

*Bill Ross
has passed died.*

A Lifetime Of Forestry

An Interview With Bill Ross

By George Duxbury

In June 1995 I was invited to meet an elderly gentleman who wanted to speak to someone from C.A.L.M. about the early days and offer some photographs to the Department if they were of any interest. The mans name is Bill Ross who lives in Walridge Hostel, Forestfield. I went along completely in the dark as to who or what Mr Ross was and was very pleasantly surprised how fast the time slipped by as he told me of his life as a Forester.

Bill Ross was born in Scotland in 1902, his parents immigrated shortly after and Bill grew up in the quite backwater of Parkerville. In 1918 he joined the first intake of forest apprentices, confederate of well known Forester Dick Perry. He told me how they spent their first year as apprentices at Hamel, near Waroona, and learnt survey techniques along with tree husbandry and other forest skills. He emphasised that at this time no-one took a great deal of interest in fire control so that wasn't something they had to learn.

Having finished their initial year as apprentices Bill was sent to work on timber classification camps where they surveyed just how much millable timber was in the West Australian bush. His first posting was to a camp at Dwellingup in November 1920 then after only a short while he was transferred to the karri country about twenty miles (32 km) out of Manjimup. There were about eight people on the camp and the fellows carrying out the survey would walk out along the survey lines and assess every tree for a hundred yards either side of the lines. Slow, hot and tedious work in dense karri scrub which Bill says put him off working again in the deep south if he could avoid it.

Living in tents and moving camp when it got too far away from where they were working, life was pretty rough. He said that each week they would buy a sheep carcass off a farmer which was picked up by whoever went into town with the horse and cart for stores. Many times the carcass was almost crawling out of the cart by the time they got it back to camp, as there was no refrigeration or means of keeping the flies away from it. Consequently they quite often threw the lot away before they could use any of it. This meant that they often went and shot a kangaroo, wallaby or bush birds, as if they didn't there was no meat at all for the week, which occasionally happened. There were no roads to the camps and the lads had to cut the roads in by hand as they went. By the end of summer and when the winter rains started to set in the gang was pulled out and sent up to Mundaring, much to everyone's relief, according to Bill. He said the trip out of the karri country was something he has never forgotten. The cart kept getting bogged, their gear was wet, they were soaked and they were caught in the dark and had no means of lighting their

way, finally stumbling into Manjimup sometime in the middle of the night.

Bill informed me the first camp for forestry purposes in the Mundaring District was at Bartons Mill, where once again they lived in tents. He said that it was while he was at Barton's Mill that the Forestry Department, under the direction of Charles Lane-Poole, first started to take an interest in fire control. He laughingly told me how they would be sent out on a hot day to ride around the district on either horse or pushbike to watch for fires. When a fire was sighted they then had to ride like blazes to find someone to tell, so the system wasn't too good as they lacked communications. He said it didn't matter that much as there was little they could do once a fire was established anyway as they didn't have any equipment. The first few years of fire control mainly consisted of cleaning tops from around potential timber trees and burning off areas during the cooler months.

Bill remembers how there was a big team of men in a timber workers camp on Allan Road not far from the weir. The main purpose of this camp was to transport timber to the furnaces to drive the pumps for the Eastern Goldfields water supply.

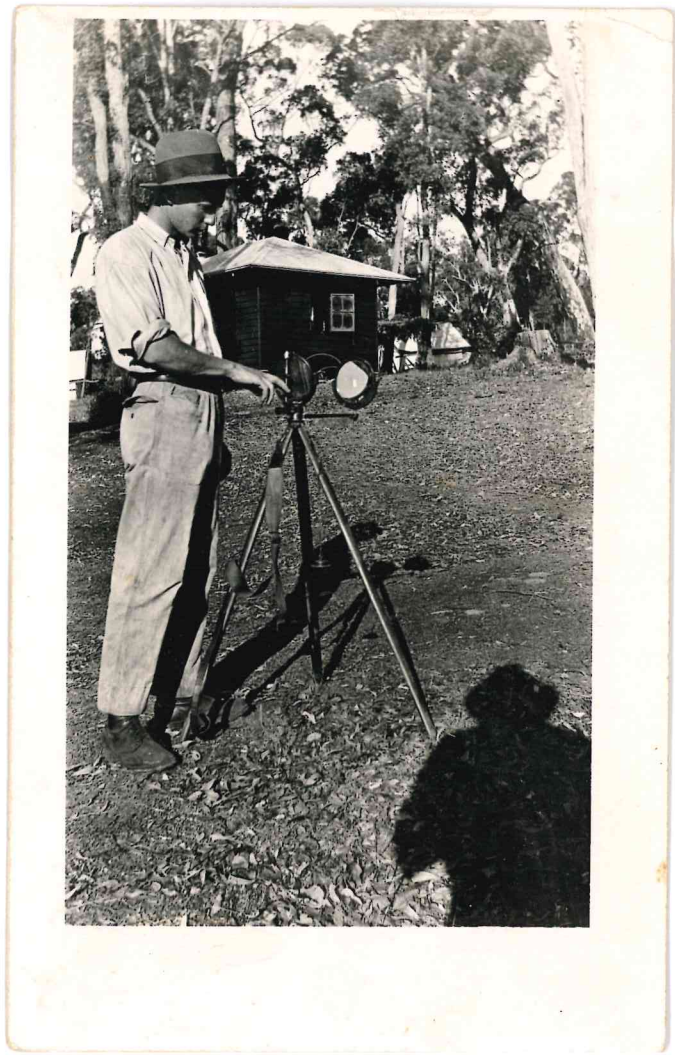
I was provided with a photograph of the gang of men who planted the first pines on Greystones Plantation near the Mundaring Weir in 1925. Bill also gave me a photo of the camp he lived in at Barton's Mill and one of himself as a young man learning how to use a heliograph which was the favoured form of long distance communication of the day. He said the heliograph was never a great success as the men were hard put to learn the morse code necessary to operate it.

I was shown photo's of how they carried pine seedlings up the weir by boat rather than having to carry them by horse and cart over the hill to the plantation site.

In the mid twenties Bill and Dick Perry were sent to South Australia for six months to learn more about pine husbandry and plantation management, a period of time which Bill has fond memories of. Bill's interest remained in plantation work throughout his forestry career. He was the officer responsible for the setting up of the Harvey Weir and Myalup Plantations. He retired in 1962 after forty four years with the Forest Department. He retired as District Forester in charge of the Hamel Nursery where he had started all those years earlier.

At ninety three years of age Bill complains that he has slowed down a bit but generally keeps reasonable health. He was quietly jubilant about how he and Dick Perry have gotten their money's worth out of the Superannuation Board having been retired for thirty three years now. There is probably very few foresters who still remember Bill Ross but I am sure that any person with an interest in the forestry past would be welcome for a chat by this fine old man. I know I am pleased that I was the one who received the invitation to visit him.

Thank you Bill.



First planting gang Greystones
1925

Jack Watson in charge

FIRST CAMP BARTON'S MILL



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BILL ROSS LEARNINGS TO USE HALLIDAY'S KODAK

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KODAK