had blackberries - there was more blackberries in Groggin but when the Snowy took it over it just got let go. That was the only spot in Geehi there was blackberries.

KH: Of the huts that are there now - there's five riverstone huts now, would you agree with Jimmy that the first one was probably the Commission, the one that's right down at the bottom, the first one that you come to on Round Flat?

ES: I think it would be, Bensons built it - Don and Rob.

KH: Oh the two of them?

ES: Yes I think so. See Don - when I left the syndicate at Waterfall Farm, Don Benson took it over, he looked after these people, we looked after them for years, these doctors and all these chaps from Melbourne and Sydney and all over the country. There was Sir Thomas Bevan, Sir Richard Stall, three or four doctors, the leading children's doctor in Melbourne Dr Stevens and Dr Morgely and Smith, Sir Harold Dew, he was a Professor at the University of Sydney - all these chaps, they bought this, there was about a dozen of them. Don Benson took that over and stopped there for a few years. I don't

Errol Scammell

know whether his brother actually built it or they did it together.

KH: Jimmy thought it was mainly Don Benson who built it.
 ES: I think it was Don and he had some chaps working - used to come with him - Shanley and Benson and his brother Rob used to work with him a bit.
 KH: Don and Rob!
 ES: Benson, they're Bensons.
 KH: One of them built Cascade hut and it wasn't the same one that built the riverstone huts.
 ES: That would be Rob I'd imagine. They had another friend of theirs, Jack Cox used to work with them - Nankervis' had him working for them.
 KH: This Shanley guy, what was his christian name?
 ES: Allan.
 KH: Was he related to Mick Shanley of Kiandra?
 ES: I don't think so. I don't know anything about the hut at Cascades because it was an old hut when I was there. I was there ahead of Bensons.
 KH: There was an old hut at the Cascades, when was that?
 ES: When I was there it would be in the early 30s.
 KH: Well this hut that's there today was built by Don in 1935 I reckon.
 ES: That could be right.
 KH: Then there was a hut there before that?
 ES: Oh yes, well I camped there in a hut with the Nankervis'.
 KH: But not with Jimmy!
 ES: Jimmy was never out there in my time, Jimmy was only a boy.
 KH: You went with his father?
 ES: I used to go with his father and then the boys, the Nankervis boys were never out there when I was there.
 KH: What was the hut like?
 ES: Just a pretty old hut.
 KH: Iron, or wood or slab?
 ES: I can't remember - I'd say it was built out of slab, they built everything out of slabs those days. A terrible lot of them built them this way - logs together and layed them one on top of the other - probably it was that - most of them were, easier to build.
 KH: There aren't many now though, there must have been originally quite a few, now there's only three or four.
 ES: When Don Benson left the syndicate up there, old Jack Reid lived just below him - he's one of the real old timers, he came here in about 1880 and he lived with Fred Scammell for a long time. He selected below the

Errol Scammell

syndicate's Waterfall Farm. Don Benson went down there and we sold Jack Reid a paddock - when the syndicate bought the 100 acres that went with the house, there was 260 acres outside of that and Jack Reid bought that off dad. My brother and I scrubbed it for him and he got us to leave a whole lot of sapling, beautiful string bark sapling, straight as anything. When Don got up there they were that big round, beautiful saplings and he cut them all down and made a hut out of them - a good hut too - I suppose it's still there - they wouldn't pull it down. He only had it rented I think - Don did or Jack Reid's nephew. Don lived there for a long time. I don't think he was there when he died, he could have been.
 KH: He was quite a builder by the sound of it.
 ES: He's the only chap I ever heard of - they must have just picked that up themselves, this stone building. He never ever did any other building.
 KH: It's not that easy.
 ES: No. They used to drag the stones out of the river on sleighs with horses and then they had to pack cement in there, they had to pack iron. That iron, we used to pack it in about six, probably could get it up to seven foot but mostly six foot lengths and we'd put bags of straw on the pack saddle, then put about - oh whatever you thought a horse could carry - 10 or 12 sheets on each side, put straps around it and just hang it on the side like that. It would be up nearly to the horse's ears. You had to have a horse that knew what he was doing because he couldn't put his head round.
 KH: A very quiet horse.
 ES: They got used to it, we never let them go, we used to lead them. They packed all that iron in that way.
 KH: Over the Geehi walls would be a bit tricky especially if it was wet!
 ES: Yes well when we used to go in - it was all down Geehi wall because that other road wasn't there. When it was wet the horse would slip a lot of the way, just skid down.
 KH: That would be a bit tricky with 20 sheets of iron on the back.
 ES: Nankervis' used to take 8-10 pack horses with salt and stuff. One horse one day crossing the river, just before he got to the river, he broke his leg - he went down and down and down the river and we managed to get him to the edge and get the pack off him, we just had to shoot him. Another day Nankervis' put a bridge across the river, just above their stone hut - this was before they had the stone hut. There was rocks on one side and they drilled a hole down in the rocks, put pins down in it and cemented it

Errol Scammel

there and put wires across. On the other side they put posts in and they only put the rails about that far apart - this is just an emergency - if you got stuck in a flood you could walk across over this. About where that happened one day, one of the pack horses was going up this steep face and he threw himself backwards and went down over the cliff and killed himself with the pack on him.

KH: So the first hut on Round Flat could have been the first one and then the next one apparently was the one as what we know as Keebles or Nankervis' with the big verandah and then apparently the third one was the syndicate hut in the scrub on the other side - I don't know what that is known as now.

ES: It would still be theirs. They don't use it - well nobody owns it, the Snowy took over all those huts. I thought the Nankervis hut might have been built before Arthur's hut.

KH: It might have been the first do you think?

ES: I didn't say it would be the first, they had the other huts they were probably satisfied with it - it's the best hut of the lot of them I think - up at Geehi - the landing strip.

KH: I don't know, I like the one on Round Flat, to stay in. The other one's a bit cold and open - up on the end of the landing strip. But apparently that was the last one.

ES: It's got a good big kitchen and a nice big bedroom and a back room for putting gear in and a bathroom.

KH: It's very bare now.

ES: Well I haven't been there for a few years.

KH: The one on Round Flat has still got bunks in it and mattresses and tables, bits of cutlery.

ES: They've probably spruced it up a bit.

KH: Well the youth hostel people had it for a while.

ES: Well I think you could probably say that would be pretty right - the Round Flat, then Arthur Nankervis' - what do you call it, Keebles?

KH: Yeah or Nankervis.

ES: Arthur built that, or him and his friends.

KH: Arthur Nankervis.

ES: Yes. Not because he owned any of it, he didn't own any of it at that time, he was at Bringinbrong.

KH: Don Benson wasn't involved in building that?

ES: He probably was, he built it, but Arthur Nankervis had it built.

Errol Scammel

KH: You call it Arthurs?

ES: Well we always called it Arthur Nankervis' hut. He used to take his friends up there quite a lot and they had it very well stocked, they were pretty comfortable I believe. I would imagine that would be near enough.

KH: And the fourth one was Nicholsons or what we now know as Dr Forbes!

ES: Well before any of those I built a hut for Nicholson up on Bears Flat, it got burnt down. On the river, right on the bend, just about opposite where Nankervis' hut is, in the bend there. I built them a hut there, just a hut, mountain slabs and things, put them up that way - it got burnt down. Then they had this stone hut built. Nankervis said he wanted to build a hut and they said if he built it on Bears there, if they came and got stranded they had a place to stop. That river comes up pretty quick. You could often go to bed at night and cross the river, the next morning you'd get up and couldn't cross it. The snow comes off in the day time and might rise by night. We found it got down at Khancoban, when it got down to there it would be the other way around - we could cross the river to go to school in the morning, you couldn't cross it when you were going home at night - it would hit there.

KH: In terms of dates - talking to Jimmy - he reckoned the first one would have been built 1945-46, towards the end of the war?

ES: That would be about right, because there was none of them built when I was there and I left up there in 1942.

KH: That's the last time you were up there?

ES: No, that's when I left and came in here to live.

KH: He said the hut on Round Flat was actually built for the Water Commission?

ES: That's right, they put a road around the hill, a steep road around the hill there. They surveyed all that country once for a weir you know. They were going to put a weir in - they probably will one day. I worked for them too - surveying it - right down through the Murray Gates there, right through to Khancoban, they surveyed the whole thing. There was a chap called Byles - he would know more about the Snowy Mountains than anybody.

KH: Not Baldur Byles?

ES: That's him.

KH: He died, he's dead now.

ES: He knew more - he lived at our place.

KH: He was a forester.

ES: Yes, when he came there he had a red beard. I struck him out

Errol Scammel

in - somewhere round the mountains - we went on a Snowy tour and I struck him out there. We got introduced to him and I said to him, 'I wouldn't have recognised you, actually it's the first time I've ever seen you' - he had a beard right down to here - Baldur was his name, Baldur Byles. He used to hire horses from us and he used to go up Geehi River and Geehi Creek, he'd leave his horse when he couldn't ride any further, hobble them out on the flats and walk the rest of it. He done the whole thing, he done a survey of the whole of that Geehi right through to Grey Mare and all through there and he told me that he found quite a few of the old maps incorrect.

KH: That would be probably right.

ES: He told me that. I had an argument with him about the lake on the other side of Kosciusko.

KH: Albina?

ES: Yes. I said to him 'That flows into this side'. He said, 'It couldn't because it's the other side of the Great Dividing Range'. I said, 'It flows into Geehi Creek'. He went up there and came back and said 'You were right'. It didn't show that on the maps - on the old maps.

KH: Did you know it as Albino nor Albina?

ES: Albino we called it.

KH: Albino - the white lake. That's got me intrigued, I read about that somewhere else.

ES: Well what is it called?

KH: Now it's Albina, things have changed and I don't know what the origin is of some of these things. When you look at it, the sun coming from the north west, there's a lot of reflection coming off it and it's like a white surface.

ES: That's right. He told me that in the old maps it showed that it was on the other side of the Range.

KH: Oh no, it flows into Lady Northcote canyon.

ES: Wait a bit, there's two lakes up there.

KH: There's Club Lake, then there's Blue Lake - there's three. Club Lake runs into the Snowy and Blue Lake runs into the Snowy, Lake Albina runs into the Geehi. The closest one to Mt Townsend is Albina.

ES: Coota Patamba.

KH: Coota Patamba - the little one - almost a swamp now, that runs this way.

ES: That's the one I'm talking about. The other one runs into the Geehi River. I've got them mixed up, the names. Albino is down in that big gorge and it runs down into the Geehi River. This other one runs down

Errol Scammel

into the Geehi Creek - that's the one he argued with me about. It's over the other side of Kosciusko and it comes back round into Geehi Creek, it's actually the head of the Geehi Creek. I'm a bit confused, it's that long since I've talked about these things, I've even got them mixed up. Coming up from Dead Horse, you come up past it and come around on to Kosciusko round by Seaman hut there. The old Wragge had a hut in there.

KH: Did you ever remember any of it?

ES: Yes I remember the hut - that was back in towards Kossie a bit.

KH: It was on top of Kossie wasn't it?

ES: No it was in under it. They couldn't stop right up on top could they?

KH: That's my impression. They had the tent first and then the hut right up on top. There was another hut.

ES: The one I know was down in under towards the other side, under the brow of Kosciusko.

KH: Between the top of Kossie and the pass?

ES: No that's looking back. It was towards the Chalet, down that way.

KH: Towards Seamans?

ES: Yeah down towards Seamans, not far from there, back across - the road goes past Seamans on the right hand side, well this was back over further.

KH: Under the top of Kossie?

ES: Yes, there was parts of a building there.

KH: The weather station that he built was right on top.

ES: It could have been, I don't see it, I don't know much about it.

KH: Do you remember anything else about this Don Benson character and the problems he had with building. How did they get - some of the walls go right under the eaves, just a single stone wall, stone on stone on stone. They must be 12 feet high in places - did they build a scaffolding of something.

ES: The stone walls wouldn't be 12 foot high! Oh yes, at the ends, they did go up. I don't know how they got them to stop there, because it's only a single stone - I don't know how they did that, because they're well built.

KH: They'll last a long time.

ES: Unless somebody runs into them with something.

KH: Well the only one I know that's collapsed would be the Syndicate Hut.

ES: Wombats undermined it I believe. A terrible place for wombats.

KH: All the others are in very good ...

ES: There's no wombats around there. That flat's covered in wombats.

KH: It's getting all scrubby too now, you can hardly find the hut.

ES: I think that would nearly cover them all right but I don't know much about I knew Don Benson pretty well, but I never seen him in action as far as building went.

KH: Apparently, Jimmy said he picked up the idea from some huts over at Bright. Some other huts that are made of riverstones. They are very unusual in the mountains but I suppose it's one of the few places where material.

ES: Most of the old huts in the mountains was built before - probably before you could pack things so easily. Wheeler's Hut - they'd take that there and get back to that end of the show - they took bullock teams up there always ^{right} to Wheeler's. (hut)

KH: Via Clover Flat?

ES: Yes and up Yellow Boy. A lot of the same road as they've gone, they used to come out to Bowaters at Welumba - they had a road up there, it was steep, I don't know how they got bullocks up there. They reckoned they nearly always used to go two teams together and when they came to the bad places they hooked one on to the other and pulled them up the steep places with two teams and then go back and get the other load, pull it up - they'd probably have 18 bullocks in each lot - they'd probably finish up with forty bullocks pulling it up.

KH: Wow!

ES: That's right. Some of those places were terribly steep. Charlie Wheeler's father and him - I suppose they worked together with Greg Greg - they had the Round Mountain and they used to take their salt and stuff out by bullock team.

KH: You always knew him as one-armed Will?

ES: I never ever heard of him as Wingy.

KH: How did he lose his arm?

ES: I wouldn't know. I never ever heard anybody call him that.

KH: But you knew him?

ES: Oh yes, He always smoked a cigar - always. He was only a little man, about 5'6". ^{Little fat fellow.} He'd come out there when we were camped there. I knew his son too, I knew Charlie pretty well. Talking about them living out there, they would have to live there when they selected it, at certain time of the year, you've got to live on those selections. You couldn't go and just take it up and select a place and not live there. For a certain number of weeks a year you had to live on the place - they sent inspectors around checking.

KH: You reckon it would have been one-armed Will that would have selected it?

ES: Yes it was him who selected it. Charlie Wheeler would be about my age now - his father would be - well 70 years ago - that would be 1910 say - he'd be a young man then but he probably selected that in the early 1900s and I would imagine that house was built there not long after that, it would have to be.

KH: He'd select it and have to use it for a certain period, then it would become freehold?

ES: They used to select a place and they used to pay a bob an acre a year for it - I don't know how many years.

KH: Like paying it off?

ES: Yes, I don't think it would be any more than that, but that's what they used to pay, a bob an acre. You could take up land around it - on a 'conditional' purchase they used to call it. That would be on record when he selected that.

KH: Yes it would.

ES: The Shire office in Tumberumba...

KH: You reckon his holding was about 320 acres?

ES: Well they all took about 320 acres - that was all they'd allow you.

KH: Someone mentioned more like 700 acres, they thought they had in there.

ES: Well he might have - he could have taken up one lot in his wife's name - he would have more than 320 altogether. But he might have taken up conditional purchase around it or leased. He had a lot of lease country as well. He probably took 320 acres in his own name and 320 acres in his wife's name.

KH: Colin Findlay mentioned something about 700 acres been freehold and then lots of leases.

ES: I'd sooner say there would be 640 acres.

KH: Two lots of 320.

ES: That was the area they'd let you take up. When the Scammells took up all that land at Khancoban they took up blocks in their wife's names as well as their own. They took up blocks from the river right back. This Chapman and Barry, where Don Mowatt is, then Fred Scammell took up the next one and then Reuben Sheather, took up the next - he was married to the old original Scammell lady and then Edward Scammell took up the next one and my grandfather the next one, (William Scammell) - they had the lot, from there right down to Khancoban Creek. They were the first selectors in the area. Then different ones bought them out. McEvoy's bought out Fred Scammell, Tyr_ells bought out Sheathers, ^{bought Edward Scammell} Hickeys out and dad's people had right

Errol Scammel

up till about 1960 I suppose and Tiny McNamara bought the old Scammell place.

KH: Tiny McNamara, he was involved in the building of Cascade I think.

ES: Could have been, I doubt it though.

KH: Jimmy mentioned his name.

ES: Could have been, but he married a Hodson and dairying most of his life until he came to Khancoban ^{and} bought this place off my uncle. I left up there and I don't know what happened when they were building these huts. I've been through Geehi and Groggin a lot since and I've been to Toolong quite a lot too, fishing, over the years, up until a few years ago.

KH: Taking parties out there?

ES: No, just fishing. I've been within a few hundred yards of Wheeler's hut, I never went across to it though.

KH: In the recent years?

ES: Yes, we used to fish there. They call that the 'Tongue' down in there.

END SIDE 1

TAPE 1, SIDE 2.

ES: The road they had to Round Mountain would have to come from down at the old Toolong, down where Tooma Dam cut it all off and then nearly in a straight line there was an old bullock dray track right out through there to Round Mountain.

KH: I think that became known as the Thiess fire trail or something like that. The Thiess Bros. were in there building one of the dams.

ES: Yes, there was an old hut - I just ^{don't} know the name of the flats it was on, on a bit of clear country, out in there.

KH: There was a Patens hut? There was a Toolong hut.

ES: There was a bit of an old hut on this road, nothing to do with any of these others.

KH: Not at Wolseley Gap, further down?

ES: Not far from Tooma Dam, there ^{is} relics of an old hut, only a little thing.

KH: Do you know anything about Patens hut?

ES: They built that later, that was built - it was only a tin hut - just in from, around from Tooma Dam. I don't ^{know} which Patens, I suppose Walter and Tom, his uncle, and some of them used to run cattle ^{out} in through there.

Errol Scammel

KH: You don't remember the time when it was built?

ES: No.

KH: Would it be before the war or after the war?

ES: It would be after I think. See Montague, he went out into those mountains too, he built a hut back this side of Tooma Dam, there's a bit of a hut somewhere in there now - I've never been to it.

KH: When was the first time you went into Wheeler's hut, 1924 was it?

ES: I would only have been 12 or 13 - '22 or '23.

KH: When that photo was taken?

ES: Yes, that was the first time I was in there.

KH: And it was quite an old hut then?

ES: Well by that photo you can tell - well it wasn't really old, but it wasn't new.

KH: Could have been about 10-15 years old?

ES: I reckon. I reckon it was built in the very early 1900s. If Charlie Wheeler would be round about 70 years old - that would be 1910 he was born, about the same time as me - his father probably took that up quite a bit before that. He was the only son you know, the only child. I suppose they'd destroy them - wouldn't they have some of the records of all their old transactions?

KH: Who, Lila?

ES: Yes.

KH: She didn't come up with any when I was there.

ES: A lot of old people, they just burnt everything.

KH: They'd moved several times and when people move, that's disastrous.

ES: They don't keep any old records. When I was young, around Khancoban, there was old Jack Reid lived up there. He came into the district in the 70s - 1870 and he told us things about the old hands and what happened. I didn't have enough brains I suppose to remember a lot of them. Herb Barlee remembered a lot of it and wrote articles on it.

KH: Did he?

ES: Yes, wrote a terrible lot about the early days.

KH: Newspaper?

ES: In the local paper.

KH: Here at Corryong?

ES: Yes and I'll tell you who's got the whole list of them too - Ray, Drew at Khancoban - she lent them to me. I went through and checked - I got a lot of my information from them. But I questioned quite a bit of what he said because I can't imagine anybody being able to write, without taking

Errol Scammel

notes, as much as what he did - well I couldn't.

KH: There weren't any tape recorders then.

ES: No, well that's what I say. He wrote about things about too many people, about what they told him, over the years. I do know quite a few of them, he wrote articles about my people, how they came into the area.

KH: This Ray Drew, she lives at Khancoban.

ES: Yes, she's a very nice person and she's got all these old cuttings that he wrote up. When they came out in the paper I thought they were a lot of bull-dust, but afterwards I got thinking about it and I asked her to bring them in and I picked up quite a lot of stuff that I was really interested in. He picked that up - Bill Barry came into Black Creek and Chapmans come into Groggin - he had that written up - that's how I picked that up. How they selected 1100 acres I don't know - this place that Mowatts has got is 1100 acres. He's got a write-up in it too about a chap called - just turn that off for a minute.

KH: Yeah I think it's good to go back to Toolong. What did you remember about this ^{Dick} Fisher guy?

ES: Only about what I saw in there, I camped with him for a week, but he was an old miner and him and a chap called Dick Humphrey, used to walk through from Toolong from the diggings to Khancoban for their supplies.

KH: Do you know how long they were on the diggings there at Toolong?

ES: No, well the diggings closed up, they were closed up in my time.

KH: Yes, but they were just two fossickers?

ES: Yes, this old fellow stopped about fossicking, I suppose he was on the pension when he was there. I don't even know who took his supplies out, I suppose Wheelers used to take him out and probably had him there living in the hut, just living there.

KH: He lived in the hut?

ES: Yes he lived in Wheelers hut at that time.

KH: He looks like he was in his seventies by then or more perhaps!

ES: Oh yes, well and truly, he was an old man.

KH: So his memory would have taken us back to the gold rush of the 1860s and so on.

ES: If I was as good as Herb Barlee in the things that he told me, I suppose - well I was pretty young and wasn't ^{very} impressed with that sort of thing.

KH: Did you just see him for the day?

ES: Oh no, we were in there for a week, we camped in the hut with him.

KH: Do you remember any stories he told?

ES: No, not a thing.

Errol Scammel

KH: Did he have any peculiar habits or anything?

ES: I can't remember a thing about him really, only that he was a nice old man.

KH: Were they using dishes or cradles for the mining?

ES: He used to just use one of those dishes. In his old days he probably was one of the ... he never ever made a fortune and this old Dick Humphrey never had any money or anything - just old pensioners. They talk about them coming in for their supplies, they were great walkers. This old Dick Humphrey was a terrific walker, you wouldn't keep up with him.

KH: They'd walk everywhere?

ES: Yes, never had horses.

KH: A lot of the miners were like that apparently, they walked everywhere.

ES: Yes, well Tom Mitchell mentioned in his book about these chaps walking through and camped at Everards hut there on the way out. To my mind, Everards hut would be one of the first huts built in these mountains. When I was building in the early 20s, it was an old hut then, falling down, probably was built in the late 1800s. I would say - there was a lot of clear country around there - I would say that Everards had that lease, it might have even been freehold at one stage. They used to take up these blocks - select them - but they only stop for a little while and then just walk off them and they'd revert back to the Crown again. A terrible lot of those places was done in that way.

KH: It's rather a long way round to go home for this Fisher guy, wouldn't he be better to go via Clover Flat and that way round. If he went to Everards, they'd have to go right back up Pretty Plain wouldn't they?

ES: No, they could come up Broadway.

KH: Oh up the Broadway Spur.

ES: Yes, that's the short cut, that's the way they'd come. They've got a good road along there now, it comes out on the Tongue there - not a good road but a road for vehicles. They put a fire trail ⁱⁿ I think, right up around the Black Spur and out to the Grey Mare, it goes right around there. It comes down into Khancoban. I've been up that way in a Landrover. It's a pretty tough track though that one.

KH: You mentioned something about the hole in the river below Wheelers hut. That was known as Mrs. Wheelers !?

ES: Where Hell Hole ^{ck} runs into the river, there's a little lagoon across on the flat, opposite it, not in the river, it runs around, and they always called it Mrs Wheelers hole. Why? I'd imagine she just used to swim in it - it would be warm. That's the only reason I can think of. But all

Errol Scammel

the old cattlemen - it was known everywhere.

KH: You don't remember any other huts in that area there, on the diggings?

ES: No, well I never went near the diggings, Grey Mare was on the diggings, but you're getting back towards ... Apparently there was diggings down around below Wheelers - I don't know much about that country.

KH: It's so close to this hut, just down the flat.

ES: I've seen the holes there, but I don't know of any huts there.

KH: You can remember the picket fence and everything around the hut?

ES: Oh yes, there was a good picket fence across^{from} the hut.

KH: Do you remember the cow bale?

ES: Yes, this bloke didn't^(have a cow) but I imagine Wheelers did.

KH: A cow for milking.

ES: Yes. If they lived there they'd have to have milk, they probably made their own butter.

KH: Well Lila said they certainly had a cow^{for} some^{of the} time. It certainly looks from this photo, that this hut was there for ten or fifteen years or so. The back rooms were also there as well as far as you can remember?

ES: Yes, they were there, it was built as a house.

KH: There's a main living room, there's a bedroom off it and there's another room out the back now.

ES: I think it was always there. I suppose we must have put up tents or something too, these chaps that we had there, because they wouldn't all be able to get ... we had a party of 4 or 5 he was out in the back room anyway.

KH: Dick Fisher?

ES: Yes. Then old Mr Wheeler came

KH: He'd get the main bedroom I suppose?

ES: I suppose he did. I know these old fishermen ran after him when he came there.

KH: Why did they run after him?

ES: Well he owned the place. I remember him telling these old doctors that they wanted to look out when they went home, that that fresh mountain air, he said he knew of people who went home from there and they got twins when they got home. He was a pretty tough old man, he'd swear like anything - this one-armed Wheeler, every second word was a swear word and he used to always smoke a cigar. He could handle everything with his one hand. He had a stump and I know he used to put the halter around under his leg and hold it and then he'd have something else, the reins of his horse under here and he'd crack a whip.

Errol Scammel

KH: The halter would be from the horse behind?

ES: Yes, he'd lead his packhorse.

KH: He'd have that between his legs.

ES: Yes, and probably the reins from his horse under his wing here and he'd crack his whip and still riding along.

KH: What a sight, and swearing and carrying on.

ES: These fellows didn't know how to take him you know - these old doctors.

KH: He was like that all the time?

ES: Oh yes, he wouldn't put it on for their benefit, he was always a swearing man. Great racehorse people you know ...

KH: The Wheelers?

ES: Oh yes, his son, Charlie, used to ride and they trained race horses, they were a racing family.

KH: Was Mrs Wheeler there when you were there?

ES: Oh no.

KH: But she did go up there?

ES: Well she must have been there. I'd imagine that they put in their time there, that's why they built the house when it was freehold. Chisholm's country was freehold, where his hut is, it was.

KH: So the Park would have had to buy that!

ES: I don't know what they did with those sorts of things. When the Park hunted them out of there they knocked off running cattle there, so their rates would all be paid up and that. I think Chisholms might have knocked off taking cattle there before the Park. They did^{nt} have, what we call, good mountain country, the Chisholms. That Broadway country, they had all Broadway and Pretty Plain, it wasn't good cattle country, it was mostly snow grass and that's not much good. The high country, grew herbage and clover - all in those creeks was covered in clover and herbage. Down the plains, some years you'd get a bit of clover but cattle never did anything like they did out on those tops. That Grey Mare range would be one of the best cattle ranges out there. You could put cattle out there and they couldn't get off it, they couldn't get down to the river and they couldn't get down to the creek - odd ones did get down. Up Round Mountain country is the same, that's good country. The sheep men that went out there, they could only run their sheep on those plains full of feed. They used to take a terrible lot of sheep out there but once snow grass gets up this high it's no good.

KH: Who built Pretty Plain?

ES: A chap called Jack Armstrong and Arthur Shooks.

KH: Shooks - it's an unusual name.

Errol Scammel

ES: I don't know whether Scammells might have brought them in, but they weren't with Chisholms - I'm not too sure about this. They ^{were} pretty good bridge builders or carpenters, they worked at Chisholms for years. Old Arthur Shooks died and then Jack Armstrong lived in that little cottage there on Swamp Creek near Mrs Boardman. He lived there for years. The Harrisons, when they came here, they took up land - they selected or squatted I should say - out at what they call Coonimi, it's about half way out to Yellow Boy, back in under the mountains there - a pretty rough sort of place. They had huts - I've only been in there once, in a landrover with Ossie Rixon, there's fruit trees and that there and bits of old shacks there.

KH: On Yellow Boy, down the valley?

ES: Yes, down below - back towards Greg Greg. In later years they used to let their cattle come back into there.

KH: There's a power line in there now, a power line track.

ES: Well, it was called Coonimi, well the Harrisons came there - if you get these notes of Herb Barlees you'll pick that all up, about the Harrisons. Then they came down to Khancoban and they must have selected there fairly early because they used to run cattle out on Findlay's Lookout and down into the Tongue - they had a hut - it would be one of the first huts in Toolong.

KH: Harrisons?

ES: Yes, in under Findlay's Lookout there, on the other side.

KH: Down the ridge further.

ES: Yes - it's called Harrisons Creek down there. When I first went out there this hut was an old - just a shell then - something like Everards, just bare ...

KH: Also a log cabin?

ES: Yes. It was falling in. We used to go to these places and pull up and boil our billy. We used to do that at Everards on the way out with our cattle and we used to run our cattle down in this Findlays. It's running down into Bogong Creek. I think they call that the Gorge. You can't follow Bogong Creek right down to Geehi.

KH: Yes, the Harrisons Creek [looking at map], it goes into Bogong Creek, MacPhees Ridge is across the other side.

ES: I think they call that valley up in the top end the Gorge.

KH: They could do, it's not on this map.

ES: Our cattle would only go down there a way and they'd get blocked, it was coming too steep. The same coming up from Geehi, you could only go up so far. There's good flats up in the Bogong Creek above Geehi. There's open flats up in that Bogong Creek. They put a road in there at one stage.

Errol Scammel

ES: That Harrisons Creek, it would be named after those Harrisons. They used to run cattle in from that way and the Scammells used to bring cattle in from the other way and they used to call that Scammells Spur right up through there. That's Scammells Lookout is not actually built on Scammells Spur. I don't know why it was called Scammells Lookout because it's not on Scammells Spur. I don't know how good your map is but Razorback is the first range up above Khancoban. It comes from the wall - well Scammells Spur sort of runs in a half elbow out around off that, it wouldn't be within half a mile of Scammells Lookout.

KH: That Razorback Ridge, I think that's called Clews Ridge now.

ES: It probably is but that was the old name - Razorback.

KH: Were the Harrisons involved in that country towards Pretty Plain?

ES: No. They just had that off Findlay's Lookout and in there. In my time they never went there, they were out of there, they must have run cattle there. When Bill Pender took up that lease country, he got one of these old Harrisons to take him and show him all the roads through there. Right along that Scammells Range, there's a place they call the Well, there's a hole in the rock - he always told us this - that when we got along there we'd be able to get water to boil our billies. There was a hole in the rock about that deep and about that square - you'd think it was man-made, it was always full of water.

KH: Where was that?

ES: Along this Scammells Range to Findlay's Lookout. It's not on the map.

KH: There's a Findlay's Spur, that might be what you know as Scammells Spur?

ES: How far does that go along to Findlay's Spur?

KH: Findlay's Spur goes right up to Findlay's Lookout.

ES: Yes, but where does it start?

KH: It starts off near Murray One ^{power} station, near Broken Back Creek.

ES: Yes well then I'd say Scammells Spur - what we used to call Rocky Knobs there - this Scammells Spur went along from there.

KH: Granite Knob here - Mt Water Spring. There is a Granite Knob and a ridge that leads on right up to Findlay's Lookout.

ES: Yes, well that's the one we had a hut. From that, well back the other way towards Geehi, that's what we called Scammells Spur.

KH: It was up near Findlay's Lookout somewhere that they got the timber for Pretty Plain hut, near Harrisons Creek?

ES: Well down in there near Harrisons Creek, back towards Pretty Plain.

KH: There's alpine ash just at the top of the Saddle, just before Grey Mare.

ES: Yes, you come up from Pretty Plain, right up there, a pretty easy grade and then there's a gap, and then it falls down that way. Well you go down into Harrisons Creek from there. That's where they got the ...

KH: The stumps might still be there.

ES: I doubt it, they rot pretty quick, mountain ash. Up above Chisholms hut there's a hill, you can follow that hill right along to this gap - that's where they brought the timber.

KH: Along the ridge

ES: Well along in under there.

KH: Not down the creek - too rough, too wet?

ES: Too boggy. The track went 50 yards above the creek - a cattle track. If you came down there you'd have to climb up a pretty steep ridge to get back into it. I'm pretty sure they brought it right down along the spur there.

KH: That spur would be behind the hut?

ES: Yes. That's where they definitely got the timber.

KH: They must have got quite a few loads?

ES: Oh well with a team of bullocks they'd bring a dozen logs at a time I suppose.

KH: And that was a team of bullocks from ...

ES: Khancoban.

KH: Who was the driver of the team?

ES: A chap called Phil Klippel, ^[Clippel?] he was their bullock driver. Why I know it would be him, because in 1941 he was a bullock driver and he carted a lot of timber for us at Khancoban for posts, across the river for Chisholm. We split him a lot of posts across the river - we felled the trees and he dragged them across - he was the bullock driver at that stage.

KH: So he would have gone up there with these two builders with Armstrong and Shooks. They would have picked the trees, felled them and then he would have taken them down with the bullock team and the other two would build the hut!

ES: I used to go out there every winter mustering and the hut was built between the time - I was never there when they were building it - we used to take cattle out in the spring, well I mightn't get back until the winter to muster and it was built through the summer because I never remember them being there.

KH: Built in one summer?

ES: Must have - oh it wouldn't take them long.

KH: I thought there might have been more than two building it!

ES: There could have been more, but they'd be the architects.

KH: They'd be the chiefs.

ES: Yes, they probably had a team of men - I doubt it though because they were chaps that worked on their own. Those old chaps you know, it was nothing for them to work on a job like that and work all day, there wouldn't be any 8 hours about it.

KH: As soon as it was light they'd be up ...

ES: You could catch trout in that creek straight there under the hut. My son was out there 2 years ago with his little boy about 6 and he rigged him up a line and he run down the creek and came back with a fish about that long. They're out there now - they're riding out - my son has taken a mob of kids out. How long is it since you've been in that hut of Chisholms?

KH: Oh a year or two.

ES: You say it's very draughty?

KH: You can certainly see light through some of the cracks.

ES: A horse couldn't bite you through it.

KH: No, that's Ted Winter, he's using ... no, he told me - Ted Winter is an old ski tourer and he got that line from Ernie Boardman.

ES: I guessed it was Ernie Boardman. I could never ever remember even wind coming through it. I'd imagine that they probably stuffed bags in it but I think when they did it, they probably put mud on top and it sets like cement you know. They'd put a log along there, they'd mix the mud up and lay it along there and then put the next log on top of that.

KH: There's certainly sacking between some of the logs.

ES: They might have poked that in.

KH: It looks like it was layed there, it's hard to say. Most of it is very well built.

ES: It was a lovely hut. The first old hut, old McPhies used to come over there when we were mustering - it was a hut you could sit in the fire place.

KH: Which is that hut?

ES: Chisholms. I suppose the chimney's still there.

KH: The one up further, along the creek.

ES: Yes.

KH: Yes, you can just see the remains of the fire place.

ES: I remember, the fire place was there, you could sit here and in front of it and at the sides of it. I remember old Dave McPhie would be sitting there smoking his pipe - Bill Pender on this side smoking his pipe.

KH: That was known as the McPhie hut!

ES: No it wasn't. This old McPhie used to come over there. They had an arrangement - the mountain men did - they'd muster cattle - McPhies would

pick up any of our cattle over at the Grey Mare and any cattle we'd muster of his, we'd hold there and he'd come over and get his and bring ours over probably or vice versa. But mostly they'd come over and stop the night. They used to live pretty rough those McPhies. They never used to shoe their horses and they never wore an oilskin, they used to wear those big old Tasmanian 'blueys'. You could imagine how heavy they got when they got wet. They never had overcoats. And tough, by jove, they were tough.

KH: There was four of them wasn't there?

ES: Dave, Archie - I forget the other fellow's name. Dave McPhie was the main man though. They still come about here, those young McPhies, they've got cattle here in agistment now - Angus and Max.

KH: Did you ever meet Lindsay Willis?

ES: No. George Finch, one of Greg Greg's men, he put in a lot of time around the Grey Mare. They started mining there, after the Kerry Pierce incident. They mined there for a good while.

KH: 1935-36 you mean, when George Bell was out there?

ES: Well after that.

KH: 1949-50 was another one, there was none after '35-'36 until 1949.

ES: George Finch would have to be there then in the '35 turnout. He was there when I was out there because he used to - I don't know what they were really going to do - I don't know whether that was a swindle or what it was. They got a terrible lot of goods and stuff there. All those old mountain men went there, they got picks and shovels and crowbars, tea - they had bins of tea and stuff. These old mountain men, they all flocked from everywhere and got loads of stuff.

KH: When it folded up?

ES: Yes. They never went back and got it, they just walked off and left it there. I never was in that part of it but a lot of the others were. My brother and Bill Pender and all those fellows, they collected a few things. I think I finished up with a shovel that they had - a short-handed shovel. All sorts of gear - they just walked off and left it. Charlie Bell was there with a bullock team wasn't he?

KH: Charlie stayed on for a little while into the winter.

ES: Yes, I gathered that from Tom Mitchell's book.

KH: Then he shot through.

ES: They were paying him were they, to look after it.

KH: For a while they were, but then he wasn't getting any more money.

ES: I didn't know he was a bullock driver. According to Tom Mitchell's book, he said he drove a team of bullocks in there, but he might have come

in with them. He doesn't look like a bullock driver.

KH: No, because he was a skier then too.

ES: Was he. Well I never heard of him until he come to Khancoban. He was a fishing inspector.

KH: He was born in Kiandra - an old Kiandra family.

ES: He must have gone through to Batlow way because he married into a family from Batlow - either he's married to a Mowatt or a Mowatt's is married to his sister. He was Don Mowatt's brother-in-law, one way or the other.

KH: If we go back to Pretty Plain, the bullock team would have come up Everards Spur?

ES: You couldn't go up Everards Spur with a bullock team.

KH: What about all the roofing materials and all that, how did they come in? Did they come in via Wheelers way?

ES: To my way of thinking they couldn't come up that plain with a bullock team. The bottom end of Chisholm's paddock, it's all boggy, you'd have a job to ride a horse through there. I don't know how - they might have.

KH: There's a hell of a lot of iron on that roof.

ES: Yes I know there is, I suppose that's what they've done, come around there.

KH: I think the materials came in on a bullock team rather than on horses.

ES: Oh yes, they wouldn't bring all that iron on horses. I'll find out - my brother ^{Chris} was out there a lot more than me and he was probably there when they were doing that - I'll find out from him and let you know. I don't know of anybody, other than him and I, that would know anything much about that, who's alive now. I don't know of anybody older than us who was ever out there. Those old chaps like old Ossie Rixon are all dead.

KH: What about the other two huts - you mentioned two other huts further up Pretty Plain Creek. The first one was the old Pretty Plain hut ...

ES: That was right along side of the

KH: There's one right along side ...

ES: The Saselias' built one.

KH: The one that was right along side today's hut, what was that known as then?

ES: Just Chisholm's hut.

KH: That was an iron hut?

ES: No, it had a bark roof on it. I helped to strip bark to reseal it. We stripped a lot of bark off mountain ash up the hill and brought it down - you've got to let it dry, spread it out and flatten it out. That would be in the 30s. It must have been before the other hut was built, the early 30s.

Errol Scammel

KH: The walls would have been vertical slabs?
 ES: They're still there, aren't they?
 KH: No, they're all gone except the remains of the fireplace.
 ES: Isn't there still a bit of a hut there?
 KH: The log cabin.
 ES: That's the old one, that's the one we used to live in.
 KH: The log cabin is all there, the one next to it.
 ES: There's only one hut there now?
 KH: Only the one.
 ES: I thought you said the other was still there - the old one.
 KH: Yeah up the creek further is still there, with a bark roof.
 ES: How far up the creek?
 KH: About half a mile.
 ES: That's Sasellas' hut. I asked you about Sasellas and you didn't know anything about it.
 KH: I get a bit confused.
 ES: That's not Chisholms hut. You said there was two huts other than the log hut. You had me a bit mixed up, because I only ever knew - we used it as a stable to put - the other hut - Chisholm built the good hut - we used the other one to put our junk in it.
 KH: It's all gone, except for the remains of the fire place.
 ES: That's the one I'm telling you about where we used to sit around in the early days with the Penders and McPhies. But that one half a mile up is the Sasellas' hut.
 KH: How do you spell Sasellas?
 ES: I don't know, I tried to spell it last night - Sasellas - something like that - they were butchers. They built that hut. It's still there?
 KH: Yes, the walls are still standing - the barks all gone.
 ES: I didn't split the bark for it, we done bark for the old Chisholm hut. The other one I don't know who built that either.
 KH: Sasellas?
 ES: I'd imagine that perhaps Don Benson might have been mixed up in that because he was working for them - Don Benson and his brother, they were working for Sasellas.
 KH: Not this Armstrong guy?
 ES: No, I would imagine Don Benson might have been mixed up in that. It would be built before Chisholms, good hut - I think so.
 KH: When was the first Chisholm hut built?

Errol Scammel

ES: Oh it was old, it would have been built when they selected the land way back in the 1900s.
 KH: And the little shed, the other building, the third one at Chisholms, that was just a shed, just a storage thing was it?
 ES: Yes. But that one up at Sasellas' is between two creeks. The creek comes down out of the mountain on that side and the main creek comes down from up - it's built right on that - there's a little bit of a flat there. Closer to the creek that comes out of the hill because we always used to dip our water out of that one.
 KH: There was no other hut as well. That's where we got confused.
 ES: I would imagine that was built just a bit before Chisholms good hut. We used to camp in it nearly all the time.
 KH: It had horizontal slabs and a couple of windows?
 ES: I think it had two rooms - one big room and a little bit of a thing on the end. We'd take our horse feed out, pack it out there before we mustered. When we went out there to muster, snakes were coming out of these damn things and going down to the creek - big black fellows about six foot long - saw two of them there. It made you think when you went to bed though.
 KH: Were there bunks in the old Chisholm hut?
 ES: Oh yes - built ones - they used to build a long bunk right from one end to the other. They'd run a pole from the wall right along and then they'd tack bags along.
 KH: You'd sleep in a row would you?
 ES: Yes, perhaps one that way and one another way and across the ends - there was beds along the ends. It was all built around like that and the table in the middle and stools, mostly home-made stools, boxes - you sat on a box - pretty uncomfortable - sat on a box at night. You wouldn't come in from mustering until after dark - way out in those places you'd be lucky to get home before it's dark.
 KH: Would you like to have a guess at who might have built Wheelers hut? Could a Whitehead have been involved?
 ES: No, I wouldn't have the slightest idea who was building in those days, that's going back before I was born. You'd have thought - Lila wouldn't have any interest in it - all their old deeds and things, they probably might have kept deeds. I think you'd find out when it was selected and if they selected it, they'd nearly build a hut within a couple of years.
 KH: Would any of the Findlays keep records?
 ES: I wouldn't think so. None of the Findlays that are alive today

Errol Scammell

had any interest out there.

KH: Harry used to go out there apparently.

ES: Yes he'd go out to Pierces. They are related to Pierces. Old Jack Pierce that owned the Round Mountain, Finlays probably went out there a bit - Harry probably went out there a bit.

KH: Colin went out there once, he drew some trout on the side of the bath.

ES: Well they might have done some fishing and that out there. They would come in from the other way. Very few people from the bottom end come up Everards way. Chisholm and Sasellas' and Penders, they went up Everards way, it's too far round. All those other people - the pound they call some of that country down in there. You went down from Yellow Boy - Yellow Bog they call it, we call it Yellow Boy, I don't know why - that old bullock dray track crosses, it only goes a mile or two along the new road, well it doesn't go anyway but you can see a lot of the old bullock dray road as you're going out there in an odd place. You cross it in a couple of places. When you get to that Clover Flat, somewhere just round there, it branches and just goes up and out of the top end of the Tooma Dam. Then there's a terrible steep face they had to come of. They used to always camp down on the Toolong river there, they had to climb up a terrible steep that's where they used to hook on the two teams and they'd have to hook on the two teams I'd imagine to come up out of Welumba too. They didn't use wagons, they only used the two wheel turnout.

KH: What do you remember about Ossie Rixon .?

ES: He was my uncle, he was a horse breaker. He didn't have much to do with any of this sort of thing he was just a horse breaker. At the time we had about 10 of these fishermen at Waterfall Farm and his wife was helping my mother look after them and he was breaking in horses there.

KH: He was the one that went with Tom and Elyne?

ES: No, that's another Ossie - he's another relation really - his mother was a Scammell and his father was ... they had a soldier block ...

END SIDE 2, TAPE 1.

Errol Scammell

TAPE 2, SIDE 3.

ES: One was Curly Ossie, the chap who was married to my auntie and the other fellow, his mother was a Scammell but his father was Andy Rixon - he was Higginbottom, he was a jockey with a trainer in Melbourne called Higginbottom. He come back from the War and worked for Jack Pierce, he was there for years and years. He was there most of the time I was in the mountains. Him and old Bill Byatt lived out there. They used to run a lot of cattle out there, they used to run anything up to 1000 head.

KH: Bill Byatt, Byatt's camp?

ES: No he's a brother of his - Leo Byatt - Leo Byatts camped up Kosciusko.

KH: Who cut Hannels spur?

ES: There was an old bloke Hannel....

KH: Hannel wasn't really involved was he?

ES: No. Hannel and Pierce owned part of Bringenbrong. They called it Hannels Spur because they paid for it, Hannel was the bloke that was mixed up in it. This old chap he paid a lot of the local fellows - a pound a day I remember at the time, which is big money - to go up there and work and cut that - quite a lot of the young fellows around the district.

KH: It wasn't just one or two, it was quite a group.

ES: Yes he had quite a group of them and they cut this track about eight foot wide through the scrub, just cut it straight up Hannels Spur. Then when they got up out of the snow gum, they got on the clear country, they made a camp there and they called it Byatt's camp. They had tents there all the summer, they used to live there all the summer. They'd take their cattle up and instead of going right around by Geehi and Groggin and coming back there, they cut this track up there. They used it then for tourists and hikers and everything. I suppose at the moment it's all grown up.

KH: I haven't walked it, but I believe it's very overgrown.

ES: You see, it's what they call 'hops scrub' grows out in that country and that grows up very thick. I'd imagine all that snow gum and mountain ash would all come back again.

KH: What was Hannels christian name?

ES: I forget. Andy Scott brought him out - Hannel.

KH: How long did it take them to cut the track?

ES: Oh weeks, quite a few weeks. They were camped there at the foot of - down at the Geehi Creek there.

KH: They'd ride up each day and do a bit more?

Errol Scammel

ES: I'd imagine they'd walk up because a horse wouldn't be much good to them.

KH: You used to ride up there didn't you?

ES: Afterwards, when we took cattle up there - that's what they cut it for. It was a terrible job taking cattle up it because you'd have to just cut out what one man could handle, about twenty head. You'd force them up and the others would be a bit inclined to follow you then. Then another bloke would cut out another lot and push them on. You might even leave that lot when they start to knock up a bit and go back and get another lot. Somebody at the tail end would have the big mob you see. It was a pretty tough job. Old Leo camped up there quite a lot and one of old Kerry Pierce's sons.

KH: Did you ever meet George Day?

ES: Yes I knew him fairly well.

KH: What, you'd ride across to the Chalet?

ES: Oh yes, and he'd come down. I bought a horse or two off him. He used to bring horses through to the sales. My brother and I, at one stage, did go up to the Chalet when he was there too and learned to ski and go as guides for the winter.

KH: But you never did?

ES: Oh no, we couldn't get away and we had our own interests.

KH: That was a case with a lot of stockmen though, they didn't do any skiing.

ES: Tom Mitchell wanted me to learn. I used to take them out and he said he'd lend me skis and things, but I never ever did, I wasn't interested.

KH: You used to take Tom and Elyne up Hannels Spur didn't you?

ES: Oh I took them everywhere.

KH: But in that particular case, you'd take them up to the edge of the snow and then they'd put their skis on

ES: I took them out to the Pinnacle once, out at Geehi on to the Pinnacle. They pitched a tent there and it snowed and they done all that Grey Mare Range, it snowed, they had this little tent about this high - he said 'We used to keep poking our clothes underneath to keep the wet off us'. I said, 'How did you sleep'. 'I slept like a tom cat' he said. He's a pretty tough bloke you know. He was a prisoner of war and that was pretty hard.

KH: That was before, in the 30s.

ES: That's right, it was too, well he was tough then, but he was a terrible horseman.

KH: Was he?

Errol Scammel

ES: Oh frightful - that's going on tape but I don't mind that.

KH: He probably doesn't mind.

ES: Well in his book, somebody wrote about him being - nobody would be more fit to write a book than the history because he was such a good horseman and stockman and mustered cattle - and he couldn't ride a horse. I knew he couldn't sit on a horse hardly. He was away at school most of his young life. I packed them around for years - him and her.

KH: You took them up Hannels Spur just the once was it, or more than once?

ES: I took him and her up once and I took her and her sister up another time.

KH: And would you then go back a number of days later?

ES: They'd tell me what day to come back and they'd meet me.

KH: They would necessarily be there, I think once or twice they were in a blizzard.

ES: That's right, once or twice I went up there and they come back around the other way I think. I took two young chaps up there once, it was snowing when I left them and I went back to get them and they never turned up. I waited a day or two and I went back and they never turned up. I rang the police, who reckoned they never made it. They never had sense enough - they landed in at my place up at Khancoban at twelve o'clock at night. They never had sense enough or anything to have set a wire or anything. They went around by Goulburn, Canberra and come home, come back to their motor car. But they never had sense enough to have sent a wire or anything. The police said when I rang them 'If they haven't turned up by morning, we'll have to do something'. They had a job to make it too. One chap was alright and the other fella, he went sleepy and the other fella had to carry him, he wanted to chuck it, he wanted to lie down in the snow.

KH: They were going to the Chalet?

ES: No, to Seamans hut.

KH: Oh that wasn't so far.

ES: No, well that's where they used to all make for. That's where Mitchells would go too. Mitchells used to go out in the summer and plant food under the floor and roundabout - they used to live on squares of soup and chocolate - they wouldn't take chocolate and leave it but all that sort of stuff.

KH: Did you camp at the edge of the snow when you were waiting for them?

ES: No, I came back to Geehi.

KH: In the 30s, Elyne mentions in her book, she describes staying in a hut on Geehi flat - that couldn't have been a stone one!

Errol Scammel

ES: No it was the old one.

KH: That would have been Reid's hut.

ES: No, Nankervis' hut. That one was alongside of the other one.

KH: Along-side of the stone hut, the one that you built?

ES: No, the one I built was across the river.

KH: I see.

ES: The Tyrrell hut was shifted down from up on the hill. It's got slabs in it laying that way hasn't it?

KH: It's gone now.

ES: The old hut that's alongside the stone hut, it's still there isn't it?

KH: At the end of the landing strip, yes it's got slabs that way. That was the hut they would have stayed in.

ES: Yes that's the hut they stayed in because I was there at the time. They came through there without me once. I was

KH: It had a big chest in it with extra clothes or sleeping bag or something?

ES: They didn't stop there did they?

KH: One night they did, with her sister.

ES: Well I must have took them there that time with her sister and they stopped down in this fisherman's hut. It had the big chest in it. Not the stone one but the one that dad built for these old fisherman down on - opposite Arthur Nankervis' hut. They've got a stone hut there now that's falling to bits, well they had another hut.

KH: It could have been that one then!

ES: Yes, well I must have took them there because we had control of that and we had a big box in it with spare blankets and food and everything in it. That's what she'd be talking about. I'd forgotten that but I suppose I must have been taking them then, her and her sister. We probably camped there and then I took them back to the snow.

KH: Or she and Charles Lane-Poole - a friend.

ES: I took them that many times I forget - sometimes they had friends. I used to take them out - there's falls out there near Everards hut on the Khancoban creek and they used to go out and put in the day swimming and under this waterfall.

KH: Oh, the Waterfall Trail, must go into Waterfall Creek.

ES: Yes, there's a waterfall in there.

KH: Is there?

Errol Scammel

ES: There's another big waterfall in the Valentine River, up the Geehi.

KH: Yes I've scrambled around that one.

ES: I haven't been there but there's no fish get above that they tell me. They can't get up that.

KH: Which way did you go when you took Elyne up when they went on to Jargungal or the Big Bogong? You'd go up Everards and then up the Grey Mare?

ES: Yes, we'd camp in Chisholms hut up there. We'd go from Chisholms hut over there for the day and up there and then back again. We never camped in Grey Mare. The paddocks wasn't fit for horses over there, nobody ever looked after the paddocks. Chisholms always had a good little paddock round there, they had two paddocks, a little one and a big one. I think the little paddock might be still kept - my son goes out there and he said they keep their horses ...

KH: At Pretty Plain, yes, its in reasonable Tom Stacey, Talbingo Trails - they come across there with big parties.

ES: I don't know now which way horsemen would go, whether they'd come back down to Ogilvys Creek and go out that way ...

KH: They come down Rycie's Parlour.

ES: That's a pretty rough one.

KH: It's an old bridle track. It comes out at the northern end, below Grey Mare Bogong, below the Grey Mare Range, then goes across the top of a big swamp on the top of the Tooma.

ES: Yes we used to go there.

KH: It's pretty overgrown but it's a good route. I've skied it in the winter time.

ES: All those huts out there would be all in the range of a skier, if they're still in good enough order to camp in, like O'Keefes and all those.

KH: A lot of the huts have caretaker groups now, bushwalking clubs and skiers and so on.

ES: That Round Mountain hut gets used a terrible lot. They've got a motor road within a little distance. You could drive to it if you wanted to in a car.

KH: It's blocked off, but you could.

ES: If you go out there in the summer time, there's car tracks everywhere in and out of there. We went there one day, by ghost we were lucky. We went out there a few years ago and somebody, only two or three days before us had cut a great big tree off the road and it was down a steep hill. I suppose we would have backed out, it was in a bad spot. Because mostly when you

go to those places you want to carry a chainsaw with you.

KH: You would have gone up to the Dead Horse Gap hut?

ES: I've camped in it. I mustered cattle there with the Nankervis'. There was two huts, there was an old one, a pretty rough one, then they built a fairly - better one anyway.

KH: And the Cascades was the same, the hut that you stayed in?

ES: Yes well that was old, I don't know of any new one. If you say Bensons built one there, well that was since I was there. I was only there when I was fairly young.

KH: In the 20s?

ES: Early 30s I suppose.

KH: Oh there we are - it's Rob Benson according to Jimmy - that's Rob Benson in front of Cascades. He was the main builder of Cascade hut.

ES: Is that the Cascade hut?

KH: Yes, with a bark roof.

ES: That's different from when I was there. He come there after I was out there. That is the way they built the bark huts though.

KH: This is carrying the bark with the horses?

ES: Oh yes, I've never seen that done before. That is good [looking at photographs]. See those things there, they'd put another one the other side and put a wire from there over to hold them there. Most of them put them down about here.

KH: That's what they did a few years later.

You reckon there was a hut there before that one.

ES: Oh yes. He built that one, I camped there with Nankervis' a few years before that. It was pretty rough - I forget what it was like but it was rough. But fancy, they'd have to have a quiet horse to do that.

KH: It wasn't very far, within half a mile I think.

ES: It's a wonder they just didn't make a sleigh and just pull it. If you get a big sheet of iron - see there's only four bits of bark on that ... That's a fairly rough hut but it's quite good.

KH: Then they put iron on it later, it's a good hut still. It was Rob Benson who built the Cascade hut.

ES: He was probably mixed up in a few of those huts around Geehi too. Although I think Don might have.

KH: It was Rob, it was Don who built the Geehi hut according to Jimmy.

ES: Yes, I know he built Nankervis'.

KH: Jimmy reckoned he built four of them or he was responsible.

ES: I'd imagine he would too. Somebody built a little one up in Youngal

afterwards. He might have built it for some of them because he was living about there then, up above Galbraith's, up above Waterfall Farm, up the river about 4 miles, what they call the Quince Gardens. There was a nice little stone hut built there. I had a grandson going out there a few weeks ago, I rang Galbraith up and asked he could camp out there. I said, 'Is the hut still there'. He said 'No, when those bulldozers came in to clear the country they pushed it down'.

KH: It was a riverstone one?

ES: Yes. I saw it once out there, only small, it would be near as big as this room I think, just a nice little hut.

KH: You never went out to the Tin Mines, you never met Charlie Carter?

ES: No.

KH: But the Penders, I thought they mainly came from Jindabyne way.

ES: There's two lots. One lot - Straighty Pender came from out Jindabyne and the uncle of mine that married my father's sister comes from Benambra. They are related

KH: A long way back. The ones you knew in the mountains, weren't they mainly Jindabyne ones?

ES: Yes, Straighty Pender and Dudley Pender.

KH: What do you remember about Straighty?

ES: Only that he had a straight leg and he was a pretty tough man. He broke his leg at the knee and it was always straight.

KH: You would have sat around the fire a lot, you talk about them smoking their pipe and so on, do you remember any yarns that were told, you must have been entertaining each other. Were there any particular ones that you can remember?

ES: I remember them telling me about old Straighty Pender, he had a row with some bloke and he chased him with a whip and flogged him for about two mile.

KH: Were there any favourite stories?

ES: No it's a bit hard to sort of ...

KH: What about food, did you have any particular

ES: Mostly tin stuff. With a pack horse you had to take tin food.

KH: You took flour I suppose?

ES: Yes, but mostly bread, make a damper if you had to. When we were mustering cattle out there we used to kill a beast and take flour out. Up in the Geehi hut, Tyrrells had a hut up there, and he used to leave his flour hanging up with a wire so the rats couldn't get at it. He had one bit strung up there and he wrote on it "This flour has been poisoned for rats" so as nobody would touch it. Somebody else come along and wrote on the other side "It really is poisoned now". He didn't know whether he could eat it or not. He was a pretty tough man this old Tyrrell. He had blokes working for him up there in Geehi. There was one other chap up there possuming - there was a terrible lot of possums

there in the old days and they were very good ones-and he had a big tin full of nails. When he was leaving old Harry Tyrrell wanted to buy them off him. He wanted too much for them - 10 bob for them and old Harry wanted them for 5 or something. He was a pretty good foot runner too, this old Harry Tyrrell, fairly old man at the time, but he could run like a deer. So he said to him 'I'll run you to see if I give you 10 bob or give you nothing'. This bloke said 'You bandy-legged old coot, I'll soon run him'. He'd been walking around the mountains there and he was as fit as anything - he'd reckoned you never saw him for dust, so he got the nails for nothing. Another time he had a chap working for him up there and he said to him - he had a horse up there old Harry Tyrrell did, this fellow was working there and he had no horse - he said 'Oh on a Sunday when you're doing nothing and having the day off, get on my old horse and have a ride around, you can just see if the cattle are alright'. So one day he was riding it around and got it caught in a log and broke it's leg. Old Harry Tyrrell made him pay for it then. Old Jack Reid told me that - he was a tough old man.

KH: Even though he offered him the horse in the first place!

ES: Yeah even though he offered him. This is telling tales out of school - I used to have to cross cattle out here at the Bringenbrong bridge, they used to pay a pound a head, crossing from New South into Victoria. Dad used to work with him and they'd be bringing cattle from Geehi we'll say, come to the river and cross, and the bloke would count them. Harry Tyrrell would disappear that night and they'd have the cattle across the river somewhere and dad reckoned the next morning there would be another 50 or 60 head in them - he'd cross them further up.

KH: They'd want to avoid that I should think, a pound is a lot isn't it?

ES: It was a lot of money. They reckoned they used to all do that if they could get away with it.

KH: Oh yes. Do you remember any stories of cattle duffing, say from the Monaro across to the Victorian side? Any notorious characters, stories passed down to you?

ES: They used to do a fair bit out here on the Jupe from way I think. I don't know, I suppose there was, but we never lost any cattle. If we mustered our cattle in the mountains out there and was three or four short, they'd come back the next year with some of the other fellows cattle, they'd take them home with them and we'd do likewise. When we had our final muster out there, if we had somebody else's cattle, we'd take them back the next year. I don't know of much duffing, not as much as there would be about here. Quite

a bit of it was done here, especially in that bush fire time. A lot of people had cattle disappear. Even now, a few years ago, there was cattle duffing around here. I dare say quite a few of them out there didn't kill their own meat you know. I would imagine that went on quite a bit.

KH: They could get rid of the evidence couldn't they?

ES: They tell me, old Barney Finn I think it was, he had sheep out there and some old bloke had sheep not far away and he come along one day and had dinner with this old Barney Finn and he said 'That's a nice bit of mutton you've got'. He said 'Yes'. He said, 'Where did you get it from'. He said 'That old bugger that lives over the hill there, I get one of them whenever I want one' and it was him you see. When he was leaving he said, 'Next time you kill one of those old bugger's sheep, hang the skin on the fence, I like to keep my skins'.

KH: It's a wonder he didn't shoot him.

ES: There's some pretty tough old blokes out there in those mountains. My brother and Frank Whitehead, one old fellow, one of the old Smurdens, he used to come out there and he'd only muster - he used to run cattle out there - I don't think he had a block really. He used to get cattle out there with some of the other fellows - we didn't have a block then - we had no right doing it, but we used to - he had no right taking our money - but we used to pay this old uncle of ours 10 pounds a year for a 100 head of cattle and then we'd help him muster. That's how my brother and I - we started going out there with him for nothing for years, just to run a few head of cattle, then we got more and more. After I got married I used to run a 100 head there myself for about 10 pounds a year, to help him muster, that's how I come to go out there a lot.

This old Smurden, he used to be running cattle with somebody anyway, he got my brother and Frank Whitehead and said 'I'll give you 10 bob a head to muster the rest of my cattle with yours'. So I got about 30 head, they took him down and met him on one of the reserves - he owed them 15 pound - he was going to send it, but he never ever did. See those sort of things happened quite a bit in the old days. He couldn't have been game to go out there again.

KH: You'd have to work together pretty well I think. Did you have any occasions when there was cattle snowed in, when you got into trouble with the weather?

ES: Not really. McPhies did, they lost a lot of cattle out there and so did Jack Pierce. They got caught out there, lost hundreds. The snow hit them, they left it too late. They'd go down into the gorges and then they can't get out. We had one lot once under Finlay's Lookout, they went out there and got to them and they'll walk up and down, up and down in the snow and make a

Errol Scammell

track, it will cut out that track, it will get too steep for them and they won't go any further, they just keep walking up and down. They got them out and yet all that Pretty Plain country goes under snow and one year we had a cow out there that broke her shoulder, they didn't kill her, they just left her. The next year she was alive out there under Finlay's Lookout, it must have been a light winter. I forget now, I think they brought her out. Those McPhies, they had a different way of mustering the cattle, they owned so much country back the other way, they used to come out there into that Grey Mare country and just start herding their cattle that way. As it snowed they'd just keep going ahead of the snow. They never had a real muster and their cattle, they had hundreds. They used to bullocks out, they never used to sell them until they were 4-5 year old.

KH: They'd pick up a lot of others wouldn't they along the way?

ES: Oh yes, they used to. They'd bring them back if they could. Most people would get their cattle out of there before they mustered. They would be the last to muster. They were in that Grey Mare range and all through that country. Their cattle was pretty-well everywhere, they must have had a terrible lot of country. They had cattle all over Big Bogong, Jargungal, right through there. Most of the other way, Farm Ridge way, was sheep people I think.

KH: The Riell's were around Farm Ridge.

ES: Yes they were sheep people.

KH: Further out was big western land-holders from out west.

ES: Its only a few years ago that they've hunted those Jindabyne people out there.

KH: Yes '68 I think was the last year.

ES: It gave people a pretty tough time didn't it. Those old Westons and that used to come in there and they only had - I don't know how they wintered their cattle back in Jindabyne but they never used to run anything in the summer, they'd bring their cattle to the mountains, how they kept them going through the winter I don't know.

END SIDE 3, TAPE 2.

CONCLUSION