

John Abbotsmith

JOHN ABBOTSMITH
INTERVIEWED BY KLAUS HUENEKE
26 February 1984

Tape 1, Side 1

This is an interview with John Abbotsmith at his home in Jindabyne. It's the 26 February 1984.

KH: Can we start at the beginning. Can you tell me when you were born?

JA: 16 August 1918.

KH: Who were your parents, what was their names?

JA: Frank Abbotsmith, he was a government surveyor, an old pioneer surveyor, and my mother.

KH: Do you remember her maiden name at all?

JA: No, but they were some society people from Sydney though. That's how the name came together.

KH: Was your father a local person?

JA: Oh no.

KH: Where did he come from?

JA: Well I only knew him when we were travelling, we used to go to a different school every year, in the early days. As a government surveyor he had a different post and we just moved around with him.

KH: Was that mainly in New South Wales?

JA: All New South Wales.

KH: Not in Victoria.

JA: No. Bega was his nearest depot and he surveyed the New South/Victorian border, from the sea right to the Murray River. His trademark is still down here on the road at Geehi where he blazed the trail as it goes across.

KH: But he wouldn't have been alone on that survey would he?

JA: He was a surveyor.

KH: But wouldn't there have been other people with him?

JA: Oh his chainmen and campmen and all like that, there was a team of them, but he was the surveyor that done the job.

KH: That straight ^{line} section of the border?

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JA: Yes, it had never been surveyed until the later years, and he got the job of doing it.

KH: Oh I see, it was put in as a line in the early days...

JA: Always drawn, but never defined.

KH: And he put cairns along it did he?

JA: Blazed the trail.

KH: I believe some of the blazes can still be seen.

JA: Yes, with F.A. underneath them.

KH: And he was Frank, Frank Abbotsmith J.A.: Yes

KH: Would his family have come from Sydney or some local country town. Have you got any information on that?

JA: No not really.

KH: Where did he go to school?

JA: In Sydney. Our people originally come from the early settlers, Captain Abbot.

KH: So you're about fifth generation or something?

JA: Yeah.

KH: On your father's side?

JA: Yeah, and they had all the land, in those days, right from Kogarah to Cronulla, it was all their property. They got that in the early days as a grant. It slowly wittled down and wittled down and they've got nothing now. But that was the old family area there.

KH: Do you remember at all - if you don't remember when your parents were born, how old were they when you were born in 1918, do you know roughly. Were they in their 30s or were they older people?

JA: I've got it all there on file, I couldn't say.

KH: Has anyone written your family history?

JA: No.

KH: No one has put together a family tree?

JA: Well it's in process with two people now.

KH: Because there's a lot of that going on in Australia.

JA: Our family tree, from the Abbots, from Captain Abbot on the first ship out, to the Smiths...

KH: Oh the Abbots and the Smiths got together, and that's how you got Abbotsmith.

JA: Yes, that's how Abbotsmith came to be.

KH: So the name is not a very old name?

JA: Oh no, it's only a two generation name.

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KH: And Abbot would originally come - have some relationship with the church or something perhaps, and Smith of course has been a common name for a very long time, probably from Blacksmith.

JA: That's how they generally come from, they reckon, yeah. But I don't know much of the Smith side but the Abbot side - the church in Kogarah has got his name up, old Captain Abbot, he's on the wall there somewhere in the early days.

KH: Did your mother have a profession too, or she just travelled with your father?

JA: We moved from house to house to town to town.

KH: He'd have a new base every so often, every couple of years or something, and do a whole lot of jobs in that area.

JA: Yeah. Well, see, he did a lot of work up in Moree/Narrabri area and right up through Murwillumbah. He did all the land surveys - they are still the original surveys, all their deeds up there are when he did the original surveys.

KH: That's right his name would be on a lot of old survey maps.

JA: Yeah.

KH: So you very much grew up in various parts of New South Wales?

JA: That's right, travelling.

KH: And so the depression, during the '20s and early '30s wouldn't have affected your father very much?

JA: No, he went straight through just the same.

KH: He had a job all that time?

JA: Yes. Well permanent public service, you can't kick them out, you've got to pay them.

KH: So he would have been fairly well off during that time I would think.

JA: Yeah. We even remember the first of the bullock wagons with the wool coming into Moree. He bought an old rugby(?) car, we used to go out first of all on horse and sulky to do his job, then he got the old rugby car, the old open tourer, and he used to travel in that. As time went on everything modernized. He'd be in his glory now, with a modern 4 be 4 wouldn't he, to the jobs that he used to do.

KH: So you've been used to cars then almost ever since you were born?

JA: Yes, we've been travelling.

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KH: It would have been quite unusual in the '20s to have a car wouldn't it?

JA: Yes, he had one of the first cars around. The car broke down once, out here at the top of Brown Mountain where ^{we} was surveying there, cold morning, couldn't start the car. The chainman got out with a stick and belted the carburettor, dropped the fuel bulb down, and the car started. After that he carried a stick, every time the car stopped, he got out and gave the carburettor a belt. That's how much mechanical knowledge he had.

KH: I had that problem with a fuel pump once and all it needed was tapping to get the fuel to come through, it was just that something was blocking it, and away we went.

JA: Old Phyl used to do that with my old Landrover, every time the electric pump stopped she used to get her shoe off and with her heel, give it a belt, and away she used to go. People used to look at her in amazement.

KH: Who was this?

JA: My wife. She did a lot of the ordering for groceries when we used to deliver them in the mountains. She used to come down and load the Landrover sky high with groceries and when she got up there I had to deliver them out amongst the huts.

KH: When you stalled on Brown Mountain, it would have been just a dirt track then, wouldn't it?

JA: Oh yeah.

KH: Was it the same route as it takes now?

JA: Roughly. Not the new diversion but the old gravel track. I don't know if you know it, do you?

KH: No, I don't.

JA: It's a different track altogether, once you left Nimmitabel. When you leave Nimmitabel the old road turns to the left and goes out through a real^{old} bumpy old road; the new one goes straight ahead. You'll see where they join, near the top of Brown Mountain, that's the new road that they've got now.

KH: Did the old road go past a bit of a reservoir?

JA: I couldn't say, I can't remember. Is there a dam out there?

KH: Yes, there's a dam up on the escarpment somewhere.

JA: That's not an old one, that's the dam that supplies the Bega Valley Hydro.

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KH: Oh is that it, it could be.

JA: There's two dams on top. The first dam they built and then they built the backup dam, ^{that's the 2 dams} They weren't there when we were there.

KH: There's a sign post that says 'Old Dam Road', or something like that.

JA: Yes that would be right.

KH: So your schooling then, in those early days, was all over the place, in a way, a bit here and a bit there, and a lot of travelling. Did you do any rabbiting?

JA: Not for a living but I always used to catch a few now and again, and we're in the days of the prickly pear up north. I don't know if you remember.

KH: That cactus thing?

JA: Yes. Sometimes the prickly pear was growing that fast and heavy you couldn't open the gate unless you started cutting it away to get to the lock to get the gate open. In those days there was just a mass of prickly pear along the road, like nearly a tunnel.

KH: What did they do to get rid of it?

JA: They brought this cactus blacus(?) grub out eventually and that started eating the prickly pear away.

KH: The rabbits didn't touch it?

JA: It couldn't, it's millions of little thorns.

KH: So you had the rabbits as well as the cactus.

JA: In those days - well I don't know much about the land but probably they did.

KH: Do you remember any place specifically where you went to primary school for a longer period than usual.?

JA: No, there was never a year of school. We used to put one year in at one school and then we'd shift to another school and then another school.

KH: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

JA: Yes. The last of my schooling was done in Katoomba. I had a couple of years up there when we were staying with people - Hazelbrook.

KH: Was there an intermediate or leaving certificate?

JA: Intermediate. That was at Katoomba, 1932 I think, or '31.

KH: You would have been 13 or 14.

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JA: That's right. From there I left school and went to Narrabri where my father was surveying and I got a job, apprentice cabinet maker. I served me time up there cabinet making.

KH: Four years or something?

JA: I did four years. I should have done five but I cleared out before that, I went carpentering. It was in those four years though I was bike riding.

KH: Racing?

JA: Yes, I was an all western champion, junior and senior.

KH: This is track racing?

JA: Track and road. Ten miles was a pretty big race then on gravel, corrugations.

KH: What sort of bikes did you use?

JA: Speedwell.

KH: Not Harley Davidsons or anything like that?

JA: These are push bikes, push bike riding.

KH: I naturally thought, because of your affinity with mechanical things, I thought it was a motorised motor bike.

JA: Motor bikes in those days were the old Harley Davidson with a side car. Motor bikes were only just coming in in those days.

KH: And you just had dirt tracks?

JA: Yes. The last race I had was on a track. There were six races, I had six starts, I had five firsts and a dead heat for first, then I gave the game away.

KH: How old were you when you gave it away.

JA: About 16½.

KH: It was a short period was it?

JA: It was hectic. After I left Narrabri I left the bike and everything behind, so naturally I never worried about bikes after that.

KH: Did your father give you your first bike?

JA: No I bought my first bike, an old broken down thing. I put her on the track and I was in the race and both wheels collapsed. It was that rusty and old that both wheels collapsed.

KH: Were the bikes still fixed wheels then?

JA: Yes fixed wheels, no gears, straight out fixed wheel bike. Even on the road. It all depends on the gearing of your back sprocket or front sprocket as to how much gear - but it was a fixed gear.

KH: What sort of brakes did you have?

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JA: Well with the pedals, with the straps over the pedal, you can brake on that.

KH: You just brake the fixed wheel, you didn't have a hand brake, on the handle bars.

JA: It probably was in those days, I don't know.

KH: The very early ones, I don't think did.

JA: Hand brakes came in later. I might have had a back brake, I'm not too sure.

KH: It would be pretty hairy going down a hill with a fixed wheel and no other brakes wouldn't it.

JA: It's like an old car, if you're on a old T-model Ford or something like that, you're not going to go down a hill flat out to stop at the bottom, you'd be going down steady. On a fixed wheel bike you'd be doing the same. You'd be jumping back on the back wheels all the time holding the bike back. If you started to go too fast you'd bale off.

KH: Did you ever do that?

JA: No.

KH: Being a cabinet maker, that was like a joiner was it, making furniture?

JA: We were making furniture and joinery in those days, box frames and the old fashioned wardrobes, dressing tables.

KH: So it was quite fine work, you would have done veneering too, and that sort of thing.

JA: Veneering was unheard of. It didn't come in until half way through my time, they started to bring solid veneer panels in. Until then, when we made a pine table, we had pine boards and glued them all together and then planed them off, that's how we made tabletops. Now you buy the whole thing veneered and finished in one piece.

KH: So veneering is that recent?

JA: Oh yes. Plywood was in but not veneering. You get a walnut veneer or you can get a Pacific maple veneer, all those veneers were just coming in at that time. That was when the Chinamen were just starting to mass produce furniture also in Sydney. Marcus Clarke got into the mass producing of furniture. In those old days the old machine used to run along on a belt along the factory and each machine came off a belt. But during the time we were there they started putting electric motors on each machine.

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KH: Where was it that you did this apprenticeship?

JA: Narrabri. We worked there in Narrabri and then we worked Moree, shopfront fitting with big panes of glass, which was something unusual, seeing a big pane of glass coming in, in those days. We did a lot of shops in Moree and a lot of shops in - modernising shops - in Narrabri. Shopfitting and making all the cabinet shelves and things like that, glass cabinets.

KH: And the counter I suppose?

JA: Yeah.

KH: I notice they've still got some lovely old counters - there's a corner shop in Adaminaby, opposite the Big Trout there. You don't see many of them now. Did you get your papers as a cabinetmaker.

JA: No, I got my trade tickets.

KH: Then you went on to carpentry, and where did you go to after that?

JA: I did carpentry round the bush then, in homesteads and stations.

KH: Did you leave home then?

JA: Oh yes, I left home a lot earlier than that.

KH: How old were you when you left home?

JA: About 12. We went boarding up at Hazelbrook.

KH: That's a bit different from today.

JA: Earned 5 bob a week when I first started work too.

KH: That was your apprenticeship pay?

JA: That was the beginning of the pay, then they gave me rise, I got 10 shillings a week, then 15. I thought I was made, I got 20 shillings a week then I could pay my own board.

KH: So your father assisted you for a while?

JA: Oh they had to, all apprentices have to be assisted, you just can't go in, like today, and demand \$120 a week with all the conditions that go with it.

KH: That's right, they do very well.

JA: But in those days no one could be an apprentice unless you were kept, you couldn't pay your board, not for the first 2 to 3 years of apprenticeship. After about 3 years you got enough money, then you could pay your board and scrape away for a bit of clothing, or do a little odd job on the side and make a few bob that way. That's all you could do.

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KH: And you would have had pretty long hours too I suppose.

JA: Yes, 48 a week, and six days.

KH: So you only had one day off?

JA: Yes, Sunday off.

KH: That's when you did your bike racing?

JA: The racing was done Saturday afternoon, Sunday, when they brought the 44 hour week in. But you used to do the hours of a morning and the hours in the afternoon after you'd finish work. You were no good unless you could do a 10 mile run after work.

KH: What did you get into after you gave away cycle racing, what was your next...

JA: Well I push-biked to Sydney, from Narrabri to Sydney.

KH: How long did that take you?

JA: Nearly a week because there was no bitumen then, gravel all the way.

KH: By yourself?

JA: Yes. And then I met up - because I was in the Boy scouts, I rose up to King Scout at Narrabri, I was a troop leader. Through the scout connections I got on to the Sydney Commissioner who was looking for a young chap to go gold mining. I went gold mining then, I come up to ^{Cowra} Creek, outside old ^{Cowra?} creek - they call it in Cooma now. We were first in there, old Tommy Shane and a chap named Bill Riley, and we went through the old leases there. This English company, this mining engineer, gave me the job in Sydney. When the winter came we couldn't get a job anywhere and old - not Billy Balmain, his brother who had the bus place in Cooma - Harry I think his name was. He said 'Well what are you going to do now'. I said 'I don't know what to do, where to go, winter's come on, there's no good going back to Sydney, I have to get a job somewhere'. He said 'Look there's a job going up at Kosi, the engineer wants a boy in the engine room. Would you like it?' I said 'I'll give it a go'. He said 'I'll give you a free trip up and back'. So up I went and I got the job, and that's how I first got to Kosciusko.

KH: That was up at the Chalet?

JA: The hotel, the Chalet was only huts at the time. So I worked in the engine room for a couple of years then.

KH: What year was that when you went up there? Were you 18 by then? You left school at 14, had 4 years as a cabinetmaker, and then you had a time with carpentry.

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JA: I must have been. When the war started I was 21.
 KH: 1939. So this was about 1937. You were 19.
 JA: It must have been that.
 KH: So that's when you first saw snow?
 JA: Yes.
 KH: Well the Chalet was there but it was a different sort of building, wooden, two storey.
 JA: The original Chalet had already burnt down and they rebuilt another wooden one. That also burnt down and they rebuilt the present one. The Chalet burnt twice. That's when I learned to ski then. They imported a ski instructor, Ernst ^{Skaardarasy}, well he taught me to ski.
 KH: At the hotel.
 JA: Yes.
 KH: So you worked at the hotel for a while, a couple of years or something?
 JA: Well it was around the hotel, the odd jobs up to the Chalet and ^{to} and all those sort of things, we weren't in the one place all the time. Then they were short of ski instructors, so after a hell of a blue, the engineer didn't want to lose me, and I wanted to go ski instructing. It went on and on and eventually I got in the ski room and then ski instructing. I was one of the first ski instructors then.
 KH: First of the Australian ski instructors?
 JA: No, there was Teddy Shields, Billy Harris, they were before me. That was the nucleus of the ski school at Kosi. We had another chap up at the Chalet - I forget his name now - I shouldn't because he went down on the hospital ship during the war.
 KH: There was some names on a photo I saw yesterday, George ^{Lamb}, Billy Harris, and yourself.
 JA: George Lamb^{le}, Billy Harris and myself.
 KH: They had it all wrong on that photo. I didn't think it was right.
 JA: Yes those are the three names, I've got them here now.
 KH: George Lamb^{le} became - is he the father of the Lamb^{le} sisters - he became manager
 JA: He's the brother of the Lamb^{le} sisters. Old George Lamb^{le}, he was the original manager. There were a few before him I would imagine, I'm not too sure. Then P.M. A. Spee^t came in. George went then, Mr Lamb^{le} himself, he was in charge tourist ... at Challis House

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in Martin Place. That's when George Lamb^{le} came in and he took over the ski school and that was when we formed the nucleus of the ski school, with George Lamb^{le}
 KH: But most of your teaching was at the hotel, rather than the chalet?
 JA: Yes.
 KH: So you trooped up and down quite a lot?
 JA: No. We used to have an exchange. You'd have a week or a fortnight at the Chalet and then you'd come back to the hotel and someone else would go up and they'd have a week or a fortnight. The chalet then started employing their own instructors as well and we never had to go up there any more. That was in the early days of starting things off.
 KH: ^{Skaardarasy}, he came out - was it '34 that he came the first time.
 JA: I don't know.
 KH: Had they already built a t-bar at the chalet when you went there?
 JA: It was built after I was there.
 KH: It must have been about '39. I think it was before the war.
 JA: The t-bar was, yes. They built two, the first one they put up was snowed under and then they put this extra big 'George Day' poles up, ^{next} and they lasted.
 KH: Were they as big as the gate posts that are still there?
 JA: Not quite as big, but only George Day could have done it, but they were good poles. That was the reconstruction of the original.
 KH: I'm going to see George Day later this week. I saw him a couple of years ago.
 JA: Remember me to him when you see him. Tell him I've been looking out for him, but I miss him when he comes here. One of these days I hope to catch up to him.
 KH: So you were ^a ski instructor. You went from being a boy assisting the engineer to the ski room, to a ski instructor. Then the war started - how did you get involved with the Ski Corp?
 JA: During my period as ski instructor, the Chalet burnt down, the second one, and Billy and myself went up as porters. We were the first through to the Chalet after the fire. We took clothing and soups and things up for the people who were living in the huts. They moved into the cow shed.

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- KH: Some went back to Betts Camp too, didn't they?
- JA: Yes. Then the war started, I was first off.
- KH: You enlisted straight away?
- JA: Yes, we went down to Goulburn and then from Goulburn to Ingeburn and the Queen Mary, over to the Middle East. Before the war I used to instruct in - this is how I got caught up - instruct at Kosi in '38/'39, and during that winter I went to Canada and I was instructing over there at the Vancouver Ski Club. We did a few big trips over there.
- KH: How do you mean 'big trips'?
- JA: Well the first year I used to cart the food up into the huts waiting for winter to come, in Canada. You just can't leave snow here and go to snow there because you've got your autumn and spring. I used to leave here in spring and it was autumn over there, coming on winter, and we weren't ready for skiing so I filled my time in carting food up into the huts and getting them underway. When winter came I used to instruct and when spring came I came back here for autumn.
- KH: They still do it I suppose.
- JA: Yes they still do it. I used to do that and I used to work on a ship, the old 'Niagara'. I met the second steward at Kosi and hit him for a job, so he put me on the boat.
- KH: You had it all worked out didn't you.
- JA: It fell that way, it just fell that way. That's how I was on the ships then for quite a while, in the summer times.
- KH: But you only went to Canada the once?
- JA: Twice. The second time I was driving a dog team.
- KH: Did you ever drive dog teams here?
- JA: Yes.
- KH: At that time?
- JA: No. The Chalet had the dogs then, but the dogs were either driven by Jacky Piazza or George himself.
- KH: Wasn't there a fellow called Adams?
- JA: Yes Ray Adams.
- KH: Was he around then?
- JA: He was, he had the team there and he used to cart all the food up to the Chalet and all the suitcases and things. ^{on the dogs} But Ray Adams and myself, he started me off sitting in the gutter in Cooma. One day I

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- met him and he said 'I can't stand, we'd better sit down'. So we sat down in the gutter in front of the Bank of New South Wales, and he told me all about dogs and what to do and how to start me off. There's one of them, that was my leader there. That was a black and white border collie that I used to have, that was my leader. Then I had three Samoyeds I got from Sydney.
- KH: Did you have the dogs after the war?
- JA: Yes a long time after.
- KH: So how did you get involved in the Ski Corp?
- JA: They called for anyone with experience in snow, through the routine orders. So I went in and applied. Of course being the only instructor in the Australian Army I was straight in. We organised the ski troops and organised their training, bought all the equipment. Then we got Major Savage in from England to represent the Ninth Army. We have Bob Savage as Colonel then, he represented the Australian 9th Division. Once I got into ski troops I transferred over to Spears Mission. Spears Mission was a governing body then for Lebanon. I used to work part civilian, part soldiering. When I went up to Turkey to buy the equipment I had to go up in ciwy clothes.
- KH: You mean the skis and things?
- JA: Yes.
- KH: You bought them in Turkey?
- JA: I bought a lot of ski poles and things that come from Turkey. That was all done in ciwy clothes, we couldn't go up in uniforms, they'd cut our throats. So we bought all the equipment there and had a lot of it made in Beirut.
- KH: They weren't sent from Australia or from Europe?
- JA: Jesus no, we had rough old birch skis then, nothing like...
- KH: You didn't have Hickory skis or anything.
- JA: Hickory was a super-duper ski in those days.
- KH: Did you have metal edges on those used in Lebanon?
- JA: No, all rounded edges.
- KH: What sort of bindings did you have?
- JA: Bits of pressed up metal, strap over the toe and a strap around the heel. But the boys did all right. We used to start off a school of 150 pupils. We'd finish up with 20 and we thought we were doing well.
- KH: Those 150 would just come from those who wanted to come?

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JA: Those who volunteered. But also they had to come from different units because we needed signallers, people to signal, we needed machine gunners, we needed artillery observers, engineers, we had to draw ^{So many} from all these divisions. But then when we finished we had to have a nucleus of a - like a commando unit because we were the forerunners of commandos. Commandos weren't in then, until we did all our training. In fact they used us as commandos in the desert after we left the ski school, we had to go in and do all the dirty work.

KH: How long did you have the ski school?

JA: I was there 2 years and we handed over to the English. But during those years I was up into Russia with a team of experts in the Caucasian Mountains. That's when the Germans were coming down, still on their advance from the top of the Black Sea and we were going to form the three divisions together and call it an army and we were going to block them on the Caucasian Mountains. That was where the Russians were down there and we were all liaising together, what was to be expected and what to do. Each unit had to be somewhere. That was one of the reasons the ski troops were formed.

KH: To fight in the mountains?

JA: Not actually to fight, we were mainly there for communication and travel. Once the troops get bogged down then they have to use the ski troops for communications, signalling, doing the advance land mining and all that sort of thing. That was what the ski troops were trained for. When we knew what was expected of us, then we came back and started training our men for that particular job.

KH: Were you ever used for that?

JA: No, because the Germans started to retreat from Russia and they started retreating from the Black Sea, so all that then got wiped. We did trace a couple of saboteurs who had jumped out of a plane at We tracked them right down into ^{Belbek} and then the security boys went to work and picked them up. They weren't as free to move as they thought they were.

KH: In this television programme that's been on, called 'The World at War' I think, they showed some of the fighting in that part of Russia, especially in the winter time, and they showed all the Russian troops in white uniform on skis. So they must have had thousands of people equipped with the skills that you were equipped with.

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JA: Yes. But white is not good on the snow, white stands out as clear as one thing on snow, you've got to have a dirty white and that camouflages into the snow. But pure white was just like putting a white sail on a boat out to sea, you could pick it out miles away. We found that out very quick. We had a dirty white. If the uniforms got dirty they weren't allowed to wash them and that's how they were camouflaged. As soon as they'd wash them they'd come up like those curtains, they'd be clear and white again. That's how we got our clothes down.

KH: But you'd only get 20 out of a 150 who would be any good?

JA: Who would come through, yeah.

KH: Who would be able to ski, or other criteria as well.

JA: We wanted new skiers. We had Norwegians with us, but when you've got a section of men who have got to ski down a hill and take a post, an army post, or something like that, a good skier, he'll outclass the others and he'll get there first and get shot and warn the others there's a patrol coming down. We found that we can get a group of men together, who weren't really good skiers, but could manouvre, turn, snow plough, control skiing, not fast skiing, that they could come down and do a job as a unit. But when you've got a team of men carrying equipment and then you've got a Norwegian who was a good skier trying to do christies amongst them all, it upset the section. So that is why we used - we would rather raw beginners, or someone who had an inkling of skiing, turned out to be the best ski troops, not the good skier.

KH: That's interesting.

JA: The good skier was too higher class. Norwegians, and that, Osberg and a few others who were quite good, we turned them into instructors, that was the way we overcame that problem. Of course they were pleased about it, otherwise it wouldn't have worked. Then if any dirty work had to come, all the instructors who had to do a fast job, would go out first, and then they'd be followed on by the slow moving boys.

KH: Were you ever actually involved in taking of opposition positions or anything like that?

JA: No, we were never involved in that. We trained the Churchill commandos.

KH: That was a special unit wasn't it?

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JA: That was the beginning of commando units. They came up and we trained them on skis and gave them a fitting. We got them all set up and they were about to go off on a job. They had to cut the Brenner Pass at the top of Italy, that was their job. They had to land on skis and take the snow ploughs and commandeer the pass so the troops getting out of Italy couldn't get through, so they blocked the pass. During the process they said 'Oh we haven't got an equipment officer and we need one urgently'. He said 'You volunteer don't you'. So I sort of volunteered until we landed on the Brenner Pass. When it was over - I was only there for a month.

KH: Was there anyone stationed on the Brenner Pass when you commandeered it?

JA: Oh yes, they took the gates over, the snow ploughs.

KH: But there were Italians there?

JA: Italians and Germans manning the Pass. But it all happened that quick. A lot of them parachuted out of their planes, parachuted equipment and landed and they made the initial ambush, then it was all over.

KH: Did you parachute in?

JA: Well I was too, but they eventually got down onto the ground.

KH: They landed.

JA: Yes.

KH: ^{Landed on the Brenner Pass} On a nearby snow field or something like that? I don't know what the pass is like, is it a fairly wide area?

JA: The Pass itself is a fairly narrow pass, but further back there was open fields and we got in there. They kept me there for a month looking after equipment for them. You see there was no such thing as waxing in those days, we had to wax skis. These boys didn't know anything about burning ^{Stockholm tar} on the bottom on their skis, I had to do all that for them, I had to wax all their skis, and make ski wax.

KH: Did you use some of the old Kiandra mixtures?

JA: We used to use the old Kosi mixture, beeswax, resin, harden it up with gramophone records.

KH: Is that right?

JA: No joke, gramophone records melted down, it's a mixture of resin and hard plastic. That used to get into the beeswax and you used to get it very hard and we used to iron it on with an electric iron. That's how we'd put the wax on the skis in those days.

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KH: That was just the base.

JA: ^{and Stockholm} tar.

KH: Did you then put running wax on the top of that, for different conditions, or was that it.

JA: That was mainly it. For climbing and also downhill running, it was a uniform sort of wax. If you wanted to go faster you'd put a bit of parafin wax on the top. If you just want climbing you'd put a bit more ^{Stockholm} tar in the mixture. I think they don't do much better these days either. You look at the wax and they're nearly the same. If you want a sticky wax you put ^{Stockholm} tar in and if you want a fast wax you put parafin wax in. That's about the strength of waxing. But more scientific though than what we used to do.

KH: A lot of the waxing has gone out now, with the new surfaces they've got.

JA: By the time we got back to Lebanon again, the Germans were advancing down the Libyan coast, so they sent the Aussies ^{up} there and we all went up there with them. We joined our units and went back up. When we got up to Alexander they called all the ski troops back again, put us together and that's where we formed our nucleus of the armband civilians - they used to call us.

KH: What was that for?

JA: Well if they want a water hole ^{a water} or well blown up - like the British have desert patrols - we used to go up and blow the water well up. We used to go and blow a bridge up and all those sort of things.

KH: That was a bit different from teaching people to ski.

JA: Well as I said it was the beginning - it wasn't only skiing we taught them, we taught them unarmed combat and I taught them the land mines. We taught them the full schooling of a soldier and they could fill in a gap anywhere, and that's a commando. He's got to be able to look after himself in a sticky position and that's how the school was, it wasn't only skiing. They used to ski during the day but you used to give them 2 hours lectures at night, and when the weather got too rough to go skiing, when the blizzards were on, we used to give them unarmed combat training and all that sort of business. In those days, they were fairly skilled.

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End Side 1

Side 2

KH: But how did you acquire the skills, someone must have taught you, like with handling mines.

JA: ^{I was an engineer} I did that in Tobruk.

KH: That was the first place you went, Tobruk.

JA: Yes, we held Tobruk. That was in the early days. We learned pretty fast there, within a couple a days, we learned how to put mines out.

KH: So you didn't go to Lebanon straight away?

JA: On gee no, that was after.

KH: How long were you in Tobruk?

JA: Eight months. After Tobruk, that was when the Germans started to come down, when the free French and the Vichy French - they collapsed over in France and then the Vichy French stayed with the Germans and the French Foreign Legion stayed with the Germans. That's when the 7th Division went up north to take Syria and Lebanon. That was when we came out of Tobruk and had our spell and then we went back up to Lebanon and Syria. That's how we got up into the snow country. From the snow country, we had heavy falls of snow and everything was immobile, no one could move, no one could walk. So then old Morse ^{head} then decided to get these ski troops going to get a bit of communication going. That was one of the reasons why the ski troops were formed in the snow country because where we were there we could ski right up into Russia, we had snow all the way through. In the army you've got to be prepared for any kind of emergency and that was the emergency that the ski troops had to fall in line with pretty quick, to keep everything working during the winter months in the heavy snow.

KH: So what happened after the Brenner Pass, you went back to the desert, did you?

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JA: Yeah, I came back to the school and by the time I was at the school they were pulling all the Aussies out and sending them back into the desert again to face Rommel coming down. We caught up to them at El Alamein and we held them at El Alamein then. That's where I got blown up there, ^{that} -knocked me out of the army then.

KH: What happened to you?

JA: I got shrapnel in the eye, the stomach and foot, got knocked around. They brought me back to Australia. then on the Wonganella hospital ship, discharged.

KH: That was about 1943 or something.

JA: Somewhere around there.

KH: So you had 3 or 4 years....

JA: Three years in the Middle East.

KH: Were you in hospital here?

JA: Oh by the time I got back they had me pretty-well patched up and I was only in the army a month or so before they discharged me. That's when I went to Bega with the old man surveying.

KH: You went back to your father then?

JA: Yes and I was on the Bega power house then, I used to operate the Bega power house ^{work as a shift electrician} I started my own bike shop in Bega. I had the power house work, so I started a bike shop. That went on for a little while. There was no young chaps left in the town, they were all in the army, I was all on my own. So after the bike shop, for about 6 or 8 months, I'd had it, so I joined the Americans then and went back up north in the American small ships. I was on all the landings then, after Buna, We-wak, I made my second engineer on a landing craft. We did all the landings then right up to the Philippines.

KH: Around New Guinea and so on?

JA: Yes, we did all those landings.

KH: So how long did you do that for?

JA: It must have been about 18 months or so.

KH: That was till the end of the war?

JA: Oh no, I got bombed out, we got hit again. I got shrapnel through the shoulder that time.

KH: Where was that?

JA: Landing on the ... Peninsula, in the Philippines.

KH: You got sunk, so you were floating in the water?

JA: Yes.

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- KH: They picked you up.
- JA: Yes. I say, "Boy, you've done your share, you go back home".
Most Americans only serve 3 months or less active fighting.
- KH: Do they.
- JA: Yes. I had 14 months front line fighting, not the blue line, that was the red line front, and that's a hell of a lot of fighting to be in the front under fire all the time. But the yanks only do 3 months. Once they do 3 months they are either shifted out or shifted back and new troops go forward.
- KH: So then you got fished out of the sea and you then came back to Australia again. Were you hospitalised then?
- JA: No. By the time I got back I was right.
- KH: The wounds weren't as bad as the first time?
- JA: No, only a bit of shrapnel. But they reckoned I'd done my share, get home boy. So we went home.
- KH: So the first time, that was when you had shrapnel in your eye area was it.
- JA: Yes, I lost my eye, this one is artificial. That's only a new one, that's why it looks good I suppose.
- KH: Because I remember that when I was a boy at the ^{Cree!} and I thought, this man's got strange eyes and I was trying to work out what it was. Thank you, you've explained something.
- JA: By the time we came back, I went back to Kosi again.
- KH: Where abouts at Kosi?
- JA: The hotel.
- KH: But not instructing?
- JA: No, I was then sports organiser, that was in charge of the instructing ski school, organising the people on their picnics and barbecues.
- KH: This was active during the summer as well wasn't it?
- JA: Yes, summer and winter. Golf courses and all that, used to mow the courses.
- KH: While I think of it, there's an area on that golf course, every spring - who's buried there?
- JA: No one. What story did you hear.
- KH: I haven't actually heard - I remember someone telling me about a horse that died, I thought maybe a horse was buried there, but I don't really know.

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- JA: Well at the bottom of that cross there's a little fountain, a little round fountain we used to have, spraying water, and little gardens. This postmistress, Mrs McManus, her husband, he was a real out and out no-hoper drunk, but he passed away and she had nothing to do on a Sunday so she - everyone was mad planting daffodils. So she bought all these daffodils and put this cross on the side of the hill coming down towards the fountain. Of course over the years the daffodils kept on expanding and expanding and just made this big floral cross. It's nothing, it was just a little old lady passing her time away, probably in memory of her old man at times, when she had nothing else to do. Being a postmistress she never worked on Sunday.
- KH: It's so noticeable when they're in flower.
- JA: Yes, and I've heard so many stories, about burials, and something happened there, all sorts of things. But that is the story, this little old postmistress on a Sunday with nothing to do, used to go over - and I think the cross was not in memory of the old boy because these families weren't too keen, she was a very religious Catholic and I think that's why the cross went there. Instead of just putting the daffodils anywhere, she decided to put the cross there, as a very strong staunch Catholic, ^{and that is how} the cross came to be.
- KH: And that's a nine hole golf course?
- JA: Yes.
- KH: It's all gone back to the bush now.
- JA: I remade it after the war, I got it going again ^{when I was at the Cree!} But the Park Trust then, as they were known, started to stipulate so many things I had to do, I had to put drains in, I had to do this, I had to do that, I wasn't allowed to do this, I wasn't allowed to do that. Their conditions were getting beyond me.
- KH: Because that whole valley has been mined by gold miners hasn't it?
- JA: No.
- KH: Along Diggers Creek there?
- JA: No. Diggers Creek goes up through the golf course, up towards that weir you're talking about and back up on the ridge. On the high ridge the mines are still there. They're only trenches about that deep.
- KH: I thought that Diggers Creek there, up above the ^bridge, looks like it's been re-routed, it looks very straight.

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JA: It was, before the golf course. When the golf course came in, they moved the creek over to one side.

KH: Oh the golf course did that, not the miners?

JA: No.

KH: Elsewhere, like the Nine Mile diggings, and Four Mile, it's the miners who did that.

JA: No, that was done because - Public Works did that on the golf course. That used to be a big long fairway there.

KH: But the diggings were actually further up.

JA: Right on top of the hill.

KH: They built that dam the first time too, didn't they?

JA: There was a dam built, and washed away, then they built the second, the second dam was put in.

KH: But the miners built the first one?

JA: I don't know, but I'd be very doubtful, because the dam is too low down there, for where they were working on top. There was no need to build one because they had plenty of water running through the creeks.

KH: This is the dam in front of the hotel?

JA: The reservoir dam. That was built for scenic purposes by the Public Works.

KH: It wasn't built by the miners?

JA: I don't know for sure.

KH: You don't remember any evidence of the mines below?

JA: It was there when I was there. We used to have reindeer fences in there, we had reindeers and dogs from Captain Scott's expedition and we had the reindeer houses and everything like that. But they forgot that when the snow came and the snow came over the fences the reindeers got out and went away. There was probably reindeers down in Island Bend and down in that rough country when the Snowy started.

KH: I don't think there are any more.

JA: It's all built out now.

KH: I was under the impression that Diggers Creek was called Diggers Creek because of the gold miners. I was also under the impression that that dam in front of the hotel, that they had built that first. But that would only be logical if there's actually evidence of mining below the dam. Do you remember any evidence of mining?

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JA: No, nothing below the dam. But mining was taken on the ridge and that's where Diggers Creek is, Diggers Creek starts up over there on top of the ridge. Then it comes right up, it runs up towards the dam. Then it comes back down towards the lake. It's still called Diggers Creek back there, but the diggings took place right up the top of Diggers Creek, not as Diggers Creek as you know, but the diggings were done right on top of the ridge there.

KH: I must walk up there some time.

JA: Go up from Rennex Gap. As you go up from Rennex Gap, walk straight up there, it saves a lot of climbing, you're half way up before you start. There's a big open peak plain swamp and in that swamp you'll see where they've been digging trenches along.

KH: Do you know if they got any gold out of there?

JA: I don't know, but at one stage all the staff at Kosi left them, and went up digging; they were back within a week, so I don't think there was much. We've got a lot of diggings up here at Thredbo too, the Thredbo diggings, but they're no-where near Thredbo, they're on the ridge right at the back, on the left hand side going into Thredbo Village, where Little Thredbo comes down, that's a gold field there.

KH: But there has been diggings near Rutledges hut, it might be called the Thredbo diggings area now, just inside.

JA: There's a lot of ground there, a lot of work done there.

KH: I thought that was the Little Thredbo diggings.

JA: That's one ... and then another lot is further up on the Crackenback, they call it the Crackenback diggings. That's on the left hand side going into Thredbo up over the ridge. Bullocks hut we used to call that, we never knew it as Rutledge.

KH: Bullocks is there now, and up-stream is Rutledge's.

JA: And over the creek on the other side you'll see big mounds of dirt where they've been digging through the gravel and throwing it up. That's where they brought the river up through there and then back down again. You go to Bullocks hut and go across the creek and up the other side - you go across a little flat and then you've got to climb a little, it seems like a little hill, it's been shovelled there. As you go down the other side you dip down into a depression, and that's where they've been working in there.

KH: I know there's a remains of a steam engine or something over there.

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- JA: That's possible.
- KH: They may have had an old stamper battery or something like that in there.
- JA: No, because it was all alluvial gold and no reef gold. The old steam engine, possibly, is the old sawmill. Just up here at that motel along the road here...
- KH: Wilsons Valley.
- JA: Wilsons Valley - well just below that I can show you where the old sawmill was. It goes down over the other side and the stumps for the roof are still standing there.
- KH: How far below Wilsons Valley?
- JA: About a mile or less.
- KH: Because I'm going up there tonight.
- JA: You look across the valley, low down, and you've got to have very sharp eyes, but you'll still see the old pole standing.
- KH: Was there a track into it?
- JA: Old bullock tracks, and that track whatever it was would be well washed out, well overgrown, by this.
- KH: But they were getting the Alpine Ash out of there I suppose.
- JA: Then that sawmill then transferred away over here, out past the Penderlea ..
- KH: Penderlea, where's that?
- JA: About 10 mile on the Thredbo Road. You see Penderlea - someone has got Penderlea up there now, that used to be the old Penderlea homestead, and that's where the road used to end.
- KH: Which Pendergast was there? I get very confused with the Penders.
- JA: So do I. I don't try to work them out because there's too many of them. But there's old Bill, old Bill Pendergast, he used to potter around with a bit of a sawmill on the right hand side, as the road takes a bit of a sweep on a big flat plain there, he used to be in there. Then some other chaps bought the sawmill and they bought the sawmill out towards the road, they used to get their timber out of the hill. That sawmill then went to Bamboka .
- KH: Who had the timber mill opposite Bullocks?
- JA: I don't know. Polly McGregor's husband.
- KH: Polly McGregor had a shop in Jindabyne. Is that the lady?

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- JA: Yeah. Her husband, he had a sawmill there and he had the last of the sawmills out near Penderlea . That steam engine - it's an old caravan park out here now. That tractor there is what I used to use to drive me first ski tow . I had that tractor in the shed with a take off pulley.
- KH: At Smiggin. Hole?
- JA: Yes.
- KH: Well let's go back. So you came back after the second time, when you fought with the Americans, worked with the Americans, came back here and you worked at the Hotel.
- JA: Yes.
- KH: Running recreational activities and things.
- JA: Sports organiser there.
- KH: How long did you do that for?
- JA: I don't remember.
- KH: When did you start....
- JA: I left - I don't know how I got back to Sydney - oh yes that's right. While I was there, I joined the huts at Kosi. The Park Trust was just being formed and one of their first jobs that they ever done was to put transmitter wirelasses into the huts; Whites River, Seamans, Alpine.
- KH: You did that?
- JA: Well I was on it, with the Signals Department. The NSW Railway was then running the Hotel and they called upon the Railway Signal Branch to put in these transmitters. They put them in at Alpine hut, Whites, Seamans, the Chalet and Hotel. I got a job working with them, doing these jobs. Then suddenly they said 'Who's going to look after them'. They put me in for the job, put me to look after them. So while they were up there they said 'Okay who's going to pay you. We haven't got any paper work, wages, ready to pay you'. So they decided to pay me through the Lands Department, to be debited against the Trust, and I was their first ranger in the park. I used to travel 78 miles a week: Hotel, Chalet, Seamans hut, Whites River, Alpine, then back to the Chalet. ^{That was} the year we got married, and we took a room over in Betts Camp, and that was my headquarters.
- KH: Was this winter or summer?
- JA: Both.
- KH: So in winter you'd ski that?

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- JA: I'd ski, 78 a week.
- KH: And in summer you'd walk it.
- JA: Oh pack saddle. I used to come down to the park and get the horses and pack horses to take petrol - I had to take petrol in and everything for the winter use, all that had to be done. I worked for the park during the summer and then used to go out and fix all these stations up during the summer so they'd be right for the winter.
- KH: Would that be about 1947 or something.
- JA: Pretty close.
- KH: When did you get married?
- JA: Around that period anyway. That's how the park first started, when they first came up.
- KH: How much did you get paid then, do you remember.
- JA: I couldn't say.
- KH: £10 a week.
- JA: No idea. I got £10 a week as a carpenter and I thought I was made, so it would be round about that, 10/12 a week I suppose. Provide your own gear and provide everything yourself. It's different from today, they get windjackets, gloves, everything.
- KH: They've got a union to represent them now.
- JA: And we had to do the lot ourselves, but anyhow.
- KH: Still you did a lot of skiing.
- JA: Oh yes a terrible lot. Many a time I never even seen my way across the ranges. One year we had one blizzard, it started in May and finished in September.
- KH: Which year was that?
- JA: That was my second year there, '48.
- KH: I know '46 was a very heavy year, but I don't know about '48/'49/'50.
- JA: Well I've skied off the Chalet roof, I've tunnelled into Betts Camp, I've tunnelled into the old Smiggins Café.
- KH: You must have tunnelled into Whites River too, and Alpine.
- JA: Alpine was always right, you drop down into Alpine, but Whites River used to completely disappear, bar from the chimney. We used to tie a shovel up on the chimney of Whites. Then something happened to the shovel, we lost it, so we used to tie a shovel on a tree

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- further back. So only those - like Ken Breakspear, myself, Dicky Curran, we knew where that shovel - so we always had a shovel of our own. We used to get in and out of Whites that way.
- KH: Did you have much to do with Ken Breakspear?
- JA: A terrible lot. In those days we used to travel all over the ranges together.
- KH: Did you ever go over to Jargungal or over to the Grey Mare, trips like that?
- JA: Yes.
- KH: Did you ever go right to Kiandra?
- JA: I drove a snow cruiser - I introduced snow cruisers to Australia, I brought the first. In fact, Outboard Marine brought them in and they got me to run them for them.
- KH: Who brought them in?
- JA: Outboard Marine, Johnson Evinrude, they were the first one to bring the snow cruiser in. That's why the name has always stuck to the snow cruiser. That was the year the party got lost up here, on the Geehi Wall. Remember those three people got lost, Victorians were out looking for them, police were out looking for them.
- KH: When was this, 1950 or something?
- JA: Oh no, that's well after, you're coming into modern time now. But they got lost and everybody was looking for them.
- KH: The winter time?
- JA: Coming on, yes, in August. They got lost and there was a diabetic amongst them. Anyhow for a fortnight everybody was looking for them, and then suddenly a radio station, Cooma service, community service, when they called in for emergency work. Anyhow they came and asked me if I'd go out because I had the snow cruiser. So I went out and we went right up over the tops and we had an aeroplane above us showing us the terrain, and a wireless between, so we could find out what was going on here and there. Anyhow we nosed around, after everybody else was missed - they were taking horses and everything out looking for them and couldn't get them. Anyhow we got on top of the ridges and I could see all these fox tracks, all merging into one spot. The radio announcer in Cooma, he was with me, the two of us, and I said to him 'Now these foxes, normally they wander everywhere, all these foxes are heading into one little place. If you're going to find people, they've been out for a fortnight, they're down there.' So we came back

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onto the ridge, travelled along the ridge, and we coo-eed and coo-eed and coo-eed and then we got a faint coo-ee down below. Then we had to find our way down, so the plane circling overhead - the plane couldn't see them because the snow covered the whole road in, they were in under all these trees.

KH: So they were still alive?

JA: Yes, only just though.

KH: Whereabouts was this?

JA: Up out of Thredbo, on that wall.

KH: Down Leather Barrel Creek?

JA: Oh no, that's that way. We were on the left hand side.

KH: On the Thredbo side.

JA: On the left of Thredbo.

KH: Near Dead Horse Gap.

JA: On the Cascades.

KH: Oh the Cascades country.

JA: Yeah. They come up by Landrover and they got across a creek and broke an axle. They broke an axle on this heavy wooded area, they couldn't be seen by air.

KH: So it was when Thredbo was already there. So it was after 1957.

JA: Yes, this is later years I'm talking about now.

KH: ^{Creek} So they must have broken an axle on the crossing of Leather Barrel ^{or} something.

JA: That's correct, they did. They got a little bit further into the timber and they couldn't be seen. The heavy snow came and snowed them in, they couldn't walk out because the snow was too heavy. So they survived there for about 14 days, barely survived. When we finished up getting down on to them, the diabetic was on his last legs and the girl was a bit panicky. I left the chap there and I took those two out, got them on the ambulance, came back in and I took the last chap out with the radio announcer, that's how we saved them. But that was the time that I had planned for this Kiandra trip. The Kiandra trip then delayed me by about a week or a fortnight. So I went across to Kiandra and there was snow everywhere, I got my cruiser out of there.

KH: You mean you went round by road.

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JA: By car. We towed the machine to Kiandra and after a few beers and a bit of a wild farewell we left there and followed the ridge ^(?) up along Tolbar and then from Tolbar went across to Rutledges hut, in ^{No} the back country. Then from there I came back up and got caught in - I was going by trig spots. I met a chap on the track, he had a team of school kids with him.

KH: This was 1957 or '58.

JA: Something like that. I got into Tolbar ^(Creek) River, Tolbar Gorge, and I was bogged, bamboozled and bushed. After getting across there I got out, climbed my way back up onto the tops and then got into the Rolling Plains, down to Mawsons hut.

KH: You started at Kiandra and you went up round Tabletop and then you would have headed for Happy Jacks Plain, round the top of Happy Jacks Plain?

JA: I went to the right. From there I went to take Jargungal straight line.

KH: You wanted to take Jargungal straight ^{from} Tabletop.

JA: Yes.

KH: You would have gone into Temperance Creek.

JA: I got into a deep creek there.

KH: And then you go into the Happy Jacks, the Happy Jacks River.

JA: No, before the Happy Jacks, I was just on the top side of the Happy Jacks. There's a hut in there.

KH: There's Brookes and there's Happy's hut. There's Broken Dam hut this side of Tabletop. Bolton's Hut on Bolton's Hill. There's Brookes, Happys, and then on the other side there's Boobe's and Mackay's.

JA: Bogong hut?

KH: No.

JA: It will come to me as we're talking. I got into there, then I got down into that deep Bogong gorge. I got out of there, I climbed the tops again and I got onto the - the Rollings or the Kerrys - what's the big open...behind the Brassey?

KH: Behind the big Brassey you start to go on to Gungahen and the Kerrys, after Mawsons.

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JA: Then I went through the Kerrys down to Mawsons hut, on that long drift plain. I had the thing going flat out. I was going flat out and travelling flat out. I must have been doing a hell of a speed and I thought I was standing still. The area was so vast and so big that I was getting no-where.

KH: That was on the Valentine I think, the basin of the Valentine.

JA: I went down there flat out and I didn't think I was moving. I was trying to stretch the throttle cable and giving it a kick along and readjusting it and then suddenly hit a bump - I was moving alright. But I got into Whites River, I got into Mawson's hut and then with no trouble I got into White River - I had petrol there. I refuelled up, checked in by wireless to Cooma radio, because they did nearly all the wireless repair for me, transmitters. I checked in there and then headed out. I got up over the Rolling Grounds, but I couldn't climb Tate, Tate was too sharp, the ridge, couldn't climb Tate. So in desperation I followed Johnnie's Ridge down.

KH: Off Tate?

JA: Yeah, as you come down to Johnnie's Ridge. You had Tate that side, the big gorge, and then there's a ridge that comes down onto the dam, so I took that. There was a big cornice there, about 20 foot cornice, drop. I didn't know what in the hell to do. In desperation I rode her straight over, straight down. I dropped about 10-12 feet...

KH: Holly Jesus!

JA:before I hit the ground, hit the snow. What else could you do, you're out there, you're cornered, you're stuck, you had to go either over the cornice to get into good snow and good travelling. Well I was desperate, you just had to go. I couldn't stay there and sit.

KH: The Guthega dam was already there.

JA: I went down to Guthega, I met the boys there.

KH: You went onto the Guthega dam wall, you went across the dam wall.

JA: Yes.

KH: Oh I'm with you, you must have back-tracked, back to Consett Stevens pass.

JA: No.

KH: You tried to go up Tate...

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JA: Yeah I came back off Tate, through Consett Stephen Pass and Johnnie's Ridge goes ...

KH: That's right, it's now called Guthega Trig ridge or something, it's off the Rolling Grounds. So you came back across Consett Stephens and down yeah, I've skied down there.

JA: Yes. Then I climbed my way up to the Blue Cow, when that first cow pastures run was there. I got up past that onto the top and I came back down into the "Man from Snowy River." I called in there to tell I'm right. He said 'What are you doing now?' I said 'I'm going to Thredbo'. He said 'You're mad'. I said 'You've got to, to do what I'm doing.' So I took off to Thredbo, but I knew all the tops, because I've been travelling on the tops for so long now. It was an easy trip to Thredbo, but I had to go from the top down to the bottom, and I couldn't brake. As soon as I braked this thing turned into a *joboggan* and got out of control. So I turned the machine around and when I got onto the steep parts I went down slowly and as I started to get out of control I used to rev the engine up and that used to drive the track forward and ease me down. That's how I got down Thredbo.

KH: You went down backwards?

JA: The steep parts, backwards, eight hours from Kiandra.

KH: That's amazing.

JA: If anybody can do it under eight hours, I'll go back and do it in five, I know the track now.

KH: Well Robbie Kilpin_en has done it in 8 hours 10 minutes, on skis and there are other guys who have run it now in 8½, no one has done it in better than 8, not so far.

JA: I done it on a machine and including that I was waylaid, bogged, bushed and everything.

KH: But you had a good day?

JA: Oh yeah. But if I had to do it again, I reckon I could do it in five.

KH: I think you could.

JA: Because I know the track now. The first time I didn't know, I always travel by trig points and that's what put me out, it put me into rough country. I know the track to take now, in future. But I'll never do it again, and it's never been done since.

KH: You wouldn't be allowed now I don't think, not legally anyway. You might get away with it.

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- JA: Oh you'd easy get away with it, go up during the week when no one's around. You could do it, in, out, flat, gone, on your trailer before they even knew where you were.
- KH: I suppose you could do it in a skidoo now.
- JA: That's what I did it in, a skidoo, a landcruiser.
- KH: A vehicle, four tracks.
- JA: Only two tracks, no, one track and a set of skis on the front.
- KH: Oh you did it in a skidoo.
- JA: You call it a skidoo, we call it a landcruiser, that was when they first came out.
- KH: Two skis on the front, a little bit of a seat, and a track at the back.
- JA: Yeah.
- KH: A little one.
- JA: Yeah, I did it in that. And I done so much work with it - they all laughed at them when I first brought them in, but when I did these runs and got the publicity, then the Park started to buy one, and the PMG bought one and the police bought one, and they started selling them then. Alan Limbrick came into it then, so I said 'Right-o Alan, it's all yours'. I was first in, sold the most, got the profit, got out, and that's how to make money.
- KH: You sold them too did you?
- JA: Yes I sold a lot.
- KH: You imported them.
- JA: No, Outboard Marine brought them in. They made me an agent.
- KH: When was that trip, can you try and pinpoint when that trip was?
- JA: 18 August 1966.
- KH: That was about the time you rescued those three people?
- JA: That's the Victorian award.
- KH: That was also on that skidoo, that small vehicle.
- JA: Yes, that was the first rescue ever done and I put it on the map. They had it on TV and everything and when they saw that everybody else wanted one. But I had to prove it and this proved it,

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- that it can be done. That was when the whole force of the rescue squads were working a ⁺fortnight and couldn't do a thing. Then they called me in and with the skidoo I went up and found them.
- KH: That trip from Kiandra was a week after?
- JA: Yes. Victoria was running the citizen of the week thing on their radios. I got the citizen of the week on that one.
- [Looking at photos]. There's old Kiandra days, I think Ken Breakspear was in that. This is the Balmain Cup, when it was a good cup, not like it is now. Who's that, it would be young Ken Breakspear would it - it is. Tim Ingram.
- KH: Oh Tim Ingram, he was in the ACT squad, he was from Canberra wasn't he.
- JA: Yes, he's in that. There's a lot of Canberra boys in the club there, in those days, it was a ski school then.
- KH: I might have a look at those later on if I could.
- 1966, and that's the only time it's been done, right across, Kiandra through to Thredbo. You only had the one fuelling stop at Whites River.
- JA: Yes, and we checked in on radio all the way through.
- KH: You had a radio with you?
- JA: Yes, a little portable radio, and they were listening in Cooma for me, so if I had any trouble at all they could have whipped me out pretty quick.
- KH: No one was interested in doing it again?
- JA: I've got no idea, this is when I left. Because I used to wander, for three years I wandered the tops of the mountains, for three years I did nothing else but go up to the tops. I was a common visitor to Thredbo, the top chairlift, when the chairlift used to go right across the mountain. They knew me all the time there. I took the electrician breakdown crews out there to repair the power lines.
- KH: I'm trying to follow it as much as possible. We've got the year '48, '49, '50.
- JA: No you haven't got that yet.
- KH: You installed the radios at Whites River and worked for the Park.
- JA: Okay, then, from there, Mawson's, Sir Douglas Mawson came up and picked me then for the Antarctic. That was the period that I went to the Antarctic for about 18 months.
- KH: That was about 1950 was it?

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JA: '47, '48, '49, I came home, in that period. Then when I came home I got a job with the Water Conservation in Sydney, I did the Sydney water supply. They taught me hydrography and everything. I did the Sydney water supply for about 6 months, kept loading out the water, how much they were using, how much storage, how long they can go for. And then, they got the urgent message that the Snowy was being talked about in Parliament, State Parliament, and they wanted the rivers measured up here. They said 'Right-o Johnny, you've had snow experience up you go.' So then I travelled here for nearly two years with Water Conservation, measuring all the streams.

KH: Soon after the SMA started? They started in '49

JA: Before the SMA started, they weren't operating. I took the army survey unit from the ^{Cree!} - I'm getting ahead of myself again. I did all the water anyway for the whole area of the Snowy scheme. We gauged the Snowy, Eucumbene, to Thredbo, and from that we drew water levels, proposed water levels in the dams. With that water flow, I was with the Water Conservation - a period of which I was with - then the Snowy came in that '49 period and I transferred from there to the Snowy. Then I handed over the hydrology that I was doing to Danny Colman, who was still with the Water Conservation - they were still doing that part of the section. I went up ^{north} to Spencers Creek, Sugarloaf, and I put the weather station in up there, and I was a works foreman then in that work at Spencers Creek. I found out that being a works foreman I could go no further, so I decided then to give it away. Then I went down and built my first ski tow at Smiggins.

KH: That was in 1951?

JA: Could be, round that period. We lived in tin huts down there, shepherds huts, ^{at Smiggins.}

KH: What were they called, those shepherds huts, did they have a name?

JA: We had the Black ~~Hut~~, that was the old Black ~~Hut~~ that belonged to the Tourist Bureau. The two huts up top were Reids, Reids built them, they were shepherds huts. I got in touch with them and they said I could ^{live} in them.

End Side 2

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Tape 2, Side 1

JA: But George Day built the first ski tow, at the Chalet, that was a government one. I built the first private commercial tow, at Smiggins, ^{that's the difference} They don't give George the credit for building that one up there.

KH: He actually built that, he took the initiative?

JA: Yes, he had it going, he did all the work. Having to put up with architects and designers and engineers, he did the actual building, he built it twice.

KH: So he was able to charge people?

JA: No, the government. He was working with the government at the time, he was there as a manager. He actually was employed and he built the first ski tow, on the government. I built the first ski tow on the commercial side. So a lot of them take the thunder away from George Day, I don't think it was explained properly, it is not as believed.

KH: Did you live at Smiggins Hole with your wife, and children?

JA: Oh yes, they were all born there.

KH: How long were you there?

JA: It must have been four or five years. I had the transport then. I built that tow, my tow, then Kaaten came into it, and I built the north Perisher tow - that was a rope tow then. I also had a little tow built, a portable tow, just near the snow ^{Revelers} up past ^{Telemark} in that gully there. That's where I had my portable tow.

KH: There's a t-bar in there now I think.

JA: But when that portable tow was there I was taking a lot of customers away from Kaaten on his tow. A bit of a row kicked up, Kaaten got around somebody, and got the excuse I was polluting his water supply which was a little dam which we were skiing over, and I got kicked out of there. I got kicked out of Perisher with my little tow. But instead of taking the tow out, Ken Murray bought that tow, and shifted it around near the ski school going up towards the Sundeck, that's where that tow went. I never had to move it away from Perisher, it stayed at Perisher, but Ken Murray took it over instead. Then I came back to Smiggins and after getting kicked out of Perisher, I got a bit cranky with everything, and the Parks and Ainsworth were getting a bit tough on me. I said 'Keep it', so I moved out to the ^{Cree!}

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- KH: So you were there from about 1953 to about 1958.
- JA: Something like that I'm not too sure. That's how we started ^{at} the ~~Creel~~.
- KH: On the Old Summit Road.
- JA: Yes. After that - I used to be in all the search and rescues before then. We used to run it individually. I used to go up with my snow cruiser, all ^ground the place on search and rescue.
- KH: Wasn't a fellow called Davidson in the search and rescue?
- JA: He was in search and rescue as I am - you're getting into skulduggery now. But he was always the main man, the main talker, of what he'd done and what he didn't do. We were the workers, we were out on the search and rescue. He used to come in on the easy jobs.
- KH: It's just been that he's been depicted on photographs that I've seen, at the radio station.
- JA: He plays up to publicity, he likes publicity. He got the publicity on all this sort of stuff, it was us in the field that did all the dirty search and rescue.
- KH: Do you remember any of those search and rescues, do you remember any specifically?
- JA: There's too many to talk about. One of them, when I was ranging with the wireless search, one of the girls, Nancy Edwards, she did her knee in at Whites River, so we made her a cook for a week and her knee didn't get any better. I half skied and half carried her back into the Chalet, that's how we got her back. She was only on one ski and I was on mine, and we used to lock together. We'd go down a hill and I used to snow plough, take her down slowly. Going up hill I'd put her on my shoulders, carried her up, put her down and carried her back. That was a 10 mile hike.
- KH: Where did you get her from?
- JA: From Whites River hut. Just under the Summit one of the doctors put a stock through his leg, clean through. We couldn't pull it out, it was too tight in, so we had to bring him in, stock and all, on the dog sled. I happened to be up there - George Day was in that - we got him in. They are too numerous to mention.
- KH: That was on a dog team?
- JA: Yes.
- KH: When did you start to get involved with the dog teams?
- JA: At Smiggins. I never touched the Chalet dogs.

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- KH: So you had your own dog team?
- JA: Yes, with this chap we were talking about, Ray Adams. he set me up with my dog team. They were the dog team [looking at photos] - when I was at the Sugarloaf, the Snowy set me up with a team of dogs and I used to supply the camp ^{from} Sugarloaf down to Smiggins, I used to bring all their food through and every like that, and take their mail out, as well as a weather job up on top of the hill.
- KH: There weren't any skidoos then?
- JA: No, that was the first of the snow cat coming in. We were still using tractors then, D4s and Caterpillars, and they were slow moving machines. But I could hop down there with a dog team and come back within the hour.
- KH: From Smiggins to the Chalet?
- JA: No Sugarloaf.
- KH: From the Sugarloaf to the Chalet?
- JA: I was with the Chalet. No I wasn't in the Chalet, I was at Sugarloaf. The provisions were in the camp at Smiggins, so I used to nick down to Smiggins, pick up the tucker, bring it back up to Sugarloaf. We were feeding over a hundred men in those days, 120 men.
- KH: Really, in the winter?
- JA: Coming on winter. Then we closed it down to about 50 men during the winter. We tried to put a tunnel through Sugarloaf.
- KH: You tried to!
- JA: Yeah, we drove a tunnel into Sugarloaf to see if we could strike a good rock bottom for a dam. But the further we drove in, it was only a *moraine*, known as David's *moraine*. It was only a conglomerate of rocks and mud and stone and the further we drove the more water and mud and ooze was coming through. So we got in about 150 feet and had to pull out.
- KH: Where's the spoils from that tunnel?
- JA: It's all been dozed in, covered up. But you'll find it going up - as you leave Spencers Creek, driving up towards where Adams hut used to be, about half way up there used to be a quarry - these are old roads, the new ones cut all that out - but half way up there we had a tunnel in under the hill.
- KH: Near Betts Camp, near where Betts Camp was?

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JA: Oh no, this is Spencers Creek, Spencers Creek itself. From Spencers Creek to Adams hut, ^{his hut} half way along there, where that moraine came down, we put a drive in there.

KH: But Betts Camp is not far away from that is it?

JA: Betts Camp is over the ridge, about 2 mile back.

KH: I'm a bit lost here.

JA: Where that road goes right round a big bend. As it goes ^{round} the bend, Betts Camp was in there. The septic tank is still there. They gave everything away and left the septic tank, it's still there. But that got pushed over in heavy snow. The drift came over and we were tunnelling in - we used to climb onto a table, onto another chair, out through the top window and a 10 foot tunnel out.

KH: Out of Betts Camp?

JA: Yes, that's how we got out of there. From Betts Camp back door to the woodshed, we had another tunnel to get the wood out of the wood shed, to keep the place going. But during that year, the building, as the snow moved, it pushed the building over about 6 inches out of level. George Day got to work with a couple of telephone poles and he straightened the building up again with his tractor. But the foundations were showing cracks, and of course, the Park not being happy with that, and ^{their} policy is to wipe ^{outs} everything out of the mountains, so Betts Camp went. Betts Camp used to be a staging camp, that's how that got there.

KH: It was used before the Chalet was built too, wasn't it. Before the Chalet was there, Betts Camp was there for quite a while and did early trips to the Summit and so on, from Betts Camp.

JA: Yes, that was the stage - horses used to go to there, and new horses taken to the Summit, and back. That was used as a staging camp.

KH: Do you remember a man called Ted Winter?

JA: Yes, I know him well. I've done a lot of travelling with him up top.

KH: He was involved in something after the war, looking for new hut sites, or something like that.

JA: I couldn't say, I don't know. I know he used to ski a fair bit ^{around} Betts Camp, he used to stay at Betts Camp, and Alpine hut, and travel between Alpine - Chalet - Betts.

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KH: He has a poem where he talks about Betts Camp and how it was shifted over by big snows. Was there a Mr and Mrs Corbett or something?

JA: Yes, a married couple. They were scared stiff, they thought the building was going.

KH: Ted talks about a time when there was a very bad blizzard and there were people all over the road, on the way into Betts Camp. Were you up there then?

JA: Yeah, well I was in that area, it probably would be one of the days when the tractor, coming over Micks rock - as you leave ^{Guthrie} a concrete ridge coming down into Guthrie Creek....

KH: The first one after Perisher Gap.

JA: Yeah, well just past that the road come around and there was a dirty big rock right at the road level, and on that rock we used to get a hell of a snow drift. Anyhow the tractor went down there and nearly tipped over and broke down. Everyone had to get out and walk into Betts Camp.

KH: Oh that might be the time.

JA: Then we used to have 'Filthy Fife' and 'Sloppy Joe'. Sloppy Joe was the cook at Smiggins - he used to run Smiggins café there, and Filthy Fife used to run Betts. Now if you want more about that ask George Day because George gave them those names. You ask him does he know Sloppy Joe and Filthy Fife. ^{and I bet he'll sit back and laugh} Sloppy Joe - well that was him ^{and come in "What will you have?"} Filthy Fife ^{was} never a cook, but he used to keep this big

pot of stew and soup on the stove. Every time it got down a little bit, he kept on adding a bit more to it, but he forgot that the old stuff was going bad, but he kept on topping it up. Everyone who went to the Chalet for about 3 or 4 weeks, all had dysentery. They traced it down to this stockpot at Betts Camp - that's why he got the name Filthy Fife. For quite a long while, anyone who had had soup at Betts, all finished up with dysentery at the Chalet.

KH: It could have been much worse than dysentery.

JA: Yes. That was the year after Corbetts, we were at Betts Camp. There's many a funny story you can tell there.

KH: Go on.

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JA: It's just too much, all sorts of funny things happened there. But it was a very good communal living. The cook, not only did they cook, but we were in there washing up and cleaning up, it was all just one big family, at Betts Camp.

KH: Ted Winter certainly has good memories of Betts Camp, in fact a lot of people do. It seems to stand out in their memories much more than the Chalet.

JA: Well the Chalet being the commercial - you had a kitchen, you had chef, and you had a manager, housemaids, and waitresses. At Betts, women's dormitory at one end and men's dormitory at the other, and the Corbetts lived between the two, the women and the men.

KH: You had to ^{muck} in together to make the thing work.

JA: Yeah. All the men, they had to get the wood in and do their certain chores, and the rubbish had to be taken out. And the smokey old boiler for the showers, there was more smoke than heat that ever came out of that one. When you tried to get the boiler alight, you used to fumigate the whole place with smoke, before we had a hot shower. Everyone had to have a hot shower, one after the other, and then the boiler went out again. Then it used to freeze up and stay off for a week before we could get it alight again. They were good hard days.

KH: I suppose it was half way between a stockman's hut and the Chalet.

JA: I put a stockman's hut in, but I wouldn't call it halfway to the Chalet. I'd call it halfway to another stockman's hut.

KH: Whites River was pretty good in those days wasn't it?

JA: Whites was very good, but the only trouble with Whites, until I took over ranging and I used to travel in and out, quite often I took a party in from the Chalet, because we had the wireless, we could say, 'Are you leaving today or tomorrow'. 'Yeah'. 'Good, I'm bringing a party in and I'll go on to Alpine' or bring the party back out. We organised it then and we cut out overcrowding, because sometimes two parties arrive^d and you're overcrowded.

KH: Yes, with the wireless you could avoid that.

JA: Yes, we straightened it all up and got things moving properly. When they knew I was skiing backwards and forwards, especially that year of the blizzard that we couldn't see our way, I used

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to come over there by compass only. A fence used to be up on the top, we used to follow the fence until we came to a certain rock and then we knew we could

KH: This is across the Rolling Grounds. You'd go from the Chalet across would you?

JA: Yes.

KH: Past Pounds Creek?

JA: Sometimes Pounds Creek. Spencers was the best one to go down.

KH: Pounds Creek hut I mean.

JA: Yes Pounds Creek, sometimes we used to go Pounds Creek^{Hut} but we found the easiest way was to ski down Spencers, right to the crossing, and then all we had to do then was go straight up the valley, keep to the left hand side towards Abbots Peaks on to Mt Tate. But if you come the other way you go over Charlottes Pass and coming down, you get blown with high winds all the way! ^{through Pounds Creek} When you get over the pass towards the Snowy, then you'd have to walk until you passed Spencers Creek to Pounds before you cross^{ed} to go up. The other way you've got an easy ski down to Sugarloaf, an easy ski down Spencers, cross over and then ski down into Pounds Creek, you've got downhill nearly all the way. But the other way you've got a fast downhill, ^{that was the track we used to take} We used to come out by Pounds Creek, because as we came over Tate, keep high, keep very high, and you come in above the junction of the Snowy and the other river - Twynam.

KH: When I meant Pounds Creek, I meant the hut.

JA: Yeah I know. But coming back we used to bypass Pounds Creek, we used to keep very high, on Tate, Abbots, and then come in high on the Snowy and then we nearly come in level to Charlottes Pass. Instead of that big climb up - and that climb up was always wind swept and rocky - we used to miss that, we used to go round nearly under the drifts all the way through, and we used to go up where that little cliff is above the Snowy, above Charlottes Pass, you look down and see a bit of a cliff and two creeks.

KH: Coming off Twynam?

JA: Coming off Clarke, that's Mt Clarke there.

KH: Oh that far round!

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JA: We used to come in round there. Well it was all downhill going, it was easy going. Contour ^{around} and then come up to - an easy climb on to Charlottes Pass and then down to Chalet. But that's ten times easier than...

KH: That's called Mawsons Cirque or something isn't it, that cliff?

JA: They've changed the names that many times. Since the Park's been in there, all our names ^{from} the ^{shepherds} they've been altered and changed around. A lot of names have been wiped and they've put their own names ^{on.}

KH: ^{The Snowy did that} They did do a lot of that didn't they.

JA: If there was two names on a river like Crackenback and Thredbo, they used to always cross out the back name and call it Crackenback. There's no Thredbo river, there's only Little Thredbo. Well to us, the Little Thredbo and the Crackenback joined at Bullocks hut and became the Thredbo River down to the Snowy.

KH: What was it?

JA: The Little Thredbo and the Crackenback from Thredbo Village, they joined at Bullocks hut and then they went on, and we knew it as Thredbo then, down to where it joined the Snowy. ^{That's how we know it} Then they altered it then, cut out Thredbo, it's Crackenback right up. And Thredbo Village should actually be called Crackenback Village, but they took the name of Thredbo at the time, so Thredbo Village it became.

KH: And further up it's the Big Boggy, so it actually has three names, the Big Boggy, then the Crackenback and then ^{the} Thredbo. Crackenback I understand, derives from 'climbing the hill could crack your back' or the other one that Ken Breakspear told me was that if you took a mob of cattle up there, you had to crack the whip across their backs to get them up there. ^{That's the 2 names I know of.}

JA: I'd say both are fairy tales. They made a fairy tale out of Crackenback itself. How it got it's name I don't know. But we used to round up brumbies in there and bring them up the spur into Trapyard. That's how Trapyard got its name. We brought the horses up and got them up into Trapyard, that was the first, and then George Day built a stockyard. After that he brought them up into the stockyard. When he got them there he put a rodeo on to break the horses in, so we had the rodeo.

KH: Yes he told me about that I think, and he's got some photos.

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JA: There's some good photos of those days. I haven't got photos of them.

KH: He's got a big album, a leather bound one, and partly my reason for going there is to photograph some of his stuff.

JA: I wasn't even rich enough to own a camera, let alone take photos. He had a lot of people taking them for him. Elyne Mitchell was a great photographer. Ken and myself carried her cameras all over the tops of the mountains for her.

KH: What sort of camera, do you remember?

JA: She had every type of camera - she had about 20 too many, she had all sorts of cameras.

KH: You know Tom Mitchell died.

JA: Yes I got word through about Tom. But Elyne's been carrying on, we got her to write a script up here for our 100 years education of the school, she's going to write the foreword for the book.

KH: Yes, she's been around the mountains for a long time. Have you got a copy of her book 'Australia's Alps'?

JA: I don't think so, ^{but we carried her cameras, Ken and myself}

KH: Did you ever have a go at the Eagle run?

JA: The Golden Eagle.

KH: Wasn't that off Mt Clarke or up there somewhere, or off Northcote?

JA: Northcote - there used to be a ski tow there - well it was beside the ski tow.

KH: That was the flying eagle?

JA: Yes, beside the ski tow, from the top of that pass up there, straight down to where the ski tow hut was and then the Kunama hut.

KH: Apparently they did 90 miles an hour down there?

JA: In those days they'd be lucky to get to 60, because they weren't on any built up skis, they weren't on any built snow, there was no such thing as streamlining or straightening out, and it was just a straight downhill run. But, they've called the flying eagle, golden eagle, because it was a measured distance, of an average 60 miles an hour.

KH: You got your golden eagle if you did it at 60 miles an hour?

JA: Yes, from the top to the bottom, and that was a measured distance in a measured time.

KH: Did you get one of those?

JA: No.

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KH: Did Ken Breakspear?
 JA: Being mountain men we never went for badges and we never went for this and that.
 KH: You never raced?
 JA: Well in the finish I raced, but you never worried about those things. If we did the flying eagle once, we did it 10, 15 times. But for a tourist to come up, to get off a city desk, come up and put a pair of skis on for a fortnight, go out there and do the flying eagle, that was something big for them, but to us, it was skiing the mountains all the time and doing those sort of runs, we just took them in a day's work, it was nothing. Ken carried 120lb of meat once on his back - we were short of meat at Alpine Hut, we'd run out of everything, so this chap, Constance, brought half a bullock up and tied it to a tree. The wireless came through that the bullock was there on the tree, go and get it. We went down there and had a look, there was three of us, Dicky Curran, myself and Ken. We went down with packs and had a look at it, and we thought we'd never carry that. Ken said 'Alright, cut all the meat off and we'll carry it in as solid meat, we'll leave the bones', so away we went. We cut all the meat off, and when we got home, Ken had 120lb pack on, I had about 80lb pack on and Dicky had about a 70lb pack on.
 KH: The heaviest pack I've ever carried is about 65lbs, a 120lb, that seems incredible.
 JA: We had to lift it on his back, but he carried it all the way in.
 KH: He's been a very fit man, he still is. How long did you carry that meat for, how long would it have been?
 JA: From Snowy Plain to Alpine, about 6 miles in, climbing all the way.
 KH: From near the old Naphthali s homestead?
 JA: Just past that there's Teddy's Creek. That's where the beef was hanging, from Teddy's Creek to Alpine.
 KH: Over Little Brassey Gap?
 JA: Yes, past Kidmans and on until we got to MacDonalds Diggings and then as we hit the top of there we went round level in.
 KH: That's quite a slog.
 JA: With a pack on and a pair of skis.
 KH: That is incredible, 120lb pack of meat. One story I heard, I think Fred Fletcher - I interviewed Fred Fletcher...

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JA: Get any stories out of him, about his dough and his breadmaking.
 KH: No, I think he was a bit nervous when I interviewed him, it was a long time ago, and I interviewed his brother, Maurice, who was a cook at Alpine for a while.
 JA: Fred was the cook and Maurice used to come up as an offsider.
 KH: Oh, right. I think Fred told me a story of one winter, or early in the season, they wanted to get some meat up to Alpine and they thought the best way was to actually drive the bullocks they were going to slaughter up to Alpine, slaughter them there and then have the meat there, so the meat had carried itself in. But apparently, the story that I have, is that the snows came early and they could only get within a certain distance of Alpine hut. So they decided they can't get them in any further, they didn't want to drive them back out again, so they slaughtered them there and then and hung them from the nearest trees and left the meat there hanging. People from the Alpine would then go back and get meat whenever they required it.
 JA: That would probably be the time when we went down to get meat, at Teddys Creek, that would tie in there. I don't remember what happened before it. I got there just in time, as Ken was going down for the meat, and I went too.
 KH: Did he slaughter that bullock there, where the meat was hanging?
 JA: I don't know.
 KH: There was ^a whole animal hanging from a tree?
 JA: Yes that's right.
 KH: That sounds like the story.
 JA: And that's how the final meat came into
 KH: And all that was left after a while was this backbone and a few ribs.
 JA: That's right, we cut all the meat off we could and put solid meat into our packs. Of course the meat, solid, kept on going, oh gees it used to cut in round here.
 KH: But other people might have done more trips to get more meat?
 JA: Well I imagine the people staying in there would have a day out and go down and get 20lb - 30lb each and bring it in. When we went down, I'd just landed in on one of my patrol runs, when Ken said

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he was going down to get some meat in and did I want to give him a hand, so I went down ^{that's how we got it in} I used to carry a - I never repaired my wireless sets, I didn't know anything about transmitters. These were the ^{old} 109 army transmitters. I was taught to look behind to see if the ^{globes} were working, and any that wasn't working I used to pull them out and put a new one in, but I couldn't do any more than that because I didn't know. So if a transmitter wasn't working, I'd bring a new transmitter in, pull the old one out, put the new one in, and then take the old one to Cooma. The radio men at Cooma radio station used to repair it and I used to bring that back and I had a spare. That's how I used to keep these transmitters going, because I know nothing about wireless sets.

KH: That was a good job wasn't it, you did that for 3 years?

JA: Two years, before I left then for the Antarctic. They were 45lb each, the transmitters.

KH: And you carried those in your ruck sack.

JA: Yes, I'd take that plus my tucker for a week out.

KH: The sleeping bags would always be at the hut, or you'd carry that too?

JA: I'd take my own bag, yes.

KH: I heard that they had some really super duper sleeping bags at Whites River, kept in a special locker or something?

JA: Yes, until the rats got into them. We had a tin food ^{cupboard} made up, completely lined in tin, and all the food used to go in that, to stop the ^{Main Range} rats getting into it. That was good. Then, in the back room I think they had some tin enclosed under the bunk and all the blankets and all the sleeping bags, belonging to different people, used to go in there. Then one party didn't close them up properly and then the rats got in, ^{When people got up in the morning they looked like abominable snowmen} and they went right through everything. [^] But that's what happened, they were known as Catalina sleeping bags, they're the ones the Catalina crews used during the war, very thick, very heavy sleeping bags.

KH: Were they tried out in the Antarctic?

JA: Yes, we took them in the Antarctic. We used to go out with about 110lb pack, when we used to first go into the field and coming back, after eating all the food, burning all the fuel, we still had 110lb when we came back in.

KH: How much did these sleeping bags weigh?

JA: I couldn't tell you that.

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KH: They were down weren't they?

JA: Yes, good sleeping bags, fairly light.

KH: Well what was in your pack that was so heavy?

JA: Condensation and water, 10lb of water, in our clothing, in your tent and in the sleeping bags. When we weighed them again, we thought we'd be a lot lighter now, we were still the same weight.

KH: Was that on your back, that 120lb?

JA: Some on the back and sometimes we pulled it in a sledge. A sledge is alright along tracks, but when you've got to go up a hill, put whatever you can on your back and pull a light sledge up over the moraines, onto the glacier and then put everything back on the sledge and go again. But it was easier to carry than drag. We worked on the theory that you can carry more if you load yourself up with a pack first and have a light sledge behind, that you can climb hills. But if you had the heavy sledge, it was a slog, a heavy hard pull. There were three of us, three ropes onto the sledge, the sledge went up behind - it wasn't easy going just the same, but with a heavy pack we found, with each of us carrying a load, it was a lot easier than trying to drag the lot on the sledge. ^{Once you got on to the top it was easy.}

KH: One of the worse things about a heavy pack, it seems to compress your rib cage and you can't get enough air into your lungs.

JA: One of those pack racks, not one that wraps around you, one that sits on your back.

KH: The old 'H' frame style.

JA: Yes, a wooden frame and just tie everything on to it, that's what we used. We found the Paddy Pallin pack would come round in a harness round here, it used to close in on you. This used to pull you apart until you got a strap and pulled the two straps together. ^{Yukon pack they called it.}

KH: The army had packs like that didn't they?

JA: I don't know what the army had. We never used packs in the Ski Corps except the old canvas one, that was only a canvas bag. The others were unheard of in those days, those ruck sacks, until Paddy Pallin came into the show, and he started making frames for packs. After the war the frame packs used to come in then, but we never saw frame packs during the war.

KH: I thought Paddy started making A-frames very early, even before the war.

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JA: That's right, but in the army, you're in the Middle East, and Paddy's over here in Australia, and you suddenly want a pack to go somewhere, and Paddy Pallin wasn't well known in those days. Not only that the army had all the ^Knap sacks and all the webbing, and the webbing tied into ammunition belts, the whole things was just like a harness ^{big}

----- (food break.)

We had this cook at Alpine hut that couldn't ski. It was time to close the hut down and no one was left, all the skiers had gone, and we were going. We said 'Now we've got to get you down the hill'.

KH: Which Fletcher was this?

JA: This was Fred. We said 'Well the only way we're going to get you down, knock the ends off a packing case, we'll nail them to your boots and you can use them for snow shoes'. So we nailed these ends of the packing case onto his boots and he got out and he started walking, using them for snow shoes, and that's how we got him out of Alpine hut.

KH: That's what you could have used I suppose, to get out of Whites River.

JA: I never thought of that, I reckoned I could walk, but coming over the Rolling Grounds, when the snow got deep and powdery with a crust on top, that's when I started sinking.

KH: So you walked over the Rolling Grounds, across ^{Consett} Stevens, round Tate and out to the Snowy.

JA: Yes.

KH: How deep was the snow?

JA: About a foot deep. There was about $\frac{1}{2}$ an inch to an inch ^{of} crust on top.

KH: That would have been in May?

JA: Early May, we had an early fall.

KH: That was about the time they had to have the stock down wasn't it?

JA: The stock was all gone, they all go in March/April. They put the salt licks out in Trapyard and the camp grounds, and they had names, and they used to come up about 2 or 3 weeks before and put salt licks. All the cattle and sheep come into these salt licks, they just round them up and take them off, you haven't got to muster all over the range looking for them.

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KH: How long did it take you to walk from Whites River to Spencers Creek?

JA: I don't know, the best part of a day I suppose.

KH: George Day told me an incredible story about how his hair turned white one day. I can't remember the details, I thought he fell off a cornice or something.

JA: I know his face turned white, by Jesus. We were on a tractor and sled, you know the old dog box you used to tow behind a tractor. We were in trouble and we were pushing and digging and that, and this time we didn't want to go in the dog box because that was all crowded with guests, so we decided to stand on the yoke, just behind the tractor. We were standing there and George slipped and his leg went down underneath ^{the} sled, it looked as if he was going to get drawn right under. He had the sense to grab something and got up again, when he stood up his face was as white as that. That was very close.

KH: There was some dramatic time when his hair went white, I thought it was something to do with a cornice up near Townsend.

JA: Golby's drift. This doctor I told you that came out with a stock in his leg, they got him out with a dog team. That's the drift under the summit of Kosi, and we always called it Golby's drift, after this doctor. What they call it today I couldn't say. I wouldn't mind betting that was one of the cornices he went over and got stuck. I went over with my transmitter on my back, with Ken Breakspear. We were off down the Rolling Ground, just over ^{Consett} Stevens Pass, heading down towards the Rolling Grounds.

KH: Across to Tate?

JA: No we were heading down towards Alpine hut.

KH: Down to Schlink Pass?

JA: We were over Schlink Pass, the Kerrys, big long runs. We were going down and we were getting a bit of speed up. Anyhow I went over the cornice, head over turkey, and I finished up with the transmitter on my back in the ground, my legs up in the air and my hands knocking the snow away so I could breath, till Ken come along. After he had a good laugh at me and he saw it was serious, he whipped his skis off and pulled me out. But I couldn't get out, I couldn't even get out of the harness on my ruck sack, I was stuck in there. But I'll never forget that, that was Ken, Ken did that, *pulled me out.*

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KH: I've had that happen, I've been able to get out of it, but with a heavy pack, especially if it's deep snow.

JA: Yes, strapped not only on the waist but I had a breast plate to stop it from cutting my shoulders off. But I couldn't move, until Ken came down, because he always travelled slower than us. Ken was never a fast skier, he was a sure slow snow plough skier, and on those sort of trips he's never mad enough to let them go, he used to slow up a lot behind us. We used to go down fast. We got caught in a white-out, ever been in a white-out? You've got to roll a snow ball up and throw it in front of you to see which way it goes. You're going flat out like this and you're down and crouching down, thinking you're going flat out, suddenly put your stocks on the snow and you're standing still, so you stand straight up. Other times, you're down and you think you're not moving, so you stand up and head over turkey you go, that's on these white-outs, they're wicked up there.

End Side 1, Tape 2

Conclusion of Interview