J.T.'s Co. Edited transcript 04148 tr

Mr. John Thomson was interviewed for the Battye Library Oral History Programme on July 13, 1976 by Jean Teasdale. Mr. Thomson describes his life, his work and many aspects of the timber industry. Mr. Thomson has placed in Battye Library a large number of tapes of his interviews with men in the timber industry and with people in the North West.

My name is John Alfred Thomson. I first saw the light of day on the 29th August, 1902 in Laverton, a thriving mining town at the time. Laverton is six hundred miles north-east of Perth and about two hundred miles beyond Kalgoorlie. As I first remember Laverton, it was a thriving town with four pubs. There were two publicans there. One had a brick hotel and the other one a corrugated iron one. They were both by the name of Thompson. One was known as "Bricky" Thompson and the other one was "Tinny" Thompson. I remember Bricky Thompson because he was a marvellous pianist and I'd go in to hear him playing. In Laverton, being such an isolated community in those far off horse and buggy days, people had to learn to entertain themselves and they had some marvellous talent down there. Even as a very young child I can remember everybody turning up for some really good singing and music. I remember my first Guy Fawkes Day, I suppose I was four years of age. People named Gairdner ran a garden about five miles out and they came to our place for supper. I remember them saying that the committee has spent seventy pounds, which in those days was a lot of money, on crackers and rockets and things. I remember them saying that one young fellow in particular had thrown ten pounds into the kitty just for the kids. The kids had a marvellous time at functions, especially after the Annual Hospital Ball. The women would come up to the school with loads of cream puffs and fancy food left over to give to the kids at the school.

When we had a picnic we'd go to a creek, I've forgotten the name. It would be about a mile out of Laverton. It only ran

when it rained and I remember there was a nice pool of water there about thirty yards long and about six or seven yards wide. There were two little girls in Laverton named Mitchell whose father had a piggery not far away and I thought it would be nice if these two little girls and I went in for a swim. So off we tootled after school and went in all in the nuddy. I remember three fellows driving past in a sulky and by the time I got home the word was all around the town about how we were all indulging in nude bathing!

At the time, my father, who had prospected all his life, was running a bike shop business in partnership with some other fellow. They used to have a lot of bike races then and betting was always going on and Dad found out his partner was running a "slanter" with some of the bike riders and virtually robbing their customers. Dad was very straight-laced and he wouldn't have a bar of this so he went off prospecting again out to the Mulga Queen Gold Mine. The Mulga Queen would be about ninety miles due north of Laverton out beyond the Erlistoun sheep and cattle station. We went there and another (quiet) woman, a Mrs. Kruse lived there with her two little boys. Something which is indicative of the times is that although all that country between Mulga Queen and Laverton, that sparcely populated country, was more or less alive with prospectors and black fellows, those two women with their four kids could stack into a sulky (I don't know how they stacked them all in) and go off to Laverton. They would have a ninety mile trip, a two day trip. I remember there was a way-side pub about half way in and they'd send word in to there to expect the two women on a certain night and if they didn't turn up they'd know that they must have had an accident or something with their horse. No one ever dreamt of them being interfered with by prospectors or by the blacks. The blacks, were marvellous people in that regard. My young brother and I used to periodically get lost, we'd just head off out into the bush. Our first playmates were little black picaninnies and

when we went out with them we were pretty right but sometimes we went out on our own accord and ended up by getting bushed. They'd round up one of the black women there and she'd see us home. I can barely remember this and I can't be too sure whether I actually remember this or whether it was from my mother telling me repeatedly, but there was a starving tribe of blacks came in from hundreds of miles away. According to the local blacks who didn't know them they'd come in from the east. All their waterholes had dried up and their yam patches and all the men, women and children had legs just like broomsticks. The first thing Dad and his mates did was to rustle up all the food they could and fed them. I think the following story indicates the marvellous stamina of the black fellows. Dad wrote a letter to the policeman, a man named Malone, explaining the circumstances and telling him to get tucker out, as much tucker as he could. Dad handed this letter to a young black man a boy, they called him Jumbo. That would mean anything of course, but you know the white man's way of calling most black people Jumbo or a name similar to that, and he said, "Look Jumbo, take this letter straight into Mr. Malone the policeman and he'll send out tucker for these people." That young fellow just trotted off into the bush at three o'clock in the afternoon and he handed that letter to Malone twenty-four hours later, just like that! It would be a distance of ninety miles. A white man would have to train for a couple of years to be able to perform a marvellous test of physical endurance like that. I suppose he lived on bardies and lizards.

You might be interested to know what sort of living accommodation my mother and Mrs. Kruse had. They didn't camp in tents or with a bough shed over them like the men would have done, but Dad and his mates put up a light timber-framed house. We had a front room, a bedroom and a backroom which was the kitchen. The outer walls were covered with hessian which was painted with a mixture of lime and cement and that served as

a very good lining in that hot climate. I remember we had a linoleum floor and a corrugated iron roof. I remember on hot days it would be so hot that you wouldn't know where the heck to get to keep cool. My favourite spot was to crawl into the front room on the cool linoleum under the table. It would be so hot sometimes that going across to Kruses' next door, about a hundred yards away in the middle of the day, running from one mulga bush or even one saltbush to the next, (say ten or twelve metres) would be too far for me. I'd have to roll over on my back and hold my feet off the ground because it was so hot it would fairly burn the soles off my feet. It was so hot too that I once found a rabbit under the shade of a saltbush and it was so exhausted I just put my hand out and caught it. The blacks you know would stand there and talk. They'd come to the back door sometimes wanting tea and sugar and they'd stand there for half an hour, stand and talk and it wouldn't mean a thing to them, the soles of their feet must have been half an inch thick! Naturally my mother would have a battle to cope with the laundry. We had a condensing plant on the mine but of course we had to be very careful with water nevertheless. The water came from down below in the mine. I remember that we had an underground shaft there away from the mine and Mum kept her perishable stuff down there, things like butter and eggs and while she had them, vegetables and fruit (which was not so often.) An underlay is a shaft that goes down at an angle of about forty-five degrees and there was water down there at about eighty feet. It was brackish. About every eight feet there's a step for people descending the shaft. One day (this is after I'd gone away to school) my young brother, Wally, who was about two, just a toddler, was with my mother and Mum left him up at the top while she went down to get some potatoes or something. He, like all curious toddlers started to follow her and he tripped and rolled over and before he could regain his balance fell over the next one and would have rolled right down into that water and been drowned if she hadn't been there. Water there was so

scarce that in the cyanide vats, where they treated the pounded up ore, we'd sometimes find dead kangaroos or dead birds. They'd come in from the bush and would smell the water and taste it. Of course cyanide is a very deadly poison. We were always warned never to go near these vats. I remember we couldn't have been too old because we'd seen them back the horse and dray in underneath the condensing tank where they drew the water and syphon it out with a hose we thought it would be a pretty good idea to syphon off this cyanide vat. The tank was about two foot six in depth and about fifteen feet in diameter and all of a sudden we became aware of Dad. We heard him whistling about fifty yards away. He told my mother afterwards that when he saw us there his first instinct was to sing out and then he suddenly realised that if he did the fellow on the top edge of the tank could have fallen in and that would have been the stone end of him. Anyway he whistled and we scampered down out of the way. The water condenser was quite good at purifying the water. It's a matter of boiling it. I can remember two places out on some of the salt lakes, when I was with Dad in the 1930's in particular. I remember him showing me some remains of some wood, billets of wood, out on the salt lakes and when I asked what it was he explained that it was where they'd been condensing in the early days. They couldn't get water anywhere. There was no fresh water, so they carted wood out on a lake and although it was as salt as the sea they'd build a big fire there and boil it up and drip by drip they got enough water to survive on. This would have been in about 1906 I suppose. Incidentally the only running water my brother and I saw in those days was red. It was in the creek. Wherever you travelled in the Goldfields in those days you noticed the dams were all red. This is from natural soil erosion. Whenever we had a thunder storm my brother and I would strip off our clothes and run out into the rain. I well remember that in our front room we had a picture of a nicely dressed girl of three with curly hair sitting by the

edge of a beautiful clear stream. There were ferns all around and I can remember thinking this place in the picture must be just like heaven!

There was another incident about this time which impressed me. A man named Charlie Hughes in Laverton was an agent and also ran a livery stable and an auctioneers. He was a man of many parts, a pretty enterprising sort of a fellow. We also had a mailman, I don't know how often the mailman came out, I think it was only about once a month. He was an Indian man named Rangi, the kindest fellow you've ever met, but he had a frightful temper. He was alleged once to have got wild with one of his horses and is said to have taken an axe to it and killed it. But to me, Rangi was a lovely chap. He was a youngish man of about thirty. When Rangi came out he'd give my young brother and me a peach or something like that. That was worth a lot to get fresh fruit out there, it was a rare treat. Anyway Charlie Hughes sent word out through Rangi that he'd be coming out on a certain day on a motor bike and he landed out at lunch time and I can remember them being amazed. My mother said, "Isn't it marvellous to think that a person can have breakfast in Laverton and lunch out here at Mulga Queen, ninety miles away!"

There was no school at the mine of course and about the time I was due to start school we came back to Laverton to live. Laverton of course was named after a Dr. Laver who was quite a well known character on the Goldfields. I can remember my mother and others saying that he was more interested in gold prospecting than in medicine. Anyway I went to school for about a year in Laverton. At the time there were mainly whites and only a few black children at the school. The blacks mostly stayed out in the bush. We had two teachers, a headmaster and a young girl about nineteen. The play ground was hard and we had no football or cricket but we did have a horizontal bar.

I tried my skill on it and tried to do what the bigger kids were doing and ended up on my nose. My mother said I was delirious for a couple of days afterwards. The kids would make "kylies" like the blacks. They're like a boomerang and were made of galvanised iron. One black boy was pretty good at this but one he threw came down across my nose.

Water was short in Laverton also. The local store had a big draught horse in one of those heavy drays with tyres about five inches wide and they'd set this old horse off and he'd go out to the mine (the store owned one). They'd give him a feed out there. He'd be in the dray, with a square galvanized iron tank about four feet by four feet and about three feet deep. It would hold about two hundred gallons of water. There was a condensing plant out at this mine and the horse would bring this water into the store and it would be pumped into an overhead tank. My Dad would take my young brother and me down sometimes of an evening and we'd have a shower for a bob, that was one shilling, twelve cents in today's terms. I don't know how poor old Mum got on. She had to make do with what they call a "Kalgoorlie" bath, a drop of water in the bottom of the tub and sponge all over sort of thing. But water of course was at a premium. We lived in a house up near the hospital, only about a couple of hundred yards away. We overlooked the town, and we had to get water carted up there, about a hundred gallons at a time, I couldn't tell you what it would cost, but it was pretty costly.

When we shifted into Laverton Mum must have lived there on her own so I could start school and Dad went out prospecting again. I don't remember him going off prospecting but he was out for two or three months and Mum got word to say to expect him home on a certain day or a certain evening and we heard the dray coming and the young brother and I rushed out to meet him and when I got out this strange man got off the dray. He

had a beard on him and I got scared and was going to run back inside but he called out to me and it was Dad. I might mention that I was the eldest of seven and my mother had virtually brought us up because Dad was away most of the time. He was a well-known prospector and a man of pretty high integrity. He was known all through South Australia and carried out several prospecting trips over there later. He chased the elusive yellow till he was about seventy-four. He never struck it really rich. They did fairly well out of the Mulga Queen Gold Mine. I think Dad got about fifteen hundred pounds. They got about fifteen hundred pounds each out of it. He was always talking about going on the land. Anyway, we shifted down to Perth about that time and I went to school at Subiaco, a school out at Bagot Road and this was the beginning of a period when Mum brought us up. Dad was away pretty well all the time prospecting. He was so well-known that he could go out prospecting for companies. I'd say my mother was a most remarkable person. She'd be one in ten thousand. She had to be firm and once Mum said she was going to do a thing she did it and if she said she was going to take you in hand and give you a whacking, well she didn't always give it right on the spot but when she was good and ready she did it. You knew that when she said something she meant it and by gee, she had to be pretty strict to bring up such a large family. She made the greatest impact on my life.

Before this we'd been brought down to Perth for a holiday and we stayed at the Shaftsbury Hotel. I remember how intrigued I was to sit down at a table and have a woman come along and give us the menu. My young brother George and I were that used to the bush where we'd head off anywhere we wanted to that the first thing we did of course was to get lost. Mum had the police out looking for us, but we got over that. We lived in Subiaco for about twelve months or so, then my mother evidently went back to Laverton again and she sent George and me to a convent boarding school at Toodyay. I was eight and a half and

George was seven. They took boys and some girls. There was a beautiful young nun there who made a tremendous impact on me. She implanted the idea that she was going to make a fine priest out of me. I went along with the idea for a long time but I'm afraid after I got down to the bush afterwards I forgot about it! We were there eighteen months altogether. Dad picked out some orchard up in the Karragullen area and Mum went up there to have a look at this place and she said later that the dead ring-barked trees haunted her. She just took one look at it and she jibbed right on the spot and said she wasn't going up there so they settled for a little weatherboard cottage out in Victoria Park which he knocked into shape. He then left Mum there to look after the kids and to see we got a bit of schooling and off he went again back bush. I had two years at the State School at Victoria Park, and two years in Perth Boys' School. I was there in '15 and '16 and the famous well-known character, Tommy Chandler, was the headmaster there. He was a remarkable man. On occasions he could dress a boy down and make him feel about knee high. I remember once there was a march through the city for troops before they departed for the war and they gave us permission to go and watch them. Each boy was on his honour to come back to the school at a certain time and on the way back coming over the bridge, at the bottom of William Street, I met my mother, my aunty and my young sister and I stopped to talk to them for a few minutes. I was late and the teacher sent me down to see old Tommy. Everybody regarded him with a respectful affection or affectionate respect if you like. He was always dead fair but when he was certain that you were guilty of anything he gave you the works and didn't he dress me down! I went back feeling about as big as a threepenny bit. I remember another occasion though, I was always taught to tell the truth under any circumstances. I remember my dad boasting once that he'd never known me to tell a lie (bit like George Washington!) But anyway on this occasion, in our class, the teacher kept us in

because of something one of the kids had done in the class and he penalised the whole class for it, nobody owned up although everybody knew who it was and we were kept in for about a quarter of an hour. We missed our train which meant we had to wait an extra thirty-five minutes. As the boys got out on the steps they all started to hoot, or most of them did. I thought hooting was a bit of a cowardly business when you're in a mob. Before we knew what had happened, Tommy Chandler who happened to be in his office came out and called us all back. He took us in the hall and he said, "Now, hand up every boy that hooted". Not one hand went up. He said for a second time, "Hand up every boy that hooted." And I thought, well to hell with them, if he thinks I'm not game to put my hand up! I hadn't hooted, but I put my hand up, so he said, "Right, you can go for telling the truth."

I stayed for two years and then that was the end of my schooling. There was a job advertised by the Forests Department for forest apprentices during the Christmas vacation and my mother asked me about that. I thought that getting down amongst the big timber, down amongst all those timber men and forest rangers they used to talk about would be marvellous. There was a film on at the time called "The Forest Ranger" and this decided me so I put in an application for this position. I was fourteen and a half. During the Christmas vacation while I was waiting for the results of this I took on a job. I was driving a baker's cart for three weeks and I was a telegram boy. Finally I was taken in to interview Mr. Lane-Poole, C.E. Lane-Poole the Conservator. I don't know why he picked me because I hadn't been back to even find out whether I'd passed my last exam, but evidently he liked the look of me or something about me and to my great surprise I was one of two out of one hundred and thirty applicants. The other boy was Dick Perry, D.H. Perry, and Dick became, well he is one of the best known foresters in Australia I would say. I don't ascribe to that distinction by any means. Anyway, that

commenced my career in the Forests Department. We were called apprentices. I've got my indentures home somewhere.

At the beginning of 1917 we were both sent down to the nursery at Hamel. I beat Dick there by two days. I landed there on the 14th of March, 1917 and we were regarded more or less as cheap labour by the Forester in Charge there. I remember he was a bit of a sadist. They had hoes for hoeing up in between the nursery lines, where they grew pines out in the open nursery lines and he'd cut the handles in half for us. You'd have about a three foot long handle whereas you could have done the job just as well and far more comfortably with a longer handle. I always had a bad back. I think I hurt it once jumping into a tank, an empty tank and I jarred it and I put my teeth through my tongue at the same time. My back's always been bad and oh gee, bending over hoeing hour after hour my back would ache that much I reckon I could have boiled a billy on it. Anyway, we were there for twelve months. We used to work forty-eight hours a week. We started at seven-twenty in the morning. We had lunch from twelve to one and then the five o'clock knock off. Now when we commenced our first year of apprenticeship our pay was twelve and six plus ten shillings sustenance allowance. That was because we were away from home, so that made twenty-two and six that's two dollars twenty-five cents in today's language. The next year after twelve months faithful service and passing our exam we got a princely rise of five shillings or fifty cents. We'd get roneoed lectures sent down to us and we had to study these at night time, after our day's work. By the time I got into the third year apprenticeship I got another five shilling's rise. I was down on the classification survey camps and by this time there were four other apprentices, that was six of us. One of the things that I'm proud about was that I drew up a petition to the Conservator and went round to these other fellows to sign it. There were two of them and I had to stand over them and nearly punch their

heads to make them sign for a rise. Anyway we got a whole two and six rise but by gee they didn't knock the two and six back when they got that.

In our first job we had a nice little brick-built cottage down at Hamel. Dick and I shared a bedroom and we had another room adjoining it which was a sort of a living room with a fire-place. We were able to light a fire in the winter time. There was no shortage ever of wood. We didn't cook much for ourselves. We were very lucky, the manager was a bachelor and his sister (oh she was a lovely woman) looked after us, they were half Chinese. By arrangement with the Department, she agreed to board us and she gave us our board for fifteen shillings a week. Just imagine that today, a dollar fifty cents a week. It used to irk me, this weeding in the nursery and I never fell in love with the Hamel Nursery. I was darn glad to get out of it. During that period another apprentice and I were sent down to Wonnerup and we worked with a man named Hughie Brockman and with another old Forest Ranger named Bill Donovan and we assessed the famous tuart forest that they later bought. The Department then were considering buying this tuart forest from the Layman family at Wonnerup, a few miles out from Busselton, so I took part in that and I was then transferred to Donnybrook. I was only there for a few months and the Forester there was a man named Percy Port. It was while I was with him that I first saw fallers and haulers working at Wellington Mill. I remember we drove up from Donnybrook this day. Old Percy had a buggy and pair of horses and we got up there about noon and pulled the horses out (you always feed your horses and water them before you do anything else). I could hear what I thought was dynamite explosions. There was forest all round us and I thought this was funny and wondered where it came from. I thought it must be some farmers or something clearing. After we'd had lunch I discovered that what I was hearing was jarrah trees being felled. About every quarter of an hour or so there'd be one of these intermittent

explosions. I saw the axemen later falling these great trees and I saw the haulers there and the whim horses and whims working with the teamsters. I also met another famous character there, perhaps the most colourful character in the history of the timber industry, that was Kelly the Mug, Jim Kelly. He was the manager of Millar's Mill at East Kirup. That was in our district at the time and there were sleeper cutters all round the country too. I only had about four months there and then I was transferred, to my great delight, to the Forestry Classification Camp as they called it. It was actually a timber assessment survey camp. Nobody knew what the exact acreage of jarrah forests were. When I say jarrah forests, I mean commercial millable forests. Marketable timber and we were engaged for four years in carrying out assessment surveys to find out the area and the approximate quantity of timber that was growing. I joined this camp at a place called Wilga about twenty-five miles up the Preston line from Donnybrook. That was in 1918.

In a previous interview, a transcript of which is held in the Battye Library, I have explained the life in these classification camps so I won't dwell on this side of it. We were only in the Wilga district for one or two camps then we shifted to Margaret River. All the rest of the fellows except the cook and I went by train. The cook drove a spring cart with the cooking gear, horse feed and our swags. I rode my horse the "Bint" who was a showy little bay with black points. The Forests Department had supplied me with this horse and she'd dance and prance all over the place. Nobody else liked to ride her but I could get her to do things. She was showy and mettlesome but I was proud of her. Well the cook and I did about thirty miles a day. The cook was about forty years old with a flowing walrus moustache. He was a good clean cook but like many in those days when they had a holiday liked to indulge in the amber fluid so he stocked up pretty well with bottles of beer. If he met

anybody along the track he'd crack a bottle, so he really enjoyed himself and so did I. He reckoned I was the best wet-nurse he'd ever struck in his travels because by the end of the day he wouldn't be in any condition to, - well he'd be feeling nice and merry and I'd fix the camp up and feed and water the horses and chuck his swag out and boil the billy and do a bit of cooking and what was needed. I remember going past an Orphanage (orchard) there I'll always remember that Orphanage (orchard), it was about six miles on the Bunbury side of Donnybrook. It was the apple season and I was hungry for fruit. I wanted to buy some apples and there was a middle-aged couple there and they asked me where was I going. They didn't know me and of course in those days a strange boy riding a horse, they naturally wanted to know who he was, I told them what I was doing and who I was and they filled up a hessian chaff sack about a third full of apples and they wouldn't take a penny for it. They sent me on my way with this great swag of apples. I was chewing apples for the rest of the trip.

I remember we camped under the bridge at Capel, there was a nice sandy spot there. We could get a good hip-hole and dig ourselves in and make ourselves comfortable. We eventually got to Busselton and we stayed a couple of days in Busselton. We stayed at the Ship Hotel and who should I meet there but a fellow who was a famous character, Sam Isaacs. Sam was the man who went into the deeper water at the wreck of the Georgette with one of the Bussell girls. She became known as the "Grace Darling" of the West. The story I heard down there, and I'm just saying it for what it's worth is that Sam is supposed to have gone into the deeper water and pulled the people off the ship and taken them into the shallow water and the girl Bussell (of course she was pretty game) went in and pulled them onto the shore. He was a very dignified old fellow, a coloured man of about sixty and he had a white beard. He always held h imself up in a very calm and dignified way and he spoke slowly and was a real old

philosopher. I thoroughly enjoyed talking to him. He'd brought his bullock team and wagon in and shifted all the gear out to Margaret River.

At that time there was no railway to Margaret River and there was no town as we know it today. There was Higgins' Homestead down on the Margaret River itself and about a hundred yards up the hill there was what would pass for a shed and that was the local hall. There was a farmer about a mile down the road and then there were the Wilmots. They were on another track and there were about ten settlers round the place. We went out in the bush and we probably camped the first night out at the Higgins'. Billy Higgins was my tent mate. He was nineteen and I was sixteen. He was a real good fellow, Billy and he was a wild devil too. We rode in one night. He'd borrowed a horse from one of the fellows on the camp (old Jim Betts) and we rode into his homestead. There was the father and mother and there was Mary, a very neat little thing who was twenty-six and Agnes the next girl was twenty-three and Tisha would be sixteen. I mention them particularly because I'll tell you the story later of how they taught me to dance. Anyhow this night we went in, a Wednesday night, and I suppose we got fed up with being in the camp so we rode in and played cards and had a bit of a sing-song. About midnight after having a bit of supper we came out and it was dark and I couldn't see anything. This mad Bill gets on his horse (fortunately it was a cream coloured pony) and before I'd properly got into my saddle he was off at a flat out gallop and I didn't know where the devil the track was so I just followed this white tail. I just gave my pony her head. I had to restrain her a bit because she'd want to gallop past the other one, but I kept her behind. I was getting sprayed with gravel and we went about a mile and a half down the track and all of a sudden the cream pony skidded to a stop and I remember there was a five foot jarrah tree

across the road. It was too big for them to cut off. Anyhow that steadied him up! This was the sort of thing he enjoyed, but to me it was like coming out of a house into a black space and I didn't know where the heck I was.

We shifted afterwards down near Karridale and I remember we were camped about four miles out of Karridale. Karridale had a beautiful hall from the days of the old mill. It had a lovely grand piano and the remains of the library (what the mice had left) from the days of the famous "Karri" Davies family (MC Davies). We used to work six days one week and five days another week instead of working five and a half days a week. On one occasion Bill borrowed the horse again and went home to Margaret River. That was only about twenty-six miles away. He wanted to know if I was coming to the dance at Karridale the next night. I said I couldn't dance and I wouldn't go in. I'd never been on a dancing floor and I hardly knew any girls and I was a bit shy. That afternoon my boss Harry Clifford said he'd been asked to go in to the dance to give the accordian player a spell, because all the music was provided with an ordinary accordian or the old "windjammer" as we called it. After dancing to this all night you'd hear the tunes going through your head for a couple of days afterwards! Of course he asked me to go in with him for company. I had a Kalgoorlie bath, that is you get a cut-down kerosene tin and warm some water up and get in your tent with a sponge or a flannel or a piece of cloth and wash yourself. We went in and when I got in the first thing I knew was that Billy raced around and brought Mary and Agnes and a cousin of his over. They came to see this strange boy who was sixteen and couldn't dance. Of course the kids there learnt to dance almost as soon as they got out of their napkins. It took me about ten minutes to convince those three girls that I couldn't dance. "Well" they said, "You can't come here unless you dance and we're going to see that you dance." Those three girls throughout the whole of the night took it in turn to dance

with me. We had two suppers, one about eleven (that was the normal thing down there) another one about two or half past and we danced through till daylight. They were three of the best dancers around the district, and by the end of the night I could dance, I could waltz and schottische and I knew enough of the figures of the square dances to get by. Well in eight weekends I rode four hundred miles to dances. Not each week-end but every couple of weeks or so. Once we were camped up the Margaret River at a place called the Rapids, that's about twelve miles up from the bridge where the Margaret township is today. We left camp on the Saturday morning and rode down along just a bit of a horse pad through the bush along the river to Billy's home. We got down there and had a bit of lunch, gave the horse a good feed and after we set off for Augusta. We got down there about six o'clock and stayed at Katy Brennan's. We danced all night and the next morning after a few hours sleep we had a bit of lunch and then all the lads and lasses of the village walked down to the Leeuwin Lighthouse. That was only seven miles away. We had a look around there and then we came back and Billy and I had an early tea and left about six o'clock. We got to his place about twelve, put the alarm on, gave the horses a good feed and went to bed. We fell out of bed at five, got into the saddles and rode into the camp just as the old cook was ringing the cow-bell for breakfast. But to top it all, that was the last day on that particular camp and I went out on a single line to finish off the area, the section of country that we were classifying. We carried out our assessments on what we call a grid survey system. You put in east, west, north and south baselines and pegged off the assessment lines. These could be twenty or sometimes it would be thirty chains apart and you estimated the timber half a chain each side of the line and every ten chains it was estimated how much timber was on an acre. Well, normally you went over north or south or whatever it might be and returned on a parallel line. But we'd done that section, so my damn compass man (he was running the

compass and pulling the surveyor's chain and I'd wait and pull up at the end, pull him up every five chains, you see, where he'd make a mark) was a new fellow and he wasn't used to the bush and the clot went and walked through the line. I said to him after we'd been walking about an hour, "Crikey, we must have walked through that damn line." He didn't know whether he'd walked through it or not. Anyhow I decided we had walked through it and I staggered into the camp. Instead of having a nice, early day (I thought I'd get home about one o'clock or two o'clock) we were very late. You had odd days like that.

Anyway we shifted then to Manjimup on the way to Pemberton. Our first camp was seven miles out from Pemberton, two miles beyond the Brockman homestead. We were to work entirely in karri country. We were more used to jarrah although there'd been a bit of karri around Margaret River. We were to put in a fortnight adjusting our judgement by measuring girths and heights so we could estimate the volume of marketable timber contained in each trunk. This was all before our normal assessment job. Before we went out we stayed in Manjimup for two days since we had to have new gear. We bought new horses, new tents, new wagonettes and the works. The morning we were to shift out we couldn't find one of the cooks. We had two cooks since two camps were going to work together for the first fortnight. We looked for old Jim everywhere behind sheds and hollow logs and stumps and of course all round the pub. We couldn't find him so we went off without him. He turned up at camp two days later. He staggered in looking like a dreadful apparition. His eyes were red and when he saw the Holbrooks sauce bottle on the camp table he made a grab for it, pulled the top off it and tried to pour the sauce down his throat. The other cook, Mack, who was a crusty old devil, rushed up and told him he couldn't drink all the profits!

Manjimup at that time was full of sleeper cutters. There were

hundreds of sleeper cutters all round the bush and just about half a mile out from the railway station there was a big spring. That'd be on the north side. I never actually went down there but they told me that there'd be a hundred big draught horses there and the teamsters would go out and cart the hewn sleepers from the bush for miles around. The yard there the timber yard, that's partly covered with shops now, right from the two level crossings was full of hewn sleepers. There were trainloads of sleepers going out. The yard was about twenty-five chains wide by two chains deep. At the same time the possum season was open and the settlers were coming in with the skins of all the possums. I heard one fellow say that someone had two thousand pounds worth of possum skins. They were for export. They had a high market value too because possum skins have beautiful fur on them. Some of the top prices went as high as six pounds a dozen for very good samples. But four pounds was a very good price. Then at the height of the season when the skins were rolling in they'd get down to as low as two pounds a dozen, but they were a very highly valued source of income for settlers around the place. My wife's people, the Muirs, made a considerable part of their income from possums in the possum season. They shot kangaroos too and sold the skins as well as an odd dingo. A dingo scalp was worth two pounds. The dingo attacked the sheep and so the Government actually paid this out. I think it was arranged through the Road Board, as they called it in those days. The men would run a strip of skin along the back with the tail and the head on it and take that and hand it in to the Road Board secretary. We had the idea of course seeing all these skins that we'd have to get on to this too, so we bought some twine and fine wire and took it out to the camp with us. Although at that time we were right in the virgin karri and we thought men had never been there before, we found that wherever we went these damn Muirs and the Mottrams had trapped every tree! When they set a trap for a possum they cut a sapling about a couple of inches in diameter and trimmed it off. It

would be about seven feet long and they'd lay it up against the bottom of the tree where you could see the possum tracks. Possums always went up in the same route and you could see their scratches particularly in the marri. Well the red kino on the underbark would come out where they scratched. To set a trap you twisted the twine and the fine wire together and you made a running noose. You put a loop on one end and just ran the other end round through the little loop on the end and then you tied that on to the sapling and just left it with a wire circle about three or four inches in diameter on the top side. The silly old possum never had enough brains to go over the top and always put its head through and got caught. The poor devils of things got suspended by the neck and choked to death. It was a horribly cruel thing but people just don't think of the suffering of an animal. It's a strange thing about human nature. My wife's brother, for instance, is one of the kindest, gentlest blokes you'd ever strike in a day's march and I've seen him faint at the sight of blood on a person but he wouldn't think anything about killing and skinning a kangaroo or a bullock or a sheep. It didn't mean anything to him at all.

Well of course that would have been at the beginning of the 1920 summer and we just disappeared into the bush for about eight weeks before we came back into Pemberton again. Of course you've got to remember that at that time we had what seemed to be the whole world full of karri trees. It was a virgin karri forest and it was in the horse and buggy days of course and we just had to cut all our own tracks. We had to corduroy across wet and boggy flats, and there were plenty of them in the karri country. Corduroying, in case the listener may not know what it means is when you come to a boggy place like that you cut down saplings and you lay them cross-wise. Then cut scrub and put it over the top of that again and you'd be surprised what a big weight that carries across a boggy spot. Of course we also had to put in an occasional culvert across a running creek. There

were plenty of running creeks in the karri country because the rainfall there would be about fifty-five inches. It was beautiful water, because unlike the jarrah it's not mineralized to the same extent and it was really good. When you're working in karri country, I think I must have explained it in that other interview, how you could sometimes be crossing a flat with all this scrub and you'd have to break it down and climb over the top of it and when you pull up you could hear running water trickling underneath you.

Life on a camp where you talked to the same fellows every day for weeks and months on end and you never saw anybody else was monotonous and you got to reading the labels of the jam tins after a while. Harry Smith was the boss of the camp and one of my heroes too. He was an original Anzac and was amongst that crowd who went right through the war. He was a sleeper hewer or a timber man, an axeman and he came back. He was promoted to a captain in the field and although I thought old Smithy had won the war on his own because he put on a bit of an act at times, it wasn't till after he'd died a few years ago that I discovered he had a military decoration. But that's the sort of bloke he was, very gruff and a big toughy. One of the strongest men, but underneath he was a real softy, a kind, helpful sort of a bloke. They reckoned you could hear his voice a mile away on a parade ground. Anyway, we were all asleep one night, it would be about one or two o'clock in the morning. It was a summer's night, but there was no moon or anything. It was pretty dark, in the karri, what starlight there was, was clothed. You could hardly see anywhere outside. Smithy had a bag with some apples in his tent down at the foot of his bunk, and in the middle of the night Smithy roared out and woke everybody up. He yelled out, "Get your gun, Jack". This was for my benefit. I had an old singlebarrelled shot-gun there, rusty as the devil too I might say and half the time it was left out on old Phil's wagonette. I realized what was wrong, there was

a blasted possum there eating the apples. I picked out what was a dark object and in my haste I forgot to jam the butt against my shoulder and I let out a blast. It nearly knocked my right hand shoulder off. Anyhow the possum fell to the ground but I hadn't hit him and he was off like a scalded cat. By this time everybody had gathered around and somebody had come to light with a hurricane lamp. Then I realized how every bushman slept in their long, black, flannel shirts. Everybody was standing there except Bill Ross another apprentice and myself. We were very respectable, we had pyjamas; all these other blokes were standing there in their bare legs and black flannel shirts!

While on these assessment camps we marked out baselines and we had maps where all the baselines were shown. Each crew, a two man crew then had a compass man. He used a prismatic compass and we tied in the end of each line on to a baseline at the other end, which was measured of course. So many chains and each assessment line was numbered so that you could pick them up and they were all plotted on to a plan, onto a map. Our field books were all carefully kept of course because that was the purpose of our job and they were sent up to Head Office where they had a drafting room which plotted all this information on to plans and worked out the loadage and volume. When I say loadage that's the volume of marketable timber. I said loadage and I corrected myself because the "load" is a term that's peculiar to the timber industry of Western Australia and it means fifty cubic feet in the round when that's in the log. Or referring to square timber it means fifty cubic feet in the square of course. We went for as long as we could on assessment. We never completed the area. At this stage we were working out toward the Shannon River, between the Walpole and the Shannon and we did come back in 1922 and finished another area between there and the Frankland River. I was given a special job just after the war to complete another section between north of

Walpole and south of Lake Muir. During that period I had half a dozen trainees including the present Conservator of Forests, young Bruce Beggs and Barney White, he was another one. Barney White's one of the senior research men in the job now. I didn't think much of them after one of them lost the prismatic compass on the line. I said, "We'll have to go back and find it." I could see that they were wondering how the heck we were going to find a compass. So I went along the line and found it. They didn't look hard enough. That was all that was wrong with them. But that's another story.

We got back to Pemberton in the 1920 summer and we worked for as long as we could before the rain broke. After we had a shower or two and it looked as if the winter might be breaking we just packed up and went for our lives. Before this, we went in for Christmas. It was an interesting trip that, because we got in and stayed at the ~~boarding~~ mill boarding house. The Big Brook it was called in those days not Pemberton. We had to get up at some unearthly hour to board the train, the mill train. They had their own private line into Manjimup where you joined the Government railway line. Of course all the timber workers, the mill men and the fellows who worked in the bush were there all waiting to go and they were playing two-up or gambling with cards all night. But the interesting thing was that we travelled in open trucks into Manjimup and we got showered with red-hot sparks because the locomotive was fuelled with mill blocks, blocks of wood from the mill. They had a driver and a fireman and the fireman was kept flat out firing the boiler to keep the fires going. This was a train not a rake. A rake is a train of specially designed trucks for hauling in logs. It's got buffers, cross-sections and chocks on the side to stop the logs from rolling. When we got into Manjimup it was about seven o'clock in the morning and there must have been three or four hundred men there in the Manjimup railway yard, all timber workers, you could tell, there was something about them. All

these "jarrah Jerkers" (which as you know, is the colloquial term) ready to head for Perth. They went up twice a year usually but Christmas was the long holiday. They usually had two to three weeks holiday and then of course they only got a few days at Easter. Everybody travelled up on the train and you were lucky to get a seat. Sometimes you had to stand, pretty well all the way, on the train. My home was in Perth and it was a time we all looked forward to. To go home to mother and be with the family and have nice home comforts etc.

Anyway as I was saying when the winter rains came we stopped the survey. Before we went into the karri we were able to work through the winter in the jarrah forest, but not so in the karri, because the undergrowth's so dense that you'd be wet all the time. It didn't matter about you but I doubt whether you'd be able to stop your field book from getting all messed up and sopping wet and ruin all the plans. So we moved out and that sort of work closed down then until we came back as I mentioned in 1922. I was sent back to Collie, I was still an apprentice. I would have been in the fourth year of my apprenticeship. Bill Ross my tent mate and I staged the first strike in the Forests Department. I'd been on the job longer than Bill and I'd qualified as a timber assessor but poor old Bill they used him as a compass man and of course he was anxious to do some timber assessment work too and it used to worry him to think that I was a step ahead of him. Of course I understood his position and it was a hell of a hard job pushing that compass. The fellow behind— the assessor, had it pretty easy because he followed in the track of his compass man. But the compass man was pushing through wet prickly scrub and your clothes got torn off you. The worst menace was the bulldog ants. Practically every decaying karri log was full of thousands of these sergeant ants and by gee it was terrible if you had a sting from a bull dog ant as they called them, I reckon they were the ghastliest (gravest) thing that ever had life in them.

Well to get back to the story. Bill and I decided it wasn't right for us to be used as compass men, we were only getting apprentices' wages so we decided we'd go on strike. We were talking big and I didn't really know whether we'd be able to put this over. But we had to study. We were supposed to study these lectures we got and there was no one in the camp there who could help us, unlike at the nursery at Hamel, the manager there was a Forester and could help us. Anyway, we had just one day's work for one gang, one assessment gang, and the rest of us went on cutting the track through to the new camp and a change of work. There's an old saying in the bush "a change of job is as good as a spell" and poor old Bill had to go and do this other job. Well, we were working away there on a nice, pleasant mild summer morning and cutting our way through when we heard a crash down in the bush and then another one and after a while out burst Bill and his face was white with rage. I knew what had happened. He'd got out and he'd got into some "bent over". Now "bent over" is when a fire goes through karri wattle and doesn't kill it outright but it bends over while it's green. It bends over and it stays that way. It's as tough as hickory almost. It dries out very tough and hard and it's a heck of a job cutting it. It's too low for you to get underneath it and it's a bit too high. You've got to climb over it and you're pushing through blessed scrub up over your head. Bill got into this and he just couldn't stand it any longer. So, big Smithy says, "What's the matter, Bill?" Bill said, "I'm going on strike. I've had this." I said, "Well, if Bill's going on strike, I'm going on strike with him." So, I went in with Bill. We went and sat in the camp and Smithy came in. He said, "Well, what about it?" "Well," I said, "We're on strike. It's not fair. We're supposed to pass our exams and we're just being used up every day. We're doing the same sort of work as you people." Smithy said, "Oh well, stay in until the boss comes in a day or two." So we sat there for three days. Anyway the boss came up and it was arranged that we would have alter-

nate days off and Bill would do his timber assessment too. Well, after the first couple of days we were very sorry that we'd ever gone on strike because we didn't know what the heck to do with ourselves. I remember the first morning in camp I had a showdown with old Mac the cook. He saw that I wasn't cutting the crib, the unwritten rule was that every man cut his own crib when you were working out in the bush, but if you were in camp, well, you had your meal and you didn't cut a crib. Anyway old Mac said, "Every man cuts his crib on this job." And I thought to myself, "To hell with you, I'm not going to cut my crib while I'm staying in camp". He could see I wasn't making any move to cut it and then after a while he said, "Every man cuts his crib in this camp." I ignored it and when I was walking off he said, "You cut your crib before you get anything to eat." I just didn't say anything and went off up into the camp and I thought I was going to starve for the rest of the day, but at twelve o'clock the old cow bell went and I came down and Mac said, "You're bloody lucky to get it." Anyway, Mac and I were good mates because I suppose I looked after him more than anybody else. I'd always watch his poor old hands and I'd help him wash up.

When we broke up camp, this time to go into Manjimup, we had to go forty-five miles around by the road. We had a very big day. There were three of the men who elected to walk, following base-lines and tracks that we'd cut. In this way they did it in about thirty miles and they got in well before we did because with big, heavy loads, the horses were walking most of the time. We stayed at the pub. They were all timber men there and the publican's wife sized the situation up and she took care of Bill and me and put us in a room on our own. Of course neither of us drank and she didn't want us to get pulled into the bar. We had a fellow on the camp named Jim O'Callaghan a fellow of about forty. He was a real good fellow, one of the best camp mates you could have and a first-rate survey hand. They had

to be good fellows in the bush and pull their weight all the time and Jim was just one of those. He was an alcoholic, poor old Jim, and he was always advising me not to touch the grog or have anything to do with it. When we arrived Bill and I were pretty tired and we went up to bed before the bar had closed. Just as we were getting into bed we heard a hell of a commotion down in the bar and I hear old Jim's voice. I thought, "Gosh, surely old Jim wouldn't get into a fight with anybody." But it turned out next morning that Jim came into the bar and there was a fellow there he mistook for me. He had his back to Jim and there was a big red-headed sleeper cutter trying to get this boy to drink. Jim wanted to fight him, because he reckoned that he was trying to get me full, you see and he was going to have a bit of him. Later on the tram he fathered me all the way up to Perth. He'd come along every station when we stopped and ask me how I was getting on and whether I needed any money.

At the finish of this camp I was sent to Collie for a few months. Then I was transferred to Bridgetown and I spent a year at Bridgetown. Oh, it was a beautiful place, Bridgetown. I've got very kind memories of Bridgetown and my boss there was a fellow named Jack Turner. He, like most of the other men, was a returned soldier. He'd lost a leg in the First World War. Oh wasn't he a wild devil! Every few weeks he'd say to me, "Well Jack, I think we'll take the horses tomorrow and we'll go out and have a look at the bush round Mitchell and Ryan's Mill." Well, Mitchell and Ryan's Mill was a small mill about five miles north of Bridgetown on the road to Boyup Brook. We'd go out and have a quick look around the bush. He'd always take his kangaroo dog with him and he'd set up a kangaroo and he'd gallop after this thing flat out through the timber country and I'd be following behind watching. His artificial leg, which was his right one, would be sticking out about six inches from his horse and every minute I'd be expecting

to see him hit this against a tree and see splintered bits of leg. The Bridgetown district in those days included Manjimup as an out-station. I was sent to Bridgetown on what we call district work and the job there was to look after the sawmills. There were lots of sleeper cutters and sleeper hewers around the place. I remember there were about a hundred hewers out on about five thousand acres of Crown Land just out from Hester Siding. Hester Siding is about half way between Bridgetown and Greenbushes. My job was to help with the office work, keeping check of the returns and the timber workers' registrations. They used to send me out amongst the timber hewers and amongst the fallers. In those days they didn't have tree markers and anybody who worked on Crown Land had to be registered of course and pay the registration certificate which was only half a crown and one shilling to register their brand, that was three and six. If they felled any tree over a girth of ninety inches axe handle height from the ground it meant of course that the bush got badly knocked about in falling operations. When we commenced tree marking, we always decided which way the tree had to be felled and you had to be an experienced faller yourself (which by this time I had become). I had once earned my living as a sleeper cutter and done some falling (I got special leave for that). A tree's natural lean is the way it would naturally fall. It might even have a lean out to that side and if you were experienced you would know whether you could "throw" it and you'd scarf the tree. You'd cut it on the side it was to fall in the direction of where you wanted it to fall and the fallers used to say that was "putting the address" on it. Anyway I had to go out and see that they didn't waste timber because fellows would fall trees and leave them if it was a bit tough. If they didn't put their brand on you wouldn't know who was responsible, so you had to check up on the stumps to see they'd branded their stumps and so that was my main job. Before we leave Bridgetown there was just one event that stands out particularly in my memory. It's

a story about a lost child. When I came down to the office on the Monday morning, I'd learnt that a child out at Glen Lynn Siding about three miles from Bridgetown was lost. He was the youngest of five kids. They were a family named Morris. I think the father was a fettler who worked on the railway line. It's the same old story, these kids went out picking wild-flowers on a Sunday afternoon. This little boy was the youngest in the family and was following them. They discovered that he was following so they sent him back home and one of the girls took him back within about a hundred yards of their house and told him to go home. When they got back there was no little brother. So when we got word of course he'd been out all that afternoon and all that night and so Jack and I decided we'd ride out and have a look for him. It must have been at the end of the winter because all the drains were full of water along the road and there were a lot of blackberry bushes growing along the roadsides and there must have been a hundred men between Bridgetown and this place just searching along on the roadside. The local policeman, Harry Street was a horse-mounted policeman and he'd organised about twenty horsemen and they were riding through the bush two chains apart. They went backwards and forwards and covered the whole country pretty well. I decided that I was going where there was no one else. I rode for about three miles within sight of a small farm and the clearing. I got within about twenty chains I suppose, about four hundred metres, as we'd say today, of the fence and I was on the point of turning back and I thought I'd better keep going because a kid like that could be lying down. I got within a couple of hundred metres of the paddock and was looking across to my right when I saw something move. He was standing up alongside of a blackened jarrah log that had been lying there perhaps for a hundred years. The top part jutted out like a verandah and the fires from time to time had burnt out the underneath part and it was nice and soft in there. This little fellow was standing up alongside of this log and he was covered

in charcoal from head to foot. I reckon he must have walked till he was absolutely dog-tired and crawled in there at dark time and I reckon he'd just woken up when I got there. I realized that I was a stranger to him and I should approach him very carefully and I said, "Oh hello son. Is your name Morris?" and as soon as I said it I realized I didn't know his christian name. He wouldn't recognize himself as a Morris and he just looked at me and never said anything, I said, "Where did you sleep last night?" He said, "Oh, home with Mummy." I said, "How long ago was that?" "Oh" he said, "about a week ago." I said, "Look, there's some people over there. There's some ladies there and I think they'd like to give you something to eat." So I put him up on my horse. I had a butt of horse-feed on the pommel of my saddle in front of me, so I sat him up on that and I climbed up behind. We rode over and do you know that those people wouldn't have been more than three miles direct from Bridgetown and they didn't know a thing about it. There was no radio in those days or anything like that. There were two women there and they cleaned the little bloke up and gave him some bread and milk before I rode off with him. The road was lined with men and there would have been a dozen women there too. They had four gallon kerosene buckets of boiling water for making tea. The store keepers had donated bread, butter and cooked meat and the butcher donated cooked meat also for sandwiches. I had to ride up to this crowd with the boy and some silly ass embarrassed me by calling for three cheers for me.

(butt of a bag = 1 feed)

Well, I think it was about this time that I got special leave from the Forests Department to go and work on a small sawmill at a place called Yornup. That's eight miles from Bridgetown. That would be in about 1922 and by arrangement with the manager I did every job on the mill. The first job was pushing out on the fire-shute. That was considered to be the most menial task on the mill, so I put in a couple of days pushing out all the

waste off-cuts from the mill, pushing them out on skids by hand into a great, big roaring fire at the other end. There was always a great block of grease there and you had to grease the top of the skids to make the timber slip out more easily. Then I went on the mill landing where the logs were being hauled direct on to the mill landing by a teamster with his six horses and a whim. I won't go into what a whim is but it's peculiar to the West Australian industry. He'd drop the logs there. They'd generally come in in the length that they were cut in. He'd just fling it in the thirty or forty feet long length and drop it in on the mill landing. The man on the mill landing would cut it into whatever lengths were needed. I went on to every other job in the mill excepting of course the specialist jobs like the engine driver. This was a steam engine and you had to have a special ticket to drive that. But that was a great experience because I got to know just what made mill hands tick. I might say that in the timber industry, when you're talking about timber workers, there are two different categories of workers. There are the mill hands, the people who work in the ~~mill~~ and the bush workers. Of course there were the fallers and the teamsters, but the axemen (the fallers) always regarded themselves as being a bit above the mill hand because they had more important skills. They worked much harder and also they were on piece work and had greater opportunities. If you worked harder and longer and you developed your skills to a greater degree, of course, you made more money. But I might say, that it was only the elite of those who really made big money. The average faller in those days would cut about twelve "loads", and earn about one pound (£1-) per day The word "load", I think I explained to you earlier, a "load" is a term peculiar to the W.A. industry and it means fifty cubic feet. They were doing about one pound a day, but some of the "gun" fallers as they called them were independent (the word "gun" means an extra good ~~fellow~~ timber faller, a champion, and the word "gun" is applied to "gun" shearers, or any men that do special contract work or piece work). After a single ~~fellow~~ faller had worked

very very hard for three or four months he would often take a few days off and go into town or go down to the city, but the married chap would work himself to a condition where he'd just have to have a change and he'd then take on a light job in the mill for a while. He'd hate working to that whistle, every morning the whistle blew and you had to be there, ready to start as soon as the whistle blew and the whistle blew to let you go off to lunch and to let you knock off at night. I really hated that part of it of course. You seemed to be a slave to this confounded whistle.

It was all good experience. I worked by arrangement with a man I regarded with great affection. Ernie Jarvis was a wizard with the axe. During the last fortnight I was working with him cutting "guvvy" sleepers. A "guvvy" is an abbreviation for the word government. The W.A. railway sleepers were seven feet nine inches by four and a half inches. They were only a medium sized sleeper. The ~~larger~~ largest sleepers were nine feet ten inches by five and these went to India. Others seven feet ten inches by five inches went to Africa. I was thrown on my own resources completely and I went out with Ern and had to learn to use a broad axe. These can be straight or bent. In a straight handled axe the handle's lined up with the blade of the broad axe, but in most other axes they bent them, so that the end of your axe handle was about four inches off the line of your blade. When you were squaring, particularly when you were squaring the second side with a straight edge you had to be careful. I'd come down on my knuckles with this straight handle and all the backs of my knuckles were bleeding. They were raw, the skin was knocked off them and I nearly cried. I told old Ernie I was having a bad time with this thing and it shows what a good axeman he was because he swapped axes with me. I had no trouble at all after that. Old Ern, just took my axe and he just sort of got the feel of it, and he began cutting. He used to average about seventeen sleepers a day there and he was a

man of fifty-one at that time. He was a real craftsman and to use a bushman's extravagant language - when he stacked his sleepers up you couldn't put a cigarette paper between them. They were dead square and smooth. When he was ~~scarping~~ scarfing a tree it was like a beautiful carving.

Ernie had chopped in eleven log chops. He won ten and was handicapped in the eleventh and came second. Don Stewart an ex Conservator of Forests had a story to tell about Ern. Years ago the railway bridge over the Swan River at Fremantle collapsed and they needed extra long piles to replace it. They needed approximately seventy to seventy-five feet piles and had got as many as they could from private property. Finally the contractors asked the Forests Department if they could cut some from Crown Land. Special permission was obtained but the trees had to be carefully marked. The reason being that all this tall timber grew in gullies and a faller unless careful could knock over a lot of immature timber as well so it needed a man who knew his business well. Ernie was chosen and he and Don Stewart went out to mark the timber. You also had to know the bush to be able to ~~get back in to~~ re-locate each marked tree that virgin bush. Anyway they went out to mark the trees and Don took an Abney level with him to check the tree height before marking. Well Ernie would just look at a tree and say whether he felt it was the right height or had the right diameter. Apparently when checked out by the Abney level he was right every time. He knew timber that well!

Now getting back to when Ernie and I were cutting in 1922 the arrangement was that we were paid for each sleeper. We each had our distinctive brand and the sleepers were taken in to the siding and they were subjected to inspection by a forestry officer. There were pretty strict specifications drawn up for railway sleepers and I just barely earned my tucker the first three months. Then I left Ernie at the end of three months

and I went camping on my own out at Hester Siding. Because I was cutting on private property at the time, I just used to get a wedge for a brand to mark the trees. I never had a special brand made and I'd just put T. my initial in the wedge. Just a smack, a vertical stroke and then a horizontal one and that was good enough for me and the number of sleepers I cut wouldn't have meant much. All timber workers had to be registered with the Forests Department if they were cutting on Crown Land, but if they cut on private property it didn't matter. Many of them from earlier times, like an old cutter like Ernie, would get a brand of his own choosing, but when you worked on Crown Land you applied to the Forests Department to be registered as a faller or as a sleeper hewer and you were allotted a brand and you had to buy it from the Department. A man's initials didn't matter they had a system of brand designs like our motor plates today. It started off with a say "A". Generally three figures. AB1 say, AB or AC1 and so on. Any brand like that was registered and a worker could go back to the stump he'd felled perhaps twenty or thirty years before and recognize it again. The same way with the tree markers brand. A forestry officer had his own special brand for tree marking. It was affixed to the back of a special axe, your tree marking axe, just the same as any other axe, but the brand was attached to the back. It was a design with a broad arrow on top and underneath that, the letters F.D. for Forests Department and under that was a number. My brand was F.D.17. That was one of the earliest brands. It was breaking the law and there was a penalty for anybody who copied one. It was like counterfeit coinage and it was a serious offence to copy somebody's brand. When using the forester's tree marking brand you had to decide first which way the tree had to be felled. If it was a tree that was leaning into a nice clump of growing young timber you'd have to decide whether or not it could be thrown off its natural lean and that's one of the most important reasons why they instituted tree marking so as to minimise the danger to the growing stock during felling

operations. Once you'd decided whether or not it could be thrown and then marked it you'd then take a cut out of the bottom of the tree close to the ground. The cut would be about three inches high and about an inch deep. You made a nice, smooth surface, cut it down and then you hit that fresh cut surface with the back of your axe with the brand, so that you left your F.D. number and the broad arrow on it. I've been back forty years afterwards and found trees that I've marked, and that's the way the brand system operated.

Well for the last month I was cutting I went on my own again by arrangement organised by Jack Turner. I took out a contract with the W.A.G.R. (that's a W.A. Government Railways) to supply them with hewn railway sleepers for their railways and they were carted into the siding at Hester. It worked out that I got two shillings and sixpence each, that's twenty-five cents per sleeper and it was a bit irksome working on my own. I'd come home and I'd have to cook my tea in a tent and I had no facilities and no proper safe. I was only camping for a short time. When you're camping say on a survey camp where you're shifting all the time you don't worry about making yourself Coolgardie safes and things like that. You just take it as it comes and make the best of it. Well, the last fortnight I worked I earned a pound a day, so I was really "hitting my straps" as the saying went. But to give you some idea of how arduous sleeper cutting was and even though I was a young man and in perfect health and strong, I always had a bad back. I'd come out in the morning and I'd feel sore and stiff as a boil and my back would be that stiff and sore that when I went to pick a wedge up off the ground I couldn't bend down I'd have to go down on one knee to pick it up. That's the time when things go wrong and you miss hit and do all sorts of silly things. You might "gap" your axe and you get wild with yourself and a good sleeper cutter's language is as good as any bullocky. I can tell you. "Gapping" your axe is when you hit it on a pebble

or something and you take a little gap out of the cutting edge of your axe. If you cut it badly enough, if you gap it big enough, you've then got to put in about two hours filing it out, you have to get to work with a file, then rub it down with a sharpening stone and that's a lot of work. All the best axemen, the best sleeper cutters and fallers often used the expression "you want to make your tools do your work for you". They knocked off regularly to sharpen their tools. That was generally a Sunday morning's job if you were camped out in the bush, but if you didn't have time well the sensible thing to do when you came out on the Monday morning was to put in a couple of hours touching up your cross-cut saw and your axe. You'd file it back from the cutting edge, back for about two inches and be able to put a straight edge along the filed surface. It had to be dead level. If you got a bit of a hollow in one side or a bit of bump in it you'd find that your scarf didn't cut right. It would go in too sharply or slide. That's well demonstrated with log-chopping and competitive log-chopping, unless the axe is perfectly filed and honed down on both sides and dead level, when you stand up over a log, one side of the scarf will slide and the other one will come in straight, so that you'd find instead of the cut being vertical it would go over one side and then when you go onto the other side of course you'd find that it would slide across. This forms a cross and that's what they call "getting wooded". You can't knock it off and that's why the oldtimers reckoned that even in those days, twelve inch logs, that is twelve inch diameter logs were only kids' things to chop because a big strong man could break about an inch and a half of wood from a twelve log. But when you're standing over an eighteen inch diameter log you don't break that because your cuts are so far apart that's the way it goes.

Well I seem to have side-tracked myself a bit, but getting back to Hester. I had my inspection when I brought my sleepers in.

I reckoned my boss would do the passing and the only sleeper I had put out was one that he had kidded me into cutting. It was a very tough tree and it had run off a bit on one end when I was splitting the billet out. I thought it was a bit under-size and I'd tossed it aside and he looked and said, "I'd take a risk with that." So I put it in. Anyhow I nearly had a clean sheet, well I did morally so far as that goes. That record stood me in great stead in the Forests Department naturally and it was not long after that that I returned again to Collie with the Forests Department. I came back into the job. Actually Jack sent out for me. I was going on to cut for another week or two but he had a Topographical Survey Camp working in the district and one of the men got sick when they were nearly finished the job, so he told me to come in and stand in for the man. My mate Claude Kinsella was in charge of the camp. When I got out there at breakfast the next morning, I said, "Where the hell's all the tucker? Where's the breakfast?" He said, "There it is in the frying pan." He had some fried bread and billied tea. By jove, we did a starve that week because there was only a week's work and they didn't want a lot of left over stores. They had a bit of tinned meat there and not much else. They all cooked together and they tuckered together as they'd say and of course, they were going to all points of the compass so they didn't want to have any food left over because it just would have been wasted, so we did a starve!

After this I went to Collie where they'd just built the Mungalup Fire Lookout Tower. It was a wooden fire lookout tower of about a hundred feet. Jim Murray was an old hand. A great old fellow too. He and I cut together and felled I think it was one hundred and fourteen tall trees around the tower. They were cutting out the view of the far horizon so we cut them down. Within the first few days of when it was ~~mounted~~ manned we had a lookout man up there and he spotted a smoke about six miles out. Out towards Lewis and Reid's Mill at about noon. It was

only slight smoke and then it disappeared after about a quarter of an hour. Jim and I had crib with him and he asked if we knew of any sleeper cutter working out that way. I remembered that Bert Wells was cutting that way. He'd come into Collie every night. He was a nice bloke Bert. Anyway, when he came in that night I saw him and I said, "What do you mean by letting your billie fire run? We were watching you." He could hardly believe his ears when I described the time of the day. He had lit his fire and there was a little bit of scrub there which burnt outside of that so he didn't worry about it. He just let it go, you see and it just burnt itself out, but you've got to remember that up till then, they'd never had any supervision. They never had any fire lookout towers and the Forests Department wouldn't have a clue as to what was happening around the place, they'd have to get word from somebody else.

We did some of our first silvicultural work around Collie. Silvicultural work meant carrying out regeneration operations after trade cutting operations like sawmilling and sleeper cutting. The Forests Department put their men in and they cleaned up all the debris around the place and ~~all~~ around the butts of young trees and before the fallers went into it we carried out what we call an advanced burn, a light burn through the forest floor to clean up all the debris on the floor. After the fallers had finished in there, we'd then go round and clean up around the butts of the trees, any branches or twigs and leaves from the crowns of the felled trees. Then we'd wait for six or even twelve months and we'd burn all these. They'd close an area of what is known as a compartment of five hundred to a thousand acres according to the topography and the practice was to leave a strip of forest, untreated forest about ten chains wide in between each compartment and these untreated strips between the compartments were burnt as frequently as we could get them to burn. This was a protection against bushfires because at that time it was the practice of the Department

to keep fire out of the regenerated areas. Well of course even today you've got to keep fire out of a compartment until such time as the smaller seedlings have grown twenty or twenty-five feet high, before you can burn it again. But at that time it was intended to keep fire out of the forest forever, that was an idea of European forestry that Lane Poole brought here. It became Forestry policy and Forestry practice to do that until Alan Harris came in as Conservator and he'd had differences with the Department about this sort of thing. After listening to all timber men and those that are what I call non-graduate forestry men, fellows like Harry Smith and others that I've mentioned who were recruited into the Department, who had been bushmen and timber men, he reckoned fires were needed. None of them agreed with the Department's policy of trying to keep fire out of the bush. They reckoned there have always been fires in the forest and it was an environment which our forests had become adjusted to and it's been proved since that this is right. But there's still a lot of controversy though about whether those fires in bygone days which were caused by lightning strikes or probably far more frequently by the Aboriginals themselves burning to hunt kangaroos were good or not. I believe with a lot of other old bushmen that the forests before the white man came here would be like a patchwork quilt and would vary perhaps from fifty acres to a couple of hundred acres or something like that, but would never be more than about five years old, because if a black fellow knew that there was a kangaroo or a couple of kangaroos camped under a log they'd just run a fire out about three or four hundred yards or less and they'd leave a bit of a gap a couple of chains wide and unless a kangaroo is panic stricken it'll never hop into a fire. When it comes to an edge of a fire it'll just leisurely hop around the edge, and the natives would have been waiting there with their waddies. Of course there's still arguments about what conditions were like then but Mr. Harris was the first to sort of cast doubt on the old idea of never burning. When he became

Conservator he introduced control burning. Naturally you'd have to close an area up for say ten years or so and then you'd burn it. We did some marvellous control burning operations. In control burning some of these old compartments were burnt - compartments up to thirty years old - and I've burnt them in a shower of rain. We carried out trial burns of course so that we burnt them under the conditions of minimum hazard, when the temperature was pretty low and when the relative humidity was high. Of course in that kind of weather particularly in the late autumn when there's often light showers the top of the scrub would be wet and underneath it would be quite dry. The wetness and the dampness stopped a tremendous flair-up. We burnt through compartments and you'd hardly know it had been burnt. If you just looked at the crowns of the saplings twenty to twenty-five feet high there'd be hardly a mark on them and that's the test of a good controlled burner. We developed some marvellously skilled overseers who could do this type of burning and we could rely on their own judgement. Of course, they were guided by the reports to say what the fire hazard would be and we'd have to give them the O.K. The District Forester would do that from the Divisional Forest Office.

While we're on the subject of fire, in those days around 1924 it was written in the Foresters' Manual that during the summer period in order to be prepared for fires, every forest employee had to always have rations for his horse and himself. You had a two gallon water bag of drinking water and a specially designed rake head that tied on to the side of the saddle. When you got out to a fire you found a good safe place for your horse. You took him in on the burnt area and made dead certain there was no overhead burning limbs or trees that could possibly fall on him. Then you made your camp and fed him and of course, you'd be on the lookout for any creek or anything and when it came to giving him a drink you'd ride him down to the creek. I remember the first fire I was sent out to, near Lewis and

Reid's mill. I'd been out falling trees at Mungalup Tower all day and when I got into Collie I went into the Forestry Office and Alan Sharpe the Forester in Charge there told me there was a fire out near Lewis and Reid's mill so I went out on my own. Now today they'd send out a heavy duty pumper with a gang of six men and a two-way radio; they'd have the works. Anyhow, I went out there. Luckily I didn't have to tie my horse up, I was only working about three quarters of a mile from the mill so I put my horse over in the mill stable. Of course they were pretty good like that. They worked in co-operation with the Department and there was a boarding house there so I knew I'd be able to get a good breakfast in the morning, so I went around the face of the fire and I just knocked it out. First of all you have to get a handle for your rake so you go and look for a nice, tough marri sapling and you just strip it off. You always carried a pocket knife with you so the handle could be trimmed up to make it smooth, this is then run through the rake head and then you belted the fire out. I patrolled the fire all that day, kept on walking round and round to make dead certain that there were no overhead burning limbs or dry limbs or blackboys or banksias or anything like that, because sometimes a dead blackboy or dead banksia root under the ground will smoulder and smoulder. A marri too is a very dangerous tree. I've heard of marri trees being alight for as long as eighteen months after they get burnt up at the top. They burn downwards and we've had fires escape from trees like that twelve months after a fire. Fire control was the first lesson you learnt and if I was the Conservator of Forests today I would insist that all these fellows who think they know all about fire control and fire fighting should go out with a rakehead and hop in and fight a fire. I'm not talking about a big fire but about how to control a reasonably small fire. Within twenty-four hours you can learn a lot about the principles of fire fighting.

Collie was a really booming town at that time with a lot of sleeper cutters around as well as miners. I was working with a group of about six at the Arboretum over near the river. I had a bit of difficulty with Stoate who was the senior man and Sharpe who maintained I'd been late to work a few times. This was unfair since I'd been working late at night so I had a bit of an argument with them. I told Stoate I was getting fed up with the job and was ready to walk off if I was to be treated so unfairly. There were plenty of jobs around Collie since bits of boys were able to earn a pound a day sleeper cutting. Anyway several days later I was transferred to Mornington Mill. Mornington Mill was a bush camp (this is a term used for a logging camp). It was a big mill out from Harvey.

Wokalup Siding is about three or four miles the other side of Harvey and Millars had their own railway line in to Wokalup. There were about a hundred and fifty men working at the mill and I can remember that they had a bad train tragedy in the early twenties. A rake load of timber was being brought in to Wokalup - about thirty or forty trucks of sawn timber and as it was Friday or Saturday night a large number of men were on board. The fellows would go down to the Wokalup pub. The train was going about ninety miles an hour and the brakes failed. A number of men were killed. It was a terrible thing. Old Mornington residents still talk about the accident.

This was the era before tree marking and we worked in some of the best jarrah forest that we have. That's the prime part of the forest up in that country from Jarrahdale South to in opposite Harvey or Collie. I think there were six horse teams working and there would have been a dozen fallers. First of all I camped in a tent on the side of the railway and other Millar's men were working there too in camps. There would be a hundred gallon tank every hundred yards or so. They'd fill it up from the lake and that's where you got your water from

even though it was winter. There was water in the creek but it was a fair way away. I was able to tucker at the bush boarding house. As I mentioned this was before the era of tree marking commenced and also the same conditions applied as with the sleeper cutters I'd been working with down around Bridgetown. They'd fell any tree over a ninety inch minimum, over a ninety inch girth, that's over the bark, axe handle height from the ground. Because they were working on piece work rates they naturally felled the trees with their lean in the right direction so that they didn't have to go to extra trouble and time, it would have meant less money but what they did to that forest would make you weep tears of blood. I can remember magnificent immature trees, what we call pile timber, sixty to seventy feet long, a limb from a big tree had come down and swiped it down the side and stripped every bit of bark off it from the crown right down to the ground. Of course the wood goes dry and it leaves all sorts of faults in it. The pin-holes get in and so forth.

This was, I think, one of the first mills where they tried out top disposal. Now top disposal work was what the name suggests. Our job was to go and clear round all the good young trees that were left. We used to clear a space of about four feet wide around any tree and throw all the branches back. Our only tool was an axe and we'd make ourselves a little prong bush rake, the same as we did at the fires. We'd then just rake up the small twigs and things around the tree and then later on we'd burn it and clean it up and then we'd lay it out in compartments and so on. Later on the Forests Department made themselves responsible for that work, but at that time it was more or less a try out and Millar's agreed to supply one man. So I was the Forestry top disposal man and my mate was a fellow from Millars. He was a big, young fellow and the only reason why he wasn't making bigger money falling (because he was a good class axeman) was that he was getting over a bout of rheumatic

fever and had to take on light work until he was fit again. George Thomas was his name. The next thing I remember was being sent down to a place called Claymore Mill. Claymore Mill just doesn't exist now. You wouldn't know where it was, but it was about five miles from Jarrahwood Mill. Now Jarrahwood's about thirty miles from Busselton on the Nannup railway line. I was given a tree marking axe and branding hammer and I was provided with a circular on how to mark trees. They just sent me out down there. I had two or three men and I surveyed the line out from the railway. I got my first survey point from the railway and I traversed the line right out to within about a mile of a private property. I was able to tie my survey into that and then I marked out the compartments of cutover country according to the topography. The railway line naturally would follow the creeks so that the landings where they hauled the logs down on to the railway line were in low ground so they always hauled big loads downhill. We marked out compartments of about five hundred to a thousand acres according to the topography always leaving the ten chain belt around them. We did regeneration cleaning work after the fallers as well as the advanced burning and that sort of thing. But my first big job, the one that was a big challenge to me, was to mark up the fallers' coupes or blocks as they were called. Now, the bush bosses job (he was the man in charge of the bush operations for the sawmill) was to mark out the fallers' blocks as the fallers called them and that the Forests Department refer to as coupes. This was the end of 1924 and during the Christmas vacation while the fellows were away I marked up all their blocks. They'd never had tree-marking before and right from the jump I realised that they'd resent somebody without authority coming in there and telling them which trees they had to fall. They'd been used to falling anything over the ninety inch girth and it was a sort of reflection on their judgement and they didn't like it much, so I realized I'd have to be very tactful because I was only twenty-two and some of

those fellows were old enough to be my father and I had a very high regard for all fallers. I marked the compartments up and the first thing I did when they started was to go round to the various blocks. I had a yarn with each bloke and told him what I was expected to do and so that was all right. The only fellow I had a bit of trouble with was a big, young Italian fellow. He was a big, brash sort of a chap, though. He'd been in the country long enough to have learnt a few things. He could speak English all right and he was the last bloke I came to and he'd deliberately gone by all my marked trees and started falling the unmarked ones. He saw me coming because I never walk up to a man in the bush from behind. If I have got to approach them from behind I always whistle because you don't like somebody walking up from behind. Well he saw me coming and when I was about a chain off him, he picked up his axe and started to walk towards me so I stopped and just held my axe over my head. I thought to myself, "Well, if you're dinkum old man, you'll get F.D. 17 on your forehead." Anyway, he got within about seven or eight yards of me and stopped. I said, "Haven't you been told that you're to fall only marked trees?" And he said, "You're not my so and so boss and I'm not taking orders from you." Anyway I went down and told his boss who spoke to him and there was no more trouble. I got on famously with all those blokes.

The teamsters and their horses were magnificent. They worked through the mud and slush and when it was too wet to use their whims they would snig the logs. They'd have a big, steel plate about three feet six inches in diameter and made of half inch steel. This had a loop on either side where they could tie a chain over it and this was tied on to the front end of a log that could weigh up to ten tons dead weight. You can just imagine how the horses had to strain. Sometimes I'd see three eight horse teams, that's twenty-four magnificent great Clydesdale horses and three teamsters and three swampers strain-

ing at a log. The horses would seem to get excited and would get down almost onto their bellies and with manes flowing they'd pull a log thirty or forty yards. Of course most of the teamsters looked after their teams but some should never have been allowed near horses - some were brutal swines.

At Claymore the teamsters all did contract work but at Millars all the horses were owned by Millars themselves and the horses were well treated. They always had a vet who went from camp to camp checking the animals. If one had a sore shoulder or something, the vet would either take the horse from the team or make the teamster check the harness for trouble spots. The chains had to be covered with sheep skins where they touched the ribs. Special feed had to be prepared by someone at the mill. He'd mix the oats and bran specially and sometimes add epsom salts or sulphur in to it so it was medicated. Millars horses were well looked after but I knew one father and his three sons with two teams who were terribly cruel and thoughtless towards their horses. They had one horse with a bladder complaint they'd put out in the yard and he was mad with pain. They should have given him something because the horses often suffered this way through drinking highly mineralized water. Anyway during the night the horse almost knocked down part of the flimsy walls in the boarding house. Crockery and food went everywhere as he hit against the walls.

On another occasion with these same men I watched some cruelty with a team. I'd been out tree marking and the team was coming down a bit of a slope approaching a landing. They had to go on a track between the stump of a tree that had been felled and another small tree about a foot in diameter. There was a slight left hand bend and the offside leader (that's the right hand one) had to be kept well up to get through. The whim was heavily loaded and the track was slightly lopsided and the near side leader pushed too hard and pushed this other one too hard

up against the tree and he backed off. As he did he slipped down where the track was lower and came down right on the top of the haynes and it hooked his eye out. The teamster just turned the horse out and put him in the yard and never did a damn thing to help him and I could have cut his throat, the dog.

There was a little fellow out at the Jarrahwood Mill who looked like a little ~~dancer~~ dandy when he came to town. He'd always come in dressed up very neatly in a dark blue serge suit with a white collar, a bow tie and felt hat turned up all the way round. He was imaculately dressed, trousers creased and everything. Well I went out there one day, the first time I went out into the bush camp I saw this beautiful team coming in and I couldn't see the teamster. I couldn't hear him coming but when I got up to him it was this fellow. He never spoke any louder than I'm speaking now and he just had to say, "Wee wooh back. Wee wooh back Darkie." - just like that and old Darkie would swing over to the left or, "Gee off, Baldie", and old Baldie would swing off to the right. It was a marvellous thing to see eight big horses pulling a whim where an overall length, the length of the log and the length of the horse team, could be about a hundred feet and the only reins on the horses were the rein that connected the two leaders, the others didn't have any reins on them and the whole thing was controlled by word of mouth by the teamster. You could tell a horse driver. He'd talk as though his vocal chords would be all busted up. One of the good teamsters I remember too was a fellow named Bob Sleeth. Bob was a fellow about forty five and fairly slimly built, I remember him well. He had a big walrus moustache. He had a bald faced team leader who was only about a medium draught, a light horse for a whim team, but oh, he was a beauty this horse. Bob's style was that he'd always pick out resting spots along the road and was always resting his horses. He always pulled them up and would never make them pull right into the landing, particularly if there was a soft spot in the winter time which

or something in the middle of the afternoon I'd get the shakes. You used up all the fuel you put into your body, you used it up for the tremendous exertion you made. I think we paid something like thirty shillings a week (three dollars a week in our money) for our board. Of course a dollar then would buy a heck of a lot more than it would now. Out on Millar's camps they always supplied huts for them. There were single men's huts and married fellows also had huts. As I explained these were something similar to the boarding house, a couple of rooms and a kitchen and some of those people lived like that for years. In the earlier days on the bigger camps like Millars they even had a school out in the bush. On the mills where I worked such as Claymore and Jarrahwood they were only medium sized mills where they would employ about fifty men I suppose. The boarding house would supply a very solid breakfast such as eggs and chops. There was always meat for breakfast, plenty of it and oatmeal porridge in the winter, not so much in the summer, of course. Well, of course, the standard of board that you got had to be good for the very good reason there's nothing upsets men working out under those conditions more than having a bad boarding house. A good boarding house keeper is a treasure. Everybody had the highest, the warmest affection and regard for a good boarding house keeper and there's been some quite famous ones. Old Norman Smith talked about a Mrs. King out at Mornington. What a wonderful woman she was! She'd never knock anybody back for a meal. There were always fellows coming around carrying a swag, looking for work and she'd always give them a good meal or several meals and even a few shillings.

In September, 1927, I was transferred from Jarrahwood. I was sent down in charge of a big timber assessment job east of Manjimup, commencing at the Pirup River and between there and the Frankland River, that section which today is a controversial issue. It's all part of the woodchip licence. Much

of that part was subject to salt. In the Pirup River, for instance, where we used to catch marron it was fresh water, well it was brackish but you could drink it. Today, it hasn't had a marron in it for donkey's years. It gets that salty in the summer that even the sheep can't drink it. Anyway, four of us went out there and we marked out the baselines and selected camp sites and what not and then the rest of the men, seven more, came down. There were eleven of us on that camp altogether. That included assessment teams and there was the cook and the teamster. By this time we'd got to the motor age and of course we had inflicted on us a T-Model Ford ton truck, the most temperamental thing you ever struck in your life. I had to drive the truck down to the Tone River area until I came to "Deeside" the Muirs original farm. Mrs. Muir invited us in and we met her daughters. Ethel was twenty-three and Rita was eighteen. Bill Whitfield, one of the men, later married Rita and I later married Ethel, but that's getting ahead of the story.

Deeside farm was the original farm in the area and a track went down from Bridgetown to Mt. Barker past their farm. It was then called the Manjimup - Mt. Barker road but is now known as Muir Highway. Old Tom Muir the father of this Mr. Andrew Muir cut the track. He was the first man alleged to see Lake Muir and he cut the track from Forest Hill Farm (known today as Pardalup Prison Farm) through to his farm and beyond. The Mrs. Muir we met, the girls' mother, was a big woman and thought nothing of helping Andrew with the clearing or in using a hand cross saw. She must have cleared half that farm and she was still expected to bake bread and serve lunch to as many people as called. I've told the story of the "Deeside" Muirs in a paper I read to the Royal W.A. Historical Society so I wont go into it now.

While we were in the area, camped on the Frankland River on

the Muir Highway there was a nasty accident when Jim Kinsella tripped over an ironstone track and since he was carrying his sharp axe, it tore a strip off his arm. He had on a pair of new pants he'd bought at Flynn's a special little survey shop in Barrack Street. These trousers had a special white calico piece down the front to protect our legs from thorns and Jim's were covered in blood. We patched the arm up as best we could then I ran four miles to the property of an English family named Brierley. Our truck had gone to pick up the mail so we asked Alan Brierley to pick Jim up and take him to Muirs in his T-Model Ford truck where the Muirs took him in their Dodge car to Jarnidup Hospital. There was no hospital in Manjimup and so Dr. Cass sewed him up at Jarnidup. Years later I met Dr. Cass in Denmark and he told me that Jim was one of the gamest men he'd ever struck. He smoked a cigarette while Cass put about thirty inside and fifteen outside stitches in the arm. What the Dr. didn't know and what I found out afterwards from Claude Kinsella, Jim's twin was that Jim was frightened to have chloroform since a childhood episode when a rough doctor had taken his brother's tonsils out and Jim had seen both the doctor and his twin covered in blood. He's associated the smell of chloroform with this incident ever since!

After finishing that timber assessment job I was transferred to Wuraming which was a siding seventeen miles east of Dwellingup on the Narrogin railway line. I was an assistant Forester by this time and our headquarters were in the old Wuraming Mill (that was the No. 4 Railway Mill). I had six overseers working with me and they were all experienced men. There were some real champion axemen amongst them but they were getting up to middle-age and past piece work and the Forests Department job was more permanent and there was a house provided for each of them. But the sad thing about it was that the Department had some silly idea in those days that a man had to work on the job and they had six houses built a

mile out from the headquarters and if any of the women wanted to talk to each other they could talk on the Forestry telephone line providing it wasn't being used for Forestry purposes. Most of the women accepted this system but it was a hardship that I felt was unecessarily inflicted on them. In fact I knew of one woman who had a nervous breakdown. She was very seriously affected being isolated out on her own. She had no one to talk to at all, no close people.

One overseer was in charge of a track-clearing gang and putting in what we call scraper tracks. That was the beginning of our fire-lines. Scraper tracks consisted of triangular-shaped pieces of railway line about three feet on either side, three feet wide and welded on to the apex of the triangle was a big loop where you could put a hook and a horse pulled this and made a path through the forest. That was our first fire-break or fire-line. I prefer the word fire-line because it was a cleared line from which you burnt backwards. It wasn't intended to stop a fire because overhead trees would catch alight. You could never stop it, you could only stop the fire by burning back against it. Each man had an offsider, a man assisted an overseer and they had their own little allotted area or working circle as it was called and their main job was to thin all the beautiful jarrah re-growth. Now around this old mill there were some beautiful stands of jarrah re-growth. I counted up to two thousand stems in one acre one day. Their job was to go through and thin them out. We'd go through and thin them out and burn the thinning so as you wouldn't have too much debris. You'd have the minimum of debris on the ground and in that way you reduced the danger of building up a very serious fire in case a bush-fire got in. The overseer's mate would burn it in heaps. That was the main job there and I always thought what a magnificent forest this was going to be and I'd think about going back there some day and seeing when it was a pole-sized forest.

It was while there in 1928 - '29 that we had an Empire Forestry Conference. There were about forty-odd delegates from all over the British Empire. They had a look at some of the work we were doing. A man named Hedges had five thousand acres of private property there, a five thousand acre block and half of it had some of the most magnificent virgin jarrah forest you'd ever wish to see. They got me to mark out an acre and mark the trees that I would normally have marked for a sawmill. I mentioned Harry Smith earlier, he was the man who taught me timber assessments and I mentioned too that he, like Ernie Jarvis never lost his sense of judgement. I remember there were a hundred and two loads of timber, that would be a hundred and two multiplied by fifty, that's five thousand square feet on an acre. That would be fifty cubic feet per square chain and that was an extraordinarily heavy volume of timber and we made dead certain that it was correctly measured. Clarry Maidment (he was my Assistant there) was one of those fellows who wasn't worried by heights and we took a long extension ladder out with us and instead of estimating the middle girth of the log from the girth of the stump at breast-height and allowing for the taper on what is known as the form factor (that's arrived at by measuring thousands of logs after the tree's been felled down and measuring the butt girth, the crown girth and the mid girth. The mid girth of course being equidistant between the crown and the butt) we took an Abney level and we measured the length of the log that would be cut out of it and we actually climbed up and measured the mid girth so that I knew it was dead right. Well, they brought Smithy up, big Harry Smith from Narrogin. He had been in Narrogin for about six years when this Conference was on and of course he was such a picturesque figure that they wanted him to be there and they brought him up the day before. I thought I'd trick him this time so I took him out to this acre that I'd measured off. I asked him how much was in the load. You know, he didn't hesitate, he just walked through it checking seven, twelve, twenty-one, twenty-

seven and the last tree was a big butty tree. It would be at least a good six feet in diameter and would have been, oh, I suppose, pretty well fifty feet long and there was something like twenty loads in it. That's a thousand cubic feet. Well you tend to under-estimate it. I've forgetten now whether there were a hundred and two or a hundred and four loads in this acre, but he got within two loads of it! This was just by walking through it, with no instruments, that's how experienced he was!

For the entertainment of the visitors we had a log chop and there were some gun choppers amongst them too. I chopped myself but I didn't have my chopping axe with me, only my tree marking one or racing blade as it was called. I was about the last to finish but a fellow called Wally Moriaty won it. The visitors were so impressed by this wonderful exhibition of axemanship that they had what we called a "tarpaulin" muster. That is they ~~all~~ donated a five pound note. A Lord Clinton who was chairman of the Conference made the presentation and shook hands with Wally. Jim Beggs the father of the present Conservator who was a bit of a character, used to tell the yarn afterwards that Wally wouldn't wash his right hand for about a month after shaking Lord Clinton's hand!

It was while I was in Wuraming that I was married. In April 1929 and at the end of that year I was transferred to Mundaring. Before I leave the Wuraming scene there is one other matter I think worth mentioning and that is the lack of understanding between Forestry Administrators and the rank and file men who in my day were and I believe still are, or could be, the back-bone of the Forestry Service. Our overseers and men who worked with them were generally fellows who had earned their living as axemen, as fallers or sleeper cutters on piece work and to them every moment of the day that was lost meant less money in the pay packet. Of course they were generally tremendous workers and they were very proud of their prowess and skills as axemen.

They regarded themselves in a way as a cut above the workers who worked in the sawmills. They had tremendous endurance, physical endurance. You can imagine this hard work all the time and they did a tremendous amount of work and they just couldn't stop working. But they were very independent types and they wouldn't stand for any boss coming around running the rule over them as it were. They'd just as soon tell him they'd walk out on the job and of course they could always get a job somewhere else. I had half a dozen of these fellows, but I never worried about them, all I did was to tell them what work they had to do and I paid them every fortnight. I'd lay out their work and tell them what had to be done and I never used to worry about them because I knew from having worked myself that what they did was a fair or more than a fair day's work when it came to that. Every quarter, the Forester's job was to measure up all the work and he had to account for it on a unit cost basis. You had your financial statements and you made up your quarterly report. Well anyway, my senior, was a man named Brian Bednell. He was my Divisional Forest Officer, generally referred to as D.F.O.'s. Well, Brian Bednell, was stationed at Dwellingup and he afterwards incidentally became the Conservator of Forests in South Australia. To my great surprise Brian turned up seventeen miles out at Wuraming one morning about six-thirty and just before I went over for breakfast. I asked him what he was doing there and he said he'd just come out to have a look round. We went off to breakfast and I wondered what it was all about because he generally made sure he'd catch me in, you see and he'd ring me beforehand. He said, "I want to go out and have a look at Jacques working and then I'll have a look at the other overseers." In between going over to have a look at Jacques (Freddy Jacques) I gathered from him that he wanted to check up on their work and see whether they really worked. So we went onto the main road and that's when I discovered what he was after you see. To my surprise he wanted to walk and usually he wouldn't walk fifty yards if he could drive his car. It was a

beautiful mild summer's morning and I can remember walking in the sunlight with the light and sunlight and shadow on the tree trunks there's something about that which gives you a kind of a special feeling about the forest. We only walked about three or four hundred yards and you couldn't hear the blows of the axes because they were thinning small saplings and it's soft and not like striking an axe blow into the matured hard wood of the big tree and the axe blow didn't ring. Anyway I spotted Jacques about three hundred yards away. I said, "there he is," I hated doing this but we got behind a big tree and watched him. Well, he had his mate and they were going through the stands of saplings. They'd vary from about twenty feet to about thirty or forty feet high. They had to be thinned out so that you left at least two or three or four feet of space between the ends of the branches of each sapling and the next one. Some fellows would stand off and look before they'd decide but others like Freddy Jacques and big Norman Smith would just take one look at it and they could waltz through it and they'd just "wham", "bang" and saplings would be falling over all over the place. When they'd finished there would be a beautiful stand of well-spaced young saplings. Some fellows had a real flair for that. Of course, their mate, their offsider, as we called them would just go round and gather these up in heaps. Anyway little Freddy Jacques almost ran. He was a very quick mover and it didn't mean a thing to Fred whether he was working for the Forests Department or working for himself, he'd just got into a life-long habit of working. Well we stopped there for about a quarter of an hour watching him and then Begnell said that he must have known we were coming. I said, "How the hell could he know you were coming when I didn't know you were coming." Anyway, we went over afterwards, and said "gooday" to Fred. Then we went to two more, but he gave it away after that. I still believe that Forestry Administrators do not have enough, well, what you might call practical experience. You've got to go out and live with men and work with them and eat the

same kind of tucker and share the same kind of living conditions. Then you become part of them, you become part of the job, you become part of your environment and you learn to live off the bush if necessary and then you know what makes these fellows tick. You have a real appreciation of their skills and their sense of judgement and doing jobs. And that particularly applied to fire-fighting and fire-controlled burning. We learnt everything from those fellows. The techniques of burning and as I mentioned earlier I believe that if you go out for twenty-four hours with your bare hands and just a rake-head and you put a fire out you pretty quickly learn what makes a fire burn easily and how to control it. I mention that in passing because I'm still concerned about what's happening in our forests today.

Well I was transferred to Mundaring Weir and the next five years from 1930 to September '35 covering the depth of the Depression was a searing experience to me and I might say it made me a confirmed radical in my political thinking. There was awful poverty and a stigma on the men who couldn't get work then. To give you some idea of what conditions were like and I'm quoting trade union figures. Unemployment had risen from about eight per cent in '29 to nineteen per cent in 1930 and twenty-nine per cent in '32, that was the peak year. Now that was near enough to one third of the total working force in the country and there would be scores, tens, if not scores of thousands of other people who, rather than apply for benefits worked for their food and tobacco money for farmers throughout the country and lots of them went up to the Goldfields and some got jobs and others didn't. They went prospecting and I think they did get some sort of sustenance while they were out there. Possibly upwards of half the working population were unemployed and I might say that all civil servants and I was one of those at the time had their salaries slashed by twenty-two and a half per cent.

Mundaring Weir was like Dwellingup, a Forestry Division and I

was the Assistant to the D.F.O. in Charge. The main forestry work there was pine-planting. We had four plantations, Greystones, about two miles from the headquarters, Helena plantation, that's about six miles out, Murdos was about twelve miles and Beraking about seventeen miles out. Well, when I got there, all the men, all the ordinary wages workers had been put off and they only had a skeleton staff of one overseer to each plantation. One of my first jobs was to start control burning around the pine plantation. I went out to each plantation with the overseer and the two of us just burnt around these. Now today, to do a job like that they'd have a heavy-duty pump with six hundred gallons of water on board and they'd have a pumper of course. They'd have all the gear for fighting fires and they'd have a team of six men. Today also they measure the weather hazards, what the temperature will be at any given time of the day and what the relative humidity will be and whether there'll be any change in any wind and from what direction, so that you're able to plan ahead. But these fellows then didn't need anything like that because they were bushmen. A bushman is a man who studies his environment. Naturally they study the weather because it concerns their ability to work and they could lose time on very bad days. The days they don't like is when it's stormy and there's high wind and they get limbs coming down when they're falling or a tree with get blown over one way when they're trying to fall it in a given direction.

We also had the job of supplying the firewood to No. 1 and No. 2 pumping stations on the Goldfields Water Supply. No. 1 station was the one down below the Weir Wall and No. 2 was only about a mile and a half on the road to Mundaring. They had eight pumping stations along the line at that stage. We had twenty cutters who did nothing else but fall big dead ring barked trees. I must divert here to explain why there was so much of this dead timber for firewood.

Apparently in the early 1900's when they were still building the Weir wall they had gangs of unemployed men ring barking timber around the wall. Nowadays all the streams etc. are monitored for salinity but they weren't then and after they'd ringbarked about fourteen thousand of these beautiful, magnificent jarrah trees it was discovered that the water in the area was going saline. They immediately stopped cutting the timber but this was why there were so many ring barked trees in the area.

My particular job at the time I was there was looking after twenty cutters. This was later in the Depression and these men were allowed to work for a pound a week above their sustenance rate. An average man would cut a cord and a half a day. A cord is a hundred and twenty-eight cubic feet and the bullets were all six feet long by an end sectional area of about twenty inches. So a cord of wood meant an average of seventy-two bullets, six feet long with an end sectional area of twenty square inches for which they received a cutting rate of eight shillings (eighty cents). The carting was done by contract. As you can imagine, cutting was an extremely arduous job as well as soul destroying. I enjoyed cutting sleepers but to cut firewood day after day for the pumping stations would drive me mad. These men had a sort of stigma put on them because they were unemployed. We'd get a list of men and their sustenance rates and the amount they were to be paid. The sustenance rate was seven shillings per head in a family with a maximum of seven. A man, wife and one child received twenty-one shillings a week but if they had more than seven in the family nothing was received for the extra members. At this time there were a number of demonstrations against this sort of thing. My brother while riding his bike home from the University saw one demonstration on St. George's Terrace and saw mounted police with batons bashing the demonstrators on their heads. He was physically sick when he got home. Anyway after

this demonstration the men won their right to earn one pound a week over the sustenance rate and we had some of them working for us. We had something like eighty men on our four big plantations.

I remember the Greystone plantation with the pines so close together that the lower limbs die. We gave each man a mattock which is a soul destroying instrument to work with, and we marked the pines in rows for them to work through cleaning up the forest floor. Every chain we'd put in a peg and each block was numbered so we could estimate the cost and the time it would take to clear a block. Now a lot of these men were clerks and that sort of thing, who had no idea about how to use their tools. They were also physically weakened and mentally demoralized and depressed so we told the overseer to double the estimated time and money. If he felt it could be cleared for seven shillings he was told to make it fourteen shillings but as it was many of them took a week to earn their money and often had to get their mates to help them. The strongest helped the weakest.

Well there were some complaints about the amount of work expected of them and a man named Keneally came up to Mundaring to check. Unfortunately he listened to the D.F.O. Nunn. Nunn was an athlete and a magnificent specimen. He had a surveyor's licence as well as being a trained forester. He was a very capable chap but had very little sympathy for these men. Keneally listened to Nunn's story and then we went out to hear the men's spokesman. Keneally told them exactly what Nunn had told him so they didn't get far. However the Department did make some concessions to the weaker men, those who couldn't cope as well. When that work was finished we took forty or so of these fellows to do a planting job at Murdoss pine plantation. It was winter by then. I was with them for three or four weeks and we camped in a big shed about fifty or sixty feet long by

about twenty. The middle section of six feet was sectioned off and that was a tool room and store room. Well, I camped in there and these other fellows were on either side of me and I used to lie in my bunk at night and listen to them talk. They talked about all their problems at home and I heard enough there to make my blood boil to think that men had to live like that in a country like Australia.

These fellows were all picked up by truck. We used to pay a fellow, McLaughlin was his name. He had an open Chev truck just a table-top truck and he'd pick up these fellows. I'm not sure whether he'd just pick them up in Mundaring or whether he went round to the various places. He probably went round to the various places and took them out to the camp. Most of them carried their tucker for the week in a seventy pound hessian sugar bag. Of course the old hessian sugar bag was a marvellous stand-by for bushmen. I think it was the most commonly used tucker bag in the bush because you could tie something like a bit of a pebble down in one corner, tie a bit of strong cord round it, tie it round the top and sling it round your shoulder and that was that. Well they only went home at weekends. They worked out there for five days a week and then on Saturday mornings they'd hire McLaughlin themselves and he'd pick them up and take them down to Midland Junction. A fellow down there had a cash and carry store and I understand that he operated on a mere two and a half percent margin so that he undercut other stores to a great extent and these fellows went down there with their sustenance cheques and they'd come back with their food for their family and themselves for the week. You can imagine what it was like in that winter time, travelling out, to and fro in an open truck.

Q. Mudros ~~Murdoss~~ is in the Dale River catchment and we used to be working planting rows of pines straight up and down this hill facing toward the east and there used to be frost on the ground there

till eleven o'clock in the morning and everything would be wet. Your trousers would get wet, you'd be wet up to your knees and these poor devils had to work like this all day. You had a fire going for boiling the billy at midday and they were able to get around that and keep a bit warm, but if they wanted to have anything to eat in the morning break of ten minutes or so it was so cold they'd have to start work again. There was an open fire-place at each end of the shed, but some of them lit their fires outside because there wasn't enough room for them to cook on. They brought out bread. The bread would be pretty stale. The storekeeper named Bill Miller from Sawyers was a great friend to all the men. He knew most of them and he'd supply them with certain things. He used to bring out meat although he was a grocer. He'd pick up meat from the butcher's and bread from the baker's and stuff like that. They cooked in saucepans and billy cans and frying pans. But of course a lot of these fellows didn't know how to look after themselves. Most bushmen do, they learn to cook pretty well, they've got to learn to cook but these fellows often couldn't. There was plenty of rain and there was a thousand gallon tank there that was kept pretty full if you wanted a wash. Well, it was just a Kalgoorlie bath, if you wanted one. I think there was one toilet but they used to do a bit of top-dressing in the pine plantation. Of course, one thing around a camp you must dig a hole for sanitory purposes and it was part of our job to see that hygienic conditions were observed because this flowed off into the water catchment for our water supplies for personal consumption. I've never forgotten the little those men lived on and the conditions.

I applied for a transfer and in September 1935 I was transferred to Kirup. That was another Division. The chap in charge there was a man named George Ernest Brockway. I think his father used to be St. Clair Brockway. One of the brothers was known as St. Clair Brockway and his father was a shire clerk, town clerk at

Claremont at one time. Well I became a life-long friend of George's. He was one of nature's gentlemen. Bonzer fellow. I worked with him there for eighteen months. My normal forestry work was like it had been before. I used to tree-mark for sawmills and look after a few cutters and do a bit of patrol work and we also had overseers working on forestry work there and it was here that I saw for the first time a tractor hauling mill logs and I'm certain it is the same one that I saw a few months ago. It was brought down to Manjimup to be put in their timber museum there. Well, actually this marked the end of an era in timber practice and the beginning of the end of the horse and bullock days you might say. They were very picturesque days in some ways, but by the same rule of course, it was a great thing for the horse and bullocks because the average life of a whim horse was three years. All sorts of things happened to the poor devils. They'd get a string of horses and one of the leaders would step on the end of a stake. This had frequently happened and the end of the stake, a tough bit of wood, or a limb would come up and it would stake them in the stomach or in the body and they'd just have to take them out and shoot them. Often too, with a loaded whim there might be a dry spar on the edge of the road of the whim track. One perhaps twelve or fifteen inches in diameter and the outside rut would get wider and wider until eventually one day they'd be coming in and the nave of the wheel would hit it with the result that many a horse would be injured. I've never actually seen this but I've been told about it by teamsters. They've had a line of four horses killed, one behind the other, this thing would come down and kill them, not kill them right out, but injure the poor devils so badly that they'd have to shoot them.

In 1937 after I'd had a few brushes with my boss I was transferred to Denmark. It was no sort of a promotional job because we didn't have any re-forestation work going on down there, but

it suited me fine because I had five thousand square miles of territory to look after. I had about a dozen small mills and I liked getting around the country and I didn't have anybody there. I was completely left to my own resources. There were quite a lot of sleeper cutters at the time. We had sleeper cutters, oh, right from near Denmark and Nornalup right up North to Cranbrook on the Albany-Perth railway line. There would have been about forty or fifty cutters there before the War started and that got me around the place pretty well. I arrived there a month after the worst bushfires they'd ever had in the history of the district and they had a Statewide appeal for funds. Many of the settlers lost everything that they had and many of them were left with just the clothes that they stood up in. One of my jobs was to look for timber, marketable timber. Over a period of years I built up quite a big plan showing all the timber belts. I look back on my nearly seventeen years in Denmark with a great deal of satisfaction. I went there in March 1937 and left at the end of 1953. I'd never lived in a town before. I'd always lived in a forestry settlement and it was a nice little town. I became friendly with the headmaster Bill Pirrett and became president of the Parents and Citizens Association. I was president for seven years and we raised eighteen ~~thousand~~ hundred pounds. We got a school canteen, a school library and sporting facilities while I was president. I was also the foundation president of the Hospital Auxiliary Committee. I also got into trouble with Mr. Stoate at Head Office for my political activities. I felt my political activities were my own concern and I resented interference. Stoate came down to see me and our differences were resolved. I also went to the schools in Albany and Denmark to talk about timber. Often I took along my broad axe, my narrow axe and cross cut saw to demonstrate. I was always invited to talk on Arbor Day. I even went to Mt. Barker, Kendenup and Cranbrook schools and developed a flair for speaking. Later on I spoke in schools the length and breadth of Western Australia from

Esperance in the south to Kununurra in the North.

About the middle of 1953 I had an accident in the bush while tree marking and was off work for four months. I came up to work at Head Office while getting medical attention for my leg. George Nunn was there and although we'd had many differences we were still good friends. This is a tradition of the bush. You can fight a man but you always worked it out somehow and remained friends. From Head Office I went to Harvey for eighteen months, then to Mt. Barker where I formed the first country branch of the Tree Society. The Tree Society was a voluntary organisation and they'd had a public meeting and they'd sought the support of the then Minister for Forests, Herb Graham and he'd promised them financial support. Harris, the Conservator at the time didn't like the idea of good forestry money going into an organisation of that nature. It would have been all right if it had been from consolidated revenue but not to come out of all the Forestry funds, you see. They depended on the royalty they got from their timber for their operations. It was only a matter of about three thousand five hundred pounds at the time. Anyhow he undertook to supply an office and a typist and an officer to be the Secretary Organiser. So I had three years and four months as the Secretary Organiser of the Tree Society and in that time I formed about thirty-four country branches and then a Mrs. Callow (she was my secretary for a start) eventually took it over. She had a flair for publicity for hitting the headlines and so forth, but I had to fight the Committee. I didn't go out of my way to look for trouble but I came up to Perth one day with the idea of starting branches all round the country and getting each branch pressurising the local governing bodies to plant trees around the place and there I was shining the seat of my pants on an office chair for five months and I had to virtually fight the State Committee to let me go into the bush instead of messing around in town.

Anyway I had three years and four months and then I asked Harris to let me out of it and so he did and I then had a most interesting job. In the course of my work in the Tree Society and forming branches I travelled all over the southern half of the State. I'd made contact with Shire Councils or Road Boards as they were then and all the schools. I used to go and talk to the schools too. I liked talking to the schools. The then Premier, David Brand, now Sir David Brand, knowing the satisfaction I suppose of going back many years afterwards and seeing trees that he'd planted thought it would be a splendid idea to get tree plots planted all through the wheat belt and that was my job. I put in thirty-four tree plots over a period of three years. My job was first of all, a public relations job, because the Forests Department had no crown land that they could make available for such plots.I'd go to the Shire Clerk. I'd write to him beforehand of course and tell him all about it using the name of the then Premier to impress him a bit so that I got the fullest co-operation from the Shires and I'd go to them and I'd say to the secretary I was looking for two plots in the district, one heavy soil and one light soil in which to establish a tree plot or an Arboretum as we called them, really, experimental tree plots, they were, and they would often suggest some public-spirited farmer or several of them. I don't know that I ever got one knock-back you know. These fellows would not only make available four or five acres of their own land which had been cleared and which they would have been able to grow wheat on, but they fenced it and undertook to cultivate it too and I put in thirty-four of these plots. They'd be about four or five acres and there'd be twenty-five to thirty different species of trees. It was my job to select the species, to design the arboretum and I'd try and arrange it so that the bushier and shorter ones were in front as well as the more colourful ones when they were in flower. This made a series of steps and stairs going up to the tallest trees in the background. The idea was that instead of a farmer or a

resident of the wheat belt trying to pick out a suitable tree from a catalogue, they just went round to the local arboretum and there were the trees all ~~known~~ named. If Mum wanted something special for outside the house, nice and bushy with plenty of beautiful flowers or Dad wanted a nice, shady tree for out on the paddock for a windbreak or something, they'd find it there. I used to design windbreaks and all this sort of thing. I'd plant up a plot over a period of three years so as to minimise any special effects of say, a poor season or an extra good season, so in that way, it minimised any differences. I've only seen one of those plots since but it was a great source of satisfaction to me to go along. It was on deep sand on a long slope and to see these trees six years afterwards with river gums up thirty feet high with trunks about nine inches was a great source of satisfaction. I feel sure from results I've heard that there were very few failures in the trees that we selected and none of those trees were watered. I didn't even water them when I put them in. One of the best plots I had at the time about a mile this side of Dowerin, it had twelve successive frosts just after planting and yet they survived. It was a very valuable experiment. I'm certain that as time goes by there'll be more and more trees planted on the wheat belt, particularly for shelter and wind breaks and that sort of thing.

Well now, during my period as Secretary Organiser of the Tree Society I was seconded to the Society so that they paid my salary, my normal salary and my travelling expenses the same as civil service rates. I had my own car for which I was paid an allowance and the same thing applied doing the tree planting job. I was on that tree-planting job in the wheat belt up till I retired four years ahead of my time in 1963. The last ten years I was in the job I was the President of our Forestry Officers' Association. We had our Annual Meeting in those days in Bunbury on a Saturday afternoon and in the evening we'd have an Annual Dinner and at both the meeting and the dinner we always

had the President, Vice-President of the Civil Service Association, the General Secretary and the Treasurer. Well, when it was announced that I was retiring and I said that I wanted to go to the North-West, Ross Fletcher the President elect, who happened to be the liaison officer for the North West Department said that if I was thinking about going up to the North West to come and see him before I went. So I thought I'd go and see Ross Fletcher and see what it was all about. I went in about three weeks later and he got on the phone and he said to somebody, "Mr. Thomson's here, Harry." So when he'd finished he turned to me and said, "That was Harry McGuigan, the Administrator for the North West and he would like to see you in ten minutes." Evidently he must have given me a build-up with Harry McGuigan because when I went in there he asked me what work I'd done in the Public Relations field and I was able to tell him about my three years or so in the Tree Society and about my previous, talks to school kids over a long, long period of years and I told him about my time in Denmark and how I'd been on the Road Board, etc, etc. He said I was the sort of man he was looking for and that he had always been keen on tree planting and at the moment there was nobody in the North West who could advise people about trees. There wasn't one nursery there so that if anybody wanted to plant trees they'd have to send up to Darwin. They would be all tropical species and on account of the quarantine regulations they'd have to empty all the soil from around them and send them down in some other mixture. If they sent down here to Perth they'd get anything sent up to them which mightn't be suitable, so he felt the cheapest and perhaps one of the best forms of social benefit that the Government could do for people up there was to give them trees they could plant round the backyards. Anyhow I did the job and I operated on a shoe-string budget. I think I had about twenty-three voluntary nurseries and I had sixteen at schools. I had four at police stations, one at Derby, one at Fitzroy Crossing, one at Halls Creek and one at Wyndham. The

manager of the Agricultural Research Station at Carnarvon also undertook to grow trees and the district engineer there had a man who was a bit of a gardener and he grew some and so I became known as the "Tree Man" of the North by the time I left. One of my proudest possessions is a scroll about three feet six inches long and about eighteen inches wide eulogising the "Tree Man". It's done in the old English style of printing all hand work on parchment and every one of about a hundred and twenty kids in the various classes of one of the schools signed it.

Amongst my other jobs I had to collect my own seed. I'd collect seeds of exotic species, spectacular ones like the poinciana tree and the golden shower tree and others. On my trip back from Darwin I collected botanical species of all the trees. I was well known of course to the State Herbarium and I took all the stuff in. I had a botanic press with me and they identified them all for me and I made notes of where I had collected the seed and so forth. When I finished the job some of the mines had already appointed nursery men and we were able to give them advice and so I feel pretty proud to think that I did start that off. One of the best nurseries we had was up at the Broome Jail. We had a very keen warder up there. Since I've left they've cut out the small nurseries. They found they were not as efficient as they could be. We'd selected a site for our own nursery and the man who took over from me I more or less selected him myself. He's a well known character in the tree world and in the wild-flower world in Western Australia, a man named Fred Lullfitz. Fred had been the Official Seed Collector from Kings Park, the Kings Park Botanic Garden and he was a well clued up botanist and he and a man named Alf Grey who was a retired nursery man from the Victorian Forestry Commission started the Yilgarnia Nursery which I think would be about the first native tree nursery. I believe Fred has done a marvellous job. He was a far better nursery man and had a lot more nursery know how than me and was a competent botanist.

One of the most interesting jobs I did while I was up there, one that I thoroughly enjoyed was to do with history. I've always been interested in local history and when I was at Cossack and again at Halls Creek and at Derby and Broome I visited the cemeteries there. You learn quite a lot there but one of the things that struck me was the number of children, very young children, toddlers that died in the early days up there, this goes back to a hundred years or more and no doubt it was due to poor food and getting enteritis and diarrhoea and all these sort of things and having no proper medicine or not enough fresh vegetables and actually living on salt meat at times when the rations got really low. But there were all sorts of tragic events too. Anyway I copied all the inscriptions and I brought them down to the office and I thought the North West Department should know about these, so I got the typist to copy them out. One copy went to the Administrator's office up at Derby and I had one for myself, and one found its way up to Harry Mcguigan's office and about three weeks later he sent me down a photo copy of correspondence he'd had with Miss Molly Lukis. He'd sent these down and Molly Lukis had immediately written back and asked him would it be possible to arrange with Mr. Thomson to tape-record various characters, old-timers up there who helped to put the North West on the map. She was particularly interested in such things as bush rhymes and parodies and songs and all this sort of thing. Harry McGuigan was very keen on this and he gave me the O.K., so they supplied me with a tape recorder and the first two people I interviewed were two black fellows up on a station, oh a few miles from Kununurra. It was one of the Durack's early stations. Anyway the Battye Library have recordings of them, but one of these old fellows was blind. He walked around the station and headquarters there but he was a marvellous old boy, and wasn't in the least bit concerned about being blind. He took that in his stride. But it was funny, most of those chaps, they were a bit scared of this talking machine and I'd have to

really impress on them that they mightn't think the story they had to tell was important, but people in a hundred years or more, say two hundred years would want to know what kind of a life they had lived, how people managed to survive under such pretty harsh conditions and what made them tick and how they got by and how they amused themselves etc. etc. Finally I had thirty-eight recordings altogether and it was a most enjoyable experience and I'm very happy to think that I've assisted in putting those sort of people on record, because they are, in my opinion, amongst the salt of the earth. The kind of people they write books about, but they themselves didn't think they were anything very special.

As I mentioned right at the beginning of the interview I was born in Laverton and always had this Goldfield background and I always had a hankering to go back there again, so I had a trip. I remember I wrote to Bob Donovan, he was still in charge of the Forest Department in Kalgoorlie and it was at the height of the nickel boom. He said, "Why don't you come up here and get a job up here?" I did and I went on mineral exploration for about four months but it wasn't that I didn't like the job, I worked under a geologist and he would inspect various mineral leases which he would buy on behalf of the firm. A mineral lease was three hundred acres, seventy-five chains long by forty chains wide and he would set out where he would want a baseline to run through the block. Sometimes just straight north and south or east and west, sometimes it followed the lode. The lode or reef might go diagonally across the block and he'd run the baseline over that and I had to mark it out every four hundred feet and I'd run lines at right angles off to the boundary and I'd put in a peg at every two hundred feet, each one would have a coded number. Then I had to dig down to the subsoil and take specimens of the dirt and each of these samples was put in a bag and that was sent away and tested for any signs of nickel or any other mineral. But I was disgusted with the

fellows that I had to work with. They weren't like the old time bushmen at all. They were filthy in their habits. You had to share the same tent and shared the same eating accommodation because the company supplied the food. They were pretty liberal like that. We were well paid and I sacked five of them in three months. I wanted the geologist to pay an extra five pounds to let me get a fellow up from the South West but he wouldn't go along with that, because I had one or two young fellows in mind, young forestry fellows that would have come up there. They'd have been interesting to talk to, they were bushmen, they were interested in their environment and what went on and the kind of birds, the kind of trees, the country itself and everything like that. You can sit down and you can talk to those sort of fellows at night but these men would get up in the morning and wouldn't even wash themselves. So I gave up and went on the pension in '68. I did a few jobs at home and painted the house, and in 1970 Han Suyin, Dr. Han Suyin the authoress came here and she gave lectures about China and I was so rapt up in her story about China that half a dozen of us formed the Australia-China Society. So I've spent my time since in promoting the objectives of the Australia-China Society which is to promote friendship and understanding with China and I'm pleased to say that both Mr. Fraser and Mr. Whitlam, or Mr. Fraser has followed up Whitlam's gesture in seeking diplomatic exchanges with China. So I've been the President and the Secretary and in between times I'm active in the Conservation and Antiwoodchip Movement and I'm sorry to say I can't find time to do half the things I really want to do. I hope to have a really good story to tell you in about another ten years or so. So we'll end just on that note.