

Councillor Leo Barry OBE, interviewed by
Neville Gare on Tuesday 15th December 1970

This is a recording being made on Tuesday 15th December 1970 with Cr Leo Barry OBE, who is a descendent of some of the very first pioneers of the Monaro area of the south-east of NSW and the north-east of Victoria.

NG Leo, your forebears were amongst the pioneers of this very interesting district, could you tell us a little bit about those very early days?

LB Well I think the first settler to come to this area, it has been agreed by everyone and records prove that Thomas Pendergast was the first person to come anywhere within coo-ee of the Jindabyne District and he settled at Moonbah, on the creek down near where that church is. He gave the land for the cemetery and for all denominations and sections. He must have been able to foresee a bit of things ahead of him because he put a right-of-way around the block of ground.

Everyone was entitled to go in wherever they like and no doubt about it, he was wise the way everything went many times since. He gave an area of twelve acres for a church site and it was one of the conditions that the church had to be built.

I think my grandfather then married his daughter, John Barry was one of the prime movers who built the church at Moonbah. It is called St. Thomas after old Tom Pendergast and he was the first man as far as I can find out who was buried on the land that he donated. His nephews came from Cottage Creek, one of his other brothers stayed at Cottage Creek near Cooma when they arrived on the Monaro.

This old John Pendergast's Cottage Creek's son went to Omeo or really went to Benambra in 1830 and there of course is a Land's Department record that I was able to get from an historical part in Sydney that they took four hundred head of cattle there at the start. Now those Pendergasts at Omeo stayed there and they were the wisest ones of the lot and they done very well and flourished. If you like at this present day in the autumn, Neville, to go to a Benambra calf sale, you'll see two thousand possibly of the best calves yarded in Australia. It's a big thing to say I know but I think it'd be right, half of the calves would belong to the Pendergast people.

NG Leo, you mentioned your grandfather, could you tell us a little bit about that period?

LB Well as the story goes that this John Barry came from Windsor and I've traced the story back that his father was also buried at Moonbah after he came and settled here. His mother got drowned in the Hawkesbury River at Windsor and is buried at Windsor. Now apparently he fell in love with this Lucy Pendergast and to get her, he ran away with her to Omeo when the gold diggings broke out there. That's somewhere in the 1850's and he kept a butchery business for the diggers and done very well as far as I can gather because he came back when old Pendergast died and when he arrived back at Moonbah his mother-in-law put him in charge of the Moonbah run and whether it was freehold land or not they had about 20,000 acres and a lot of cattle.

My grandmother who only died in 1918, told me of her experiences while there were at Omeo and the trip across on horseback to Moonbah when they returned. Two sons on horseback, carrying them, she carried the youngest one in front of her, James Barry, a member of the Snowy River Shire. My father was expected at the time and he was the first one born at Moonbah, George, and he also died at the Shire meeting at Dalgety Shire. Old Granny told me that the bushrangers raided her at Omeo when they had the butcher's business and that they got paid by the diggers in sticks of gold and lumps of gold and that she had time and enough foresight or thought to plant a lot of the gold they had in the dirty napkins belonging to the kids and the bushrangers didn't look in it.

NG Which bushrangers would be around there?

LB Oh I don't know, but I can easy get you some of the old Omeo stories I've just recently...Oh I don't know whether you'd seen the book, it's written "Echoes of the Mountains" it goes well back into Omeo. There's another issue of the Pendergast family. I've got the.....

NG There must have been some very interesting characters and some very interesting incidents around the mountains, Leo that you could recall or were passed onto you from your ancestors? Could you just comment on a few of these?

LB Well, the O'Rourke family were a family who came very early into the back blocks of the end of the Monaro, and as far as I can gather, one of the old O'Rourkes married and took up land where Wulgumerang Station is now in Victoria before you get to Gelantipy. Their son David O'Rourke who was drowned here at the Thredbo River at Waste Point about 1923, he was the first Shire Clerk when the Shire Local Government started in 1906. He had a sister....., she got lost in the scrub in those early days, very small girl and she was about 8 or 9 years before they found the skeleton and the piece of the dress from her. That area was known as the Little River which looks down into the Snowy in the Orbost direction from

the top of Black Mountain.

Then Christy O'Rourke, the brother or an uncle of the Shire Clerk, he married a Thompson of Cobbin and he in turn took up land right on the border of Ingeegoodbee and established a, I think, fairly famous type of cattle run there. Some of the family were born there at Ingeegoodbee and Christy O'Rourke, son of this old Christopher is still alive in Cooma, I think he's just about 92, he's very alert and I think it would be well if you ever talked to him. He got lost about 1889 I think, and he got lost at the head of the Ingeegoodbee River in the Tin Mine Creek which rose into the Murray River. He was 8 or 9 or 10 days missing, Jack Riley brought him back to Bales Sawmill at the Moonbah River and they in turn brought him down to Cobbin. There were 30 or 40 people looking for him and of course there was no way to tell them he was found, but ride out and tell them.

One thing that stuck in my mind is Jim Wellsmore from Paupony, together with old Christy O'Rourke's father used to ride onto the top of The Pilot every morning before daylight to watch for smoke in the hope this young fellow would light a fire. And Mr Wellsmore told me that the only smoke they ever saw was the chimney or furnace burning at Mt Wills in Victoria.

NG This would be Ossie Wellsmore's father, would it?

LB Ossie Wellsmore's father.

NG Now some of these horsemen of course from this area are almost world famous, definitely Australia famous. This is reputed as the land of the Man from Snowy River. You mentioned Jack Riley, now could you tell us a bit about Jack and some of his contemporaries?

LB Oh well of course he sort of was a pretty old hand when I ever knew anything of....I think I only ever saw him about twice, but no doubt he was a famous rider and he had a lot of mates, and Jim Spencer got the same. Well somebody on the Murray said Jack Riley was the man, the people on the eastern side, Jim Spencer was the man, then as time went on they elected better men. Some of the Delaneys from Adaminaby, somebody would be it, then of course in my life I'd reckon Charlie Woodhouse, who got killed running brumbies in Ingebyra together with Jim and Dudley Pendergast, I'd nominate him as another top rider, but I think Patterson wrote his poem about no particular person. I think it would be the story of all these men and their ability to ride horses in the bush prompted him to write the poem and I don't think any one of them was much better than the other.

NG Yes, they were a wonderful standard of horsemanship. Do you think it's still carrying on today? That might be asking you to stick your neck out?

- LB Oh well, of course you know it'd be very true to say no that it does not exist today, as far as bush horses and running horses and riding in the bush cause they don't do it, but these rodeos that they buck out of the chutes, there's no doubt there's an odd very famous man riding those.
- NG Did they have rodeos or bushman's carnivals back when you were a boy?
- LB No I think they used to have them every day nearly amongst themselves and there was nearly always any mustering time, or round up or even at the dances in the bush, the morning after the dance. You had to wait till daylight to leave. You'd often see a rodeo getting away from it.
- NG These early bush dances now that you've mentioned it, you said they'd wait till the morning after to leave. I suppose this was a matter of travelling, they travelled into a place somewhere to a hall or a homestead or something, could you tell us a little bit about that?
- LB Oh well they'd go to certain places and you didn't go to halls, you went to people's homes or some places, woolshed, but people had to get there by dark and they couldn't do much to catch their horses or do anything with them until daylight so it was a matter they'd go all night and sometimes part of the day. But I will say this, there'd be more grog drunk in five minutes now at some of these pubs than they ever drank at these dances. You couldn't get it would be one reason.
- NG Yes it would be mostly hard stuff?
- LB Hard stuff and hard to get too!
- NG And what about the music for these things, I suppose there was mainly a fiddle and perhaps a squeeze box or something like this.
- LB Yes, seldom you found a home well up in this district that'd have a piano in it and it was nearly always an accordion and a violin and that sort of thing.
- NG Were there any particular characters that used to play about that time that you can remember?
- LB Oh no, why I can remember there were a couple...Jack Ward, he was the local Jindabyne he was a very noted fiddler, he played marvellous time on the violin and it'd surprise you to know that I was a bit of a fiddler. Yes I used to go to dances as far away as Dalgety and down at Pambula. Yes my daughter won the National Eisteddfod, you know? I think she might have taken it from my mother.
- NG That's good, I didn't know that, Does she still play?
- LB Oh yes.
- NG Now you mentioned Jim Spencer, I suppose you knew a little bit about Jim, you'd have been a boy when Jim was kicking around, would you?
- LB Oh yes, you didn't travel very far those days you were

lucky if you got to Jindabyne once a year. And you know I didn't know Jim Spencer very well, hardly at all, but I knew of him a lot. But I was associated with his brother Dave a lot. I done a lot of droving with old Dave when I was a young fellow, he was an old fellow. We done a fair bit of cattle work together from, you may say, from the Monaro to Gippsland and I could tell you that they were all pretty smart men with horses and I think that Jim might have been more famous than the rest of them.

But you know there's an instance of Dave Spencer, he broke his leg away out at the head of the Pinch River and he had to be carried in and the story is quite an interesting one if you know about it. Charlie Woodhouse, he would be the grandfather of Bob Woodhouse at Gegeджерick, now he went out there to muster cattle in the autumn with Dave and the first mob of cattle they found in the morning when they went there, the horse bucked and threw Dave and broke his leg.

Instead of riding into Moonbah to get someone to help him, he rode towards Ingeegoodbee and he knew that a lot of these Omeo fellows were in there mustering their cattle, and he got those Ingeegoodbee people to sort of improvise a couple of bags and sticks and start in with Dave. Then he came into Grosses Plain to get help and an old chap named Luidy Higgins started out with Jim Barry and the two old Golby chaps, Tom and George Golby. It got very foggy and you know 1.00 in the morning, at a place called Waterloo Creek there between the rivers, Luidy wanted to carry on, said he was on the track, and the others refused to go any further, so they tied up and made a fire and when they woke up at daylight, Luidy's fire was on the track!

That Waterloo Creek has another history to it, how it got it's name. Big Jack Pendergast, one of the Omeo Pendergast s was there possuming and old Paddy Freebody came in, in the night time to fight him over something to do with possums. In the moonlight morning at 4 o'clock old Jack got out of bed in his tent and he beat Paddy and it was the first time Paddy had been beaten and it got it s name of Waterloo.

NG Now Leo, you mentioned they had a bit of an argument, what would they be doing there in that country around this time on this possum business?

LB Well of course that wild bush country carried a good many possums, especially that high country, carried what the native local people called Bobuck possum. He is a very big possum, very dark fur and nearly as big as a fox and very wild and shy. He only lives in that mountain ash

country or adjacent to mountain ash, found about the level that mountain ash grows to through the Kosciusko State Park, and they were more valuable than the ordinary grey Possum. Then of course you've got the other little fellow that's called the ringtail.

Now when you reach the Ingeegoodbee country going down towards the Snowy and it's hotter country, it was all the opossum as we know him, the Australian Grey Possum, but up in that higher country in the mountain ash-y type of country there's the black possum and known locally as Bobuck. Now they were very precious skin and never in my time since I remember were ever they got a licence to catch them regularly. Although there's been a limit on the other possums it's never been a limit on them. And I know a lot of fellows that got the skins of these black possums illegally and they had a hell of a lot of trouble to get anything done with them, or sell them to anyone, because it was nearly as dangerous to touch as the platypus.

NG They couldn't sell them as anything else I suppose?

LB You've never seen one?

NG No.

LB Well they're very shy and they're very beautiful and I don't think that rain or snow would ever penetrate the fur that's on them. Thick, nappy and beautiful.

NG Talking about Dave Spencer breaking his leg, now things must have been a bit rugged in those times as far as hospital and medical services, how would he get on after he broke his leg there?

LB Well of course they carried him into Grosses Plain, the old Woodhouse people had a home there, it'd be on the outskirts of the District, the old home is still there, it's right alongside of where my son Tom lives now. Old Mr and Mrs Woodhouse, they were there, they just put him to bed and set his leg with a couple of wooden pieces of board bandaged together and he laid up for six months or more before he was let walk on it and he was right except he had a bit of a bump, but no doctor, I think ever saw Dave.

NG Where would the nearest doctor be in those days?

LB I suppose there'd be one in Cooma but it was a funny thing, Adaminaby was the place that had doctors very early. Possibly before Cooma I think if we looked the thing up, and if you would ask me why I would have to say that I think the Kiandra gold diggings might have brought some kind of medical help to Adaminaby before anywhere. But I can remember as a boy, Adaminaby was our nearest doctor, it was a little bit close to Jindabyne than Cooma.

NG And the road to Adaminaby was through Rocky Plain was it?

LB Yes, well all the roads were about the one class.

Getting on to that you know it was a custom of the property owner of the district to always keep a horse in the yard at night and shod. I suppose you know that story, if anyone came he took the horse. Woodhouses at Gedzerick always had a horse put in at night and it was for anybody wanting was sick. The same thing went at the old Moonbah Station where my grandfather lived, they kept a special horse in the proper nick to be caught up and rode away and you know it would be something people never dreamed of these days. I don't know how far these things can go, but you know that Omeo was settled long before Melbourne and I've heard the old hands say that people have ridden in from Omeo to Cooma for a doctor and they done it in these relays, this fellow's horse and that fellow's horse was kept specially. You know it's history, isn't it?

NG Oh yes, and I suppose it took a long time for services to improve, I think you mentioned to me once before about Charlie Woodhouse and this was a bit later on when he got into trouble.

LB Well he got a fall and broke his pelvis bone running horses at the back of Grosses Plain back in 1921 and I happened to be in the party that found him. He'd laid out all night and part of the next day under thunder-stormy conditions and they took him to Sydney. He was carried in on a stretcher the same as Dave Spencer with a couple of bags and sticks. And Wallaces at Jindabyne, Bill Wallace, you know him, he was the only bloke with a motor car, he got as far as Grosses Plain to the same house as Dave Spencer laid up in, that was as far as you could go with any vehicle.

NG It would be a pretty rough track too, I suppose?

LB Was it what! He was taken away to Sydney but he lived a fortnight, whatever medical care even in Sydney has come a long way since then.

NG Broken pelvis would be a pretty severe injury in those days?

LB Hopeless.

NG Talking about Grosses Plain and that country in there between there and the Snowy, I've seen one some of these old maps a place called "Where Dick got Frightened" and I've always wondered what the significance of this was. Could you tell us what you know about it?

LB Well the first time ever I went into it, it would have been about 1917 with a chap named Bill Woodhouse, he was one of the Ingebyra Woodhouses and he took me specially out of his road to ride right on top of this hill to look down into the Snowy Gorge and he said "This is where Dick got frightened." Well I didn't blame Dick for getting frightened, but I asked him as it called after Dick Woodhouse, he was an old identity in the old Woodhouse's of Ingebyra. He said no, it was another old fellow named

Dick someone. He didn't attribute it to Dick Woodhouse. But I couldn't tell you any more about it.

NG You don't know the significance why he got frightened?

LB No. I heard that he was running brumbies and run them over it and pulled up just in time or something.

NG It's a pretty steep drop isn't it?

LB Well it is. It's a wonderful view off the top of it you know.

NG Yes it's an intriguing name. Now another thing about this time I guess was the timber industry with Alpine Ash and stuff around the place, do you recall much about the early sawmilling days and where the early sawmills were?

LB I don't recall a lot, but my father built a home, I wasn't born in, but I remember he built it in 1912.

NG This would be split slabs, I guess?

LB No, he built it with clay on the place. Harry Willis, of the Willis' made the bricks by hand with a horse and a pug mill on the spot at home and that's where my son George lives now. Local clay and he burnt it himself, you know built the kiln and burnt it himself with wood that he carted with it.

NG Any of those bricks still around out there?

LB You know that little room that's alongside the Moonbah Church, that's an offshoot of the bricks that was made for my old home and they're well burnt and well preserved.

Well the timber that was put into the rafters and the joists of that place was cut at Irwin's Mill across the Thredbo River on the Kosciusko side, opposite where Dr. Bullock had his block. Well they were carted in with bullock teams by old Davey Williamson, and Jack Adams drove the timber to us. Then later on old Dan McGregor at Jindabyne started the mill up that Chinaman's Creek, McGregor's Mill they called it, going out towards Wombat Gully.

NG When would he have been going there?

LB Well I think round in the '20's

NG Bullock teams, I suppose or horses?

LB Yes, well bullocks and then later, or before he got into these mills old Bill Bale started a mill at the Moonbah river and he milled a lot of stuff, you know for those days and it was all bullocks.

NG Did they ever use pit saws, these fellows?

LB No the steam engines with McGregor at Chinaman's Creek, you know wood engines, that burn wood? The same went with Irwins, but the old Bale's had a water wheel and they diverted the Moonbah water round a little race and they bung their mill with water.

NG Where is the site of that mill, can you still see the remains of it there?

LB Yes some of the old water wheel is still in existence.

Well you know it was a block of land 40 acres, the Shire sold it for rates when the Park Trust bought it in....

NG So this is up the Moonbah?

LB Yes up the top end of Moonbah.

NG Up above Teddy McGufficke's?

LB Yes not very far, I suppose three miles from Teddy McGufficke's. Yes I told you the wrong thing Neville, the water was taken out of what they call the Mill Creek, a branch of the Moonbah River, it ran into the water wheel and discharged into the river. That's how it works.

NG Do you know anything about this pit saw up in Sawpit Creek, the remains of the mill are still there but we don't know very much about it. I think it was before your time?

LB No I don't remember anything about it.

NG Must have been very early in the piece. There was milling also over around Alpine Creek - Adaminaby way and also up at Kalkite, was there?

LB Well the Broadheads as far as I know started their first mill at Kalkite eventually went over to the Alpine area and whatever might have happened to them they ended out in the eastern part of the Monaro, you know what they call The Badja. Kellys, Adaminaby people called Kellys ran the mill at Alpine Creek, I think right up to the end of the day and I think it was a steam engine, some of it might be still sitting there I think.

NG Alpine Creek. Now talking about buildings and things, the first building you can remember, were they out of galvanised iron roofing then?

LB No they were still using shingles, you know he was the capitalist who could afford to use iron when I first remember, they were nearly all shingles and not sawn shingles, either, they had split shingles. I don't know whatever got it in their heads, but the old hands reckoned Mountain Ash was the best shingle. I think it might have been the quickest to rot, but the easiest to split straight. I think that might be why.

NG How long do you reckon an Alpine Ash shingle roof would last?

LB Well if they're put on well, that's a lot you know, a good shingler was an art, you know that's a thing that's gone out, the same went for thatch. I can remember thatch roofs.

NG What did you use for a thatch?

LB The tussocks. you know the tussocks put on properly with snare and wire, what you'd call the tie wire, those days it was snare and wire core because the only sort of wire we had was wire for snaring possums. If you get a good thatched roof, no rain would get through it if it was done by a man who knew his job. The only thing, it was a beautiful roof for coolness and of course you know it

- was the most dangerous thing for a fire.
- NG Did it last for a fair while?
- LB Oh yes, it would last for years! Especially if the thatch was got at the right stage, you know, just about the time the tussock seeded, seemed to be the time they got it.
- NG I suppose there would be a few bark roofs around the place?
- LB You had to go out on the outskirts, you know, to find the bark. You know the Cascades Hut that you talked to me about, well it was first built of that bark and no iron.
- NG Who built Cascades?
- LB^(Harry) Nankervis. It's not so very old really.
- NG It's a nice hut.
- LB Yes well the iron was put on it since.
- NG Leo, the Lower Snowy country, the country that now carries the road through into Victoria, that bears your name, this is a very interesting and a very romantic sort of an area. Can you give us a few of your early recollections, you must have been down through there with droving mobs very early in the piece?
- LB Oh yes, I've had a bit of a go at it you know. The first time we were in there we had cattle running in on the Pinch and Jacob's Rivers in the wintertime for grass and used to winter there and we had quite some pretty tough experiences without food and one thing and another, but you know they're not worth very much, they're something that you'll never forget.
- NG What about the yards at Willis', what was there?
- LB Well there again I've only got these things from other people but on-one's been able to tell me they were wrong, some of the stuff was collected from Melbourne over the Custom's House. It was put there before Federation and they used to collect the fee for crossing the border and you'll find that in the pamphlet we put out the day that they opened the road down there.
- NG Bolte had a good idea years ago.
- LB I think it was about 10/- (ten shillings) a head for cattle to cross the border in the early days, and it was paid in sovereigns, they say it had to be.
- NG Was this to protect the Victorian industry or something, was it?
- LB I don't know what it was, somewhere along the line they used to call it the Protectionist's State, you know. Could have been very, very early. Pluero was first discovered in Australia, no reason what it was, it was discovered in the Omeo district and that's what made the law against cattle entering Victoria so stringent. There was some bloke, one of the Chisholm family, one of the connections of the Chisholms from Goulburn and related to the old Lady Chisholm that's on the note or penny or stamp or something else. I don't know what it

- is, well some of her offshoots, they started to take big mobs of cattle across to Port Arthur to ship to Tasmania when there was no beef in Tasmania, Oh I can't tell you the year, but I could find out for you.
- They had about 1,000 head of cattle and they were going to boat them away from near Sale, Lakes Entrance on a cargo ship. Any rate, the cattle began to get sick you see, on the trip and they kept leaving them. Leaving them through, you see, by the time they left the numbers, it was no time till Omeo district, famous for its cattle had a lot of sick cattle and they died. Now this has been written that there wasn't a beast in the Omeo district that lived, the Pluero wiped them out. And possibly that was one of the starts of taking these actions against people entering the State.
- NG So they probably sorted out cattle at the border and they could reject some I suppose, and the others had to pay a tax to get over?
- LB But the end of the old Custom's House was the possum fellows burnt it down to get the nails out of it to peg the possums. They were those old nails that were made, you know square with the hammer, you know, there were no machine nails. The little business that the fellow had at the border was built out of timber with these hand made nails, that's the way to put it, they weren't square, they were narrower, had a head on them and no point.
- NG There should still be a few of them around the place I suppose? I can remember the things round the mountains that the blokes were pegging the possums skins out.
- LB I suppose they'd be all rusted away like the poor old blokes. Anyway it did have a history, that Lower Snowy. There were a lot of things that happened there. It is true that Ben Boyd reached in there with his cattle and he spread from down at Bullocktown to Bombala and then down the Lower Snowy. The first old Woodhouse was one of his stockmen, landed at Eden or somewhere from England and he took on a job with Boyd and he ended up down at Willis' as stockman with Boyd, but Boyd got killed and they had no payments and he came back as far as Ingebyra and settled on the first bit of level flat he found.
- NG Was he a forebear of Snowy Golby's, would that be right?
- LB No.
- NG What about those yards back this side of Willis' on the high bank there, there are some old yards?
- LB Well I don't know what they were, they called them Scrubby's Yards.
- NG When you would have gone through there with stock, did you follow the Snowy or did you head up over the Ingegoodbee way?
- LB Well just about the first time I started going through

- there the Willis track was still open and it was the one to go and there was a place to hold them at Willis', a big yard there on the side of the hill just over the border. You can still see the old slip rails there, but somebody burnt it down and that ended going there 'cause you couldn't hold the stock overnight. There was another reason why we went to Ingeegoodbee, it got uphill and all that up the Nine Mile and downhill into Suggan Buggan, seems stupid, but you always got plenty of grass on the top and somewhere to hold them. That seemed to be the trend till this road went through and of course it's transport, well droving cattle's gone out.
- NG It's always seemed to me that there is far more grass in the Ingeegoodbee and the other route down the river is pretty hard going.
- LB Well of course it's pretty hard going to punch cattle up that Nine Mile and down that short cut too, do you know it?
- NG Yes. But I suppose it was quite a relief to hit the Ingeegoodbee when you got over the top there?
- LB Well most fellows that could manage it, they'd spell there a day or two, see.
- NG You mentioned Christy O'Rourke before, is that a bit of a hut on that bit of a clearing just near the border at the Ingeegoodbee?
- LB Right down at the water there's a bit of a thing there, yes on the river. They call it Wingeegoodbee.
- NG Now when you went down the Snowy did you cross the river where the Jacobs is and go down on the eastern side? Or did you stay on the western side?
- LB Stayed on the western side.
- NG All the way?
- LB Yes.
- NG I thought you might have crossed into this Byadbo country or Bidj Creek area.
- LB No, before ever I can remember anyone, you know I can remember talk about, the stock route would start, the land between the Pinch and Jacob's River used to frighten the old hands apparently in the old days with their pretty wild stock. Now the stock route from Gippsland to Ingebyra was down the Gulf Creek and across the river and out, up onto the clear ground and back at Guttamurk below Willis, across the Snowy both ways. That was very early. You know there were a lot of horses travelling this, they used to take horses to the markets.
- NG So that would have been through the Byadbo country, what is now called the Byadbo country?
- LB Yes but then you see they broke through to the Pinch on that track through between the rivers and it was shorter and you didn't have to run the risk of the Snowy being flooded.
- NG Still be a fair size cut there though wouldn't it, a fair

- size float to move stock on where that road cuts through there now? They go higher up now do they?
- LB No they went pretty well where the track is.
- NG And what about this Bidj Creek area, now there was some early settlement in there, I haven't been in there myself, but they tell me that there was some early settlement. Do you know anything about that?
- LB Yes, well there was a lady went around here a couple of years ago by the name of Hawkins, Marcia Hawkins, she's related to the Elliotts, and she's got some very interesting stuff of the early settlements around there and she was so intrigued with finding the spot that she got Ossie Wellsmore and Snowy Golby to take her on horseback, and she wasn't used to riding, to this Bidj house to see where her grandmother lived. Now the old Elliotts settled there somehow, why I don't know, but I think they were working for some of the..... Mrs Hawkins tells me it was long after Boyd's day, they had some stock job for someone and built a house, it would have been as good as anybody else's house I suppose, at Bidj and there's one instance that I think is well worth remembering. Ossie Wellsmore would be able to tell you the same thing.

- They used to have to go to Buckley's Crossing for their provisions and old man Elliott went to Buckley's Crossing, which is Dalgety today, and he loaded his packhorse up with flour, a couple of bags of flour. There's a spot between Reedy Creek, which is on the map and the Gulf Creek, they run into the Snowy on this Monaro side on this western side, very steep. There was a chap named King fell in it and it's known as "Where King fell in" I don't know anything about King or the history of him, but old Elliott's packhorse slipped where King fell and he rolled into the river with the flour, and of course the kids and Mrs Elliott had no flour. They say though that the old boy had his bottle of rum as well, though.
- NG Did they grow anything in that country in there, I had an idea they might have tried a bit of agriculture in here. Would that be right?
- LB Oh, I don't think so.
- NG Did a bit of clearing I suppose?
- LB Yes, well do you know what the old Williams family at Moonbah, Jim Williams was the oldest, he told me that when he first went onto the Snowy River country, around Bidj and down to Willis there was a very, very odd pine tree and the flats weren't washed away. The flats used to grow grass, you know, the Snowy had cut big grooves in like that in his time and it's hard to believe, but when I can remember the way the scrub and the timber's come up, I can quite believe that it's true now.

NG You think there was much cypress pine round there in the area?

LB Well he said there was a very, very odd one.

NG Mainly box was it?

LB Mainly box and it wasn't on the real flats. Because the flats are all down at Orbost now I think.

NG Well I think that one of the things I notice now is that since the river's been dammed of course, that the river itself is much smaller and the vegetation is encroaching right out onto the flat. You can see it growing right out there. There's a lot of trees growing out on those sandy flats that they just wouldn't have had a chance before of getting established. The river must have come up pretty high, I suppose you've seen it in flood?

LB Yes I think the highest it's ever been in my life was about 1933, there was a summer flood. Took that first bridge away that was down at McKillops, you know, they put a steel bridge over it, it twisted it up although those days if you went down just as the flood was over, there was posts and timber up for hundreds of yards away. Funny part of that flood was that the rain fell in the other areas, which proves it could come again.

NG Yes, well I suppose when you see as much water as that go away, it was probably one of the things that kicked you along a bit towards getting the Snowy Scheme off the ground, Eh!

LB Oh yes!

NG Hell, a lot of water goes into the sea! Leo, Jindabyne at one stage had a flour mill and I'm just interested in the wheat growing on the Monaro in the early days and what you remember about it and flour production?

LB Well I think they had to have these little flour mills everywhere because there was no way of carting the flour from a general mill like Goulburn or those things in those days, so each fellow grew his own little bit of stuff and took it to a small mill so he'd have flour.

NG Nearly all for local consumption then was it?

LB Oh that was all. I don't think any of it would ever go away. 'Cause the early days, as you know, the story of Ryries who were supposed to start the first flour mill with a water wheel in Jindabyne and that was the first time ever the Snowy water was used for power and all that. Then I think McGregors took it on after Ryries went out of it, and run it for a while, then later on about 1909 or 10 or 11 or something, local farmers got together and I think it might have been in the early days when Sir Joseph Carruthers come to Jindabyne West, I'm not sure of that, but I can remember then at that stage what happened and they started the mill up again. I think Dan McGregor, old Polly's father was the man who was the miller again for this co-operative business.

Now I can remember my father growing a few acres of wheat at Moonbah, carting it away down to Jindabyne on a couple of horses and a dray, get it milled and be back home that night. I'll never forget what they called the sharps, it was a fine type of bran or polley stuff and it was the porridge. We had that porridge for the winter and I can tell you this you were sharp by the time you finished the winters on sharp. Really and truly the flour was good wholesome flour and all that, but without any doubt Monaro wheat wouldn't measure up to the type of wheat that would be the top wheat now. I don't think it would ever grow real top wheat.

NG Had a pretty short day too.

LB I reckon.

NG Yes, I've often wondered. The same would go for that Nimmitabel mill I suppose, it would be mainly for local.

LB It would all be local and there was another one down on the plain near the airstrip you know. It had a fire wheel long as a hell of a size, because we still got one piece of axle business for fire dogs in the old house at home and the weight of it would be tremendous.

NG This from the Jindabyne one?

LB No from the old Coolringdon mill.

NG That was a windmill was it?

LB No it must have been by steam because it had a fly wheel to keep the..... up.

NG And Jindabyne mill was always a water one?

LB Water wheel.

NG Just while we're talking about machinery, I've seen these horse powered mills, you know the ones with the horse was hooked up on a single bar and he walked round and round in circles and this worked the chaff cutter, you're familiar with this?

LB Oh yes, done a lot of that. Yes, well the big chaff cutter had two or three horses on. The little one only had one and you know you put four horses in and one fellow stood in the middle and kept them running as easy as he could so the sharp blades would cut even. I can also remember themachines where the horses walking, stepping on a thing that would keep it going and they'd never step away, their front feet stepped all day and they kept making this thing come down like a belt and as the sweat used to come out on the old horses, you know, they'd keep touching them with a whip and they'd keep stepping, it was hard work.

NG They would have gone out what, back in the '30's?

LB About the 1900's. The last people I ever saw with a threshing machine was the people at Moonbah.

NG Would you remember the first traction engines coming into the Monaro at all, in your boyhood I suppose?

LB Yes I think the first person to ever bring a tractor on the Moonbah was old Fred.....

NG That would be the old steam tractor?
 LB Yes the old Fordson made them. They'd kick your head off when you cranked them.
 NG Was this a petrol exhaust?
 LB Yes.
 NG Would they have seen traction engines around the place like the big old steam rollers?
 LB Yes, but you know they never got out in the bush they was too cumbersome.
 NG I suppose once these petrol driven tractors hit the place.....
 LB Oh yes the tractor was what they were made for I think.
 NG Yes when I was a boy at home we used to use the old hand-driven chaff cutters, you know the smaller job with the big brim and the handle on it?
 LB There's one story I could tell you about chaff cutting, one fellow was a contractor, he went round all the farms cutting chaff and they used to bag it all in a hole. I suppose you know what I mean by that, the old model of chaff cutters just cut the chaff and threw it out on the flat. To bag it you dug a hole and put your bag down in the hole and you tramped it in, you see and then you lifted it out, put another one in, well that was the system until they got these bagging machines put on the chaff cutters. Well I'll tell you a yarn that one of the local fellows was so mean, that everywhere he went he used to be sad when he couldn't dig the hole up and take it with him.
 NG Leo, Monaro has come a long way today and electricity's all over the place, you've got electric light and electric cooking and washing machines and all this sort of thing and I know you had a lot to do with this with your time with Monaro County Council, but in your early days things must have been pretty primitive for the women and their cooking and other domestic chores. How did they get on for tucker and things like doing their washing and clothing and all this sort of business?
 LB Well I think that as for food, you know everybody had to grow his own meat or in one sense in the bush, beef because it was tooto keep sheep alive in our area if we took them on, so it was a matter of grow the beef. Your nearly always got to kill that beef in the autumn because the winters were so severe with green timber and rabbits and one thing and another that you were lucky, you wouldn't go till the spring with a fat beast so there you could have a storage of. Kill two or three fat bullocks or calves about May or June, the latest June, and then you salted them. That was the part that cured them and when you reached that stage they were hung and that saw you through until you had a fat beast come along Christmas again.

Now the same went for pigs. Everyone had a pig and everyone fattened the pig and cured them and they were a luxury, these couple of hams and things. As for anything else, well you had to make your own butter and you know when the plums were ripe and that sort of thing and the frost didn't kill the cherries everybody had cherry and plum jam and so on. That'd be the reason why all these old homes that you see today that are deserted all had a few fruit trees around them. I think you might have read when I wrote an article on the County Council the other day where we kept the fat in the bladders of the pigs, did you see that?
 NG No I didn't read that.
 LB On how they kept the food down the well to keep cool?
 NG You put it down in hessian?
 LB Or put it down in a bucket so that it was just touching the water and not get water in the bucket.
 NG And what was this about the fat?
 LB Oh well as for refrigeration, when you killed a pig, well I just mentioned that first lighting was a fat candle. To get that candle you ran the fat off the butts of the bullock, not his corpse, that's too precious, then you rendered it down and you made this candle. Well we went on, one, how do you refrigeration anything, well when you killed a pig you cleaned his bladder out properly and you blew it up to ten times the size of what it was and then when it dries you poured your lard into it and tied it and that kept that lard as good as gold, you know, airtight.
 NG I often wondered, you probably know the origin of this but you know I heard a story about Leather Barrel Creek, how they used to bring the tallow down from Kosci down Leather Barrel Spur, do you know anything about this?
 LB No I don't.
 NG I understood that they used to melt them down up top and bring the tallow down Leather Barrel Spur, I thought this might have had some connection with this business with the pigs. I suppose the trip to town wouldn't be very frequent. Did you have to go, what, right into Cooma in your early days for supplies and things or did you go in to get salt or that sort of business?
 LB Oh no. There were so many things you know, there were only about a couple of and they'd tell you they'd do one or two trips a week and they'd supply Jindabyne, I don't know, everybody must have been pretty self-supporting, but I can remember people named Lassiters, they're a very early firm, they used to send a traveller around with a great big book as big as the Sydney telephone directory and everything was illustrated on it and numbered and everything. This traveller stayed at everyone's home for a day or two and he got the order and then Lassiter's had special trains come into these

railway stations and then the goods were distributed out and they lasted you twelve months.

Why they went broke I don't know, but they were in where Nock and Kirbys are now, is where F. Lassiter and Co, they supplied everything. There's a story about one of the old Lassiters, he got the first mowing machine that ever came to the Monaro and it had on it, Lassiter's had a trademark 'Al' and they had it on everything. This mowing machine had 'Al' here and there, so the old Lassiter knew nothing about mowing machines 'cause he told his men when he gathered them round to have a look at this new machine, he said, "Whenever you see 'Al' that means put oil!" So there you are, he kept it greased.

NG You mentioned Bill Wallace before, you said he had the first motor car, that'd be round Jindabyne would it?

LB No, his father.

NG And when was the first car in the Moonbah district, when would that have arrived?

LB I think the Filtness's were the first people to have a car at Moonbah. He's still alive, the chap, he lives at Melbourne, it was a T Ford.

NG This'd be back just after the First World War or during it?

LB Just about the end of it, about 1916-17.

NG And the access business, now you had a road which was trafficable by car about that time, just about to Moonbah was it, or further to Grosses Plain?

LB Oh well, actually it wouldn't be trafficable at all by car today, but they got them there. You know any man that drove a car to Ingebyra you know he was a Kingsford-Smith.

NG Roads out that way weren't really formed up for motor traffic until back in the '30's sometime?

LB Nothing was really done well with the roads until machinery became available to build roads with.

NG So this road to Mt Kosciusko when it was put through it must have been quite an event for that to be done at that time?

LB Yes it was done I think principally with pick and shovel and horse and cart, must have been.

NG Yes, you mentioned earlier in the piece that Local Shire Governments, I think, came to this area in about 1906?

LB That's right.

NG Prior to that, Municipal Governments?

LB No, municipalities were formed a lot sooner, but they only looked after towns. And then the outskirts, an odd job done from Public Works Department, you know, like some bit of a culvert put in, you're lucky if you got something in this area once a year!

NG And when you kicked off with the Shire I suppose you didn't have any machinery and things would have been all

done by hand?

LB You know each fellow had, when I got into the Shire which was a long time ago, they had a sort of a let-system. I think old Alf Robinson he looked after the road from Jindabyne to Berridale with a grader and one horse and a tip-cart. And old Jim Bourke had a two horse grader which was a bit bigger and a tip cart from Cooma to Berridale and so on, but they did have a steam roller and it had some prongs on it for.....and it was fed with wood and it used to do about a mile a day.

NG Who owned it?

LB They owned it. Anyway it was pretty unsuccessful, you know things got a little bit of a stir on when I got into the Shire I think I would have been the first fellow that recommended they started to bring out Caterpillar Tractor type of thing, a grader type of thing and we borrowed the money on that plant loan about 1937 - '36 I think we borrowed the money, the Shire, to buy the first tractor and a grader drawn thing behind it. It was a Caterpillar 6 tractor and we kept it in that Shire for many, many years, you know looked after it. Anyway of course the things flourished until we ordered twelve graders and got the first one when the war broke out and they commandeered it and took it to Darwin, you know the military defence, but we never seemed to get anywhere til you got machinery going.

NG Yes, well you seen a hell of a change in road accidents in the area then in your time?

LB Oh yes. The pipe culvert, I don't think hardly between Cooma and Berridale when I first got the Shire.....they're all over the.....

NG A hell of a lot of hold-ups then?

LB Oh well, there'd be a hell of a lot of bumps and bogs of course, there wasn't near as much traffic either.

NG No, but I bet in those days when you set out to go to Cooma you'd want to be prepared to camp the night?

LB Oh well the things that went to Cooma when I first remember motor cars, you left at daylight and were home after dark, you know it took so long.

NG How many pubs or inns would there have been between Cooma, say and Jindabyne in those days?

LB In my time only Pine Valley.

NG And then something between Pine Valley and Berridale?

LB The old.....had closed up, it had been a pub.

NG Where was that?

LB A few heaps of rocks just the other side of where the Rocky Plain Road turns off. You'll see the stones there.

NG Near Amos Williams there, just up the hill from there is it?

LB No just past the Rock Plains turn-off on the Cooma-

Berridale Road going towards Cooma.
 NG And nothing then between Berridale and Jindabyne?
 LB No there never was.
 NG What about the place down near Jindabyne that used to be a hotel?
 LB Mathorlis.
 NG Yes, what's the name of that place?
 LB Wollondibby.
 NG Wollondibby, yes, can you tell a bit about that?
 LB Oh I don't know much about it you know the old chap turned it into a sort of a pub when the diggings broke out up thatperiod.
 NG Leo, everyone's interested in early pubs I think, now could you tell us a little bit about the first pub around the Jindabyne district?
 LB Well as far as I know the stone building that still stands up along the road nearly three miles out of Jindabyne, Leesville, it was the first licensed hotel around about here and it seemed to be quite a little gathering spot there. The racecourse up the flat towards Moonbah from it. They had a blacksmith's shop when I remember it there, a fellow named Sam Martin, he built coaches and things in Cooma afterwards and sulkies, he had a blacksmith's shop there. There was a store there and this hotel and later on as far as I know old man Sturgeon, he'd be Les Sturgeon's father, he opened a store on the Cooma side of Jindabyne, of old Jindabyne and then he added to it a hotel and he was the first hotel keeper and storekeeper in Jindabyne. You'll see that big photograph with first the little shingle roof place was the store and the other place. Evidently there's a little cottage alongside it which belonged to the man that run the punt across the river. Well when the bridge came they made a big flourish these..... crowd.
 NG When did the bridge come?
 LB I think it was over in 1892. When the bridge came, Solomons, they were always active around Cooma, they opened what you'd know as Blewitt's Store it was there in your time, and Tourists Hotel was on the end of it. That had a licence for a number of years. Then it went down the drain when they all went back over the other side of the river.
 NG Blewitt was the place that was Mick Simmons' there at one stage?
 LB That's right. Those were the three had licences other than old McEvoy but he was only serving the diggers.
 NG Did they get regular supplies of beer in those days?
 LB I don't think there was any beer, there'd be no beer. You know I think I can first remember the first bottles of beer. It was rum - schnapps was a great drink!
 NG And keg beer wouldn't have come on for quite a while?

LB I don't think it reached out here.
 NG No, so it was a good hard drink?
 LB Yes.
 NG O.P. (overproof) rum?
 LB Oh rum would be the main thing you know, but all these things take time to think about. You were talking about Lassiters a time ago too, they put up a very special whisky Golden Guinea and you know it was a bit famous, because you could get it in bulk from Lassiters, it'd be Scotch Whisky.
 NG Did anyone put down blackberry wine or cherry wine or anything like this on the properties round the place?
 LB Oh of course!
 NG There'd be a bit of home brew. Would this be pretty common I suppose?
 LB Oh well you know, not alcoholic, not fermented enough to make it, you know people used to only have it for soft drinks.
 NG What about cider?
 LB Oh I can't remember cider. But if you want me to tell you a story, my mother was always an experimenter on making ginger beer and hock beer. She didn't believe in alcohol, but any rate she started to make elderberry beer with elderberries and of course she went away down the coast with a whole heap of this keged up and corked. Of course it started to blow the corks, so I was a pretty lazy fellow at milking cows and we had a mob of pigs to keep and I thought "Bugger the pigs, I'll mix some of this elderberry stuff with the milk, make it go round." There's one lady still alive that verified we had drunk pigs for a week!

(End of typed transcription)

Retyped
 Pauline Downing
 15th July 1993