

23rd July 1990

Interview with Ross Bolton, Ossie Bolton, Jean and Kath

Graham Scully

GS Well we've got Reid's Hut, made a few mistakes here have we? Can you explain what that's about?

RB Well you know Dad built the original Reid's Hut on the Back River in 1904, that was right. He built it and he had Harry Reid, well it was Tom Reid, who later became his father in law, just put that in there.

GS So it was actually built for Tom Reid?

RB Yes. The chimney was standing without a stone out of place and the Park Trust dozed it down, you see Dad and Harry Reid pulled all the timber for the fencelines, with the bullocks, that's on the Finns River. I don't know if you should have Finns River there.

OB Would be better if you had it there, would stand out better from the others.

1904 Back River was built

GS But Reids Hut isn't on the Finns River is it?

RB No its on the Back River.

OB Burrungabuggee.

RB Built it for Tom Reid.

GS So Harry Reid pulled all the timber for the fencelines? That wasn't for Reids Hut then?

RB No that was on Finns River. He lost a beautiful drag chain on the Sugarloaf and now called it Green Knob, I found it in 1940 and sold it back to him for five quid, it was still good. Olivers Hut, that's on the same side of the river as Reids old Hut, it was carted from Hedgers House on Snowy Plain. It was one room from Harold Hedger's Mothers and Fathers place. Ray Oliver bought it and took it there. Ernie Scarlett took it on his truck, it was bad going. Ray put it up but never put a fireplace in it, he never finished it. Tolbar Hut, Harry Bolton built the Tolbar Hut, he built it for Harry Reid in 1932. I dragged the slabs for it and I was only seven. This hut was built for twenty quid, that included everything the only thing Harry Reid supplied was nails.

The Tolbar was where I helped drag that, Louis and I. Yes you were only seven, we were a lot older.

- GS You were all in it were you?
- RB Best axeman in the mountains, Jimmy Bolton was the best axeman in the mountains. If you picked his axe up you weren't game to touch it, that's sort of put badly, might alter it.
- GS Uh huh.
- OB You'd take the edge off it would you?
- RB He wouldn't allow you to touch it! If you picked his axe up you weren't game to touch it, it was like a razor, if he was clearing along a fence and there was a tree leaning over it, he could pull it that way or that way. He was left handed, he was only a little man but one of the strongest I've ever seen. He built the Grey Mare Hut not long before he died.
- He'd go crook! He wouldn't allow anybody to use his axe.
- GS Its not that it was so sharp, it was that he'd be pretty angry.
- OB He didn't want anyone to gap it, thats why!
- RB It was sharp too!
- OB I liked to have a sharp axe and I wouldn't want anyone else to use it! If I had an axe I wouldn't want anyone else to use the good one, the sharp one, cause as soon as someone else gets hold of it, they'd ruin it!
- RB Me too!
- OB And thats my attitude!
- RB You'd only have to touch it to the ground put a bit of a gap in it.

(general conversation)

- RB Dick Eames. Dick's buried near a big rock at the back of Naphthali's. There's two pickle bottles of gold buried not far from there. Dick buried them, he always had a beautiful garden, he cut up onions, carrots, parsnips and turnips and he'd cook it in his camp oven, his camp oven had a little piece out of the lid and in the summertime the blowflies used to go in and put a bit of "rice" in with his possum. He'd leave it hanging, when he wanted a feed, he'd light the fire under it and heat the lot up again. This is true! Dad reckoned towards the end it was more rice than anything else! That's what grog will do for you, so don't take to the grog and he was Postmaster of the GPO in Sydney before he came here.

Bolton's Hut on Finns River - My father built Bolton's Hut, the land was freehold, it was originally selected by Mum's father Thomas Reid, (its only got 160 acres, it was 600 acres).

- GS Thats actually Thomas not Harry Reid. O.K. Thomas Reid.
- RB 600 acres, and it went down the Finns River, it was all good country. The Park bought it in 1959. The hut was burnt in the '39 fire, we lost over 900 sheep, we built the new one in 1940-41. The new hut was a bit smaller than the old one, there was bit of talk of the Park coming up and we had to pack everything in. I had to pack the iron in on my horse from Snowy Plain. We filled bags with heather so the iron was away from him, he couldn't look around, I carried the ridge iron on my shoulder. We split the slabs the previous year down overlooking Island Bend, down in the Mountain Ash. They used to drag two at a time, it was terrible steep and rough. The horse could only pull two up the hill. I dragged them up to the flat at the top and carted them over to the slab, I was eighteen at the time. We stayed there six weeks in 1940 fencing. We were living in a tent with no radio. We would be over to the fenceline having a fire made ready to boil the billy for morning tea before daylight. Dad used to cook the bread and kill a sheep, we never had any visitors, you could stay there for six months and never see anybody.

Well, it was the quietest place in the mountains on Finns River, it was a dead end, nobody went through there to go anywhere. You see it was Finns River on the backside and Murray on the other side, it was a dead end. I reckon you could stay there two years and you'd never see anybody. That bloody Ray Adams.....

Ray Adams used to look after Litchfield's sheep and help them mustering on the Kerries. They'd all muster the big mob and miss some, and they reckon Ray used to "run a mob away" some people reckoned, so he'd have to go back for them. Ray would go back and get so much per head for stragglers, about 1936-37 we went out there late in the year and found...Oh, about 1936-37 Ray went out there and found a mob of sheep, he brought them back across to the Finns River, it started to snow, so he shut them in our hut and came home for ten days. The lice was lined with wool packs, they ate them as far as they could reach and they ate our mattresses. We went back in the spring and we had bloody nothing. The smell of the sheep was so bad we had to cart the dung away and get new dirt for the floor.

Dad said "That bloody Ray Adams!" That was the wildest I've ever seen Dad. I tell you we were disgusted, you know riding from here out there, thirty eight miles, just with pack horses, because mattresses were hard to get out

there. We had to go and cut heather to put on the bunks. You couldn't get the smell of the sheep out, even ten years after, on a wet day and you lit the fire, it was like sleeping in a shearing shed.

A rich seam of gold on Diggers Creek. There was a header down on Turkey Flat. They built it with wheelbarrows. I'd say the Boltons started the mining there. Afterwards there were lots of others. Grandfather Bolton used to go with the gold to Jindabyne, not Berridale.

GS Right, Jindabyne.

RB Stay at the pub and drink it out.

GS You did say something about your father living there in that Con Bolton's hut for some time?

RB No not permanent.

GS It wasn't permanent.

RB We used to camp in there when we went up for the sheep and that, but Dad never lived there, see he came to Sutherwood up here in 1911.

GS Oh see, right! So when he was a boy he was living in that house that John Bolton built, and they'd work down at Diggers Creek. Then he saved enough money to buy this place.

RB Well he worked at Jindabyne, he worked at ???? for his father in law, butcher at ?????? he married Mum and they shifted down here. Well he had the place here before he got married.

GS So at Con Bolton's hut, who was there? There was Charlie Carter....

RB Charlie Carter, Dad and myself, Jack Willis, I don't think there were any others. I think Jack came there on his own, I don't think he was staying the night either, he only came down to have a feed with us.

Then he started coughing, Charlie reckoned he had consumption.

OB There was a lot of it around them days too, a lot of TB!

HH Hear a lot of it in Parliament, hear about the Consumption Tax.

(Laughter)

RB Bill Shannon and Jim Shannon used to live in our hut, they were working round Snowy Plain, gold digging. Jim

was the youngest and old Bill was the eldest, and old Bill was the dirtiest. Do you remember him, he was the dirtiest man I think I ever seen. He had a beard down here, he used to smoke a pipe, he'd be puffing on the pipe and the table would be there with all the tucker on it and old Bill would spit into the fireplace over the table!

(laughter)

HH He'd never miss!

RB And when he'd buy a shirt and when it worn out, he'd put it over the top of it. When he died they found the remains of five shirts.

OB He never ever washed them.

RB No! Old Jim was terrible clean, he was the opposite. Bill was the filthiest man I've ever seen, you couldn't stay near him! I bet he never had a bath in his life.

GS How many years did Bill Shannon live in that hut on Diggers Creek?

RB There were there a good few years. They were there when the Italians came there, so that would be about '35 or '36. There were working, they had a claim a bit further down and they just missed this one that the Dagoes found. They were working a bit further down Diggers Creek. They must have been there five or six years at least, then they went and lived up here at Rushes Creek, that old hut there.

GS Harold, you've got a story about Bill Shannon haven't you?

HH He used to be about the shooting ground there. Jardine's there.

RB When would that be, before this, would it?

HH Oh I don't know, it would be in the late twenties, I suppose.

RB That would have been before they went over to our hut, I suppose.

HH Anyway they used to have pigs and they used to take their pigs up there and he was trapping, he was trapping mostly. I don't know if he was gold digging about there. Old Fred Cooper, did you know him?

RB I don't think so.

HH Well he was camped there in the Jardine's hut he was camped. Old Bill didn't like Fred Cooper, the only way he thought he'd get rid of him, he bought over a whole heap of rabbits one night, when he went round his traps. He skinned them in front of the fire and there was guts everywhere, and next day Cooper he packed up and left!

(laughter)

HH It was a dirt floor then in Jardine's hut. That's the only way he thought he'd get rid of him! Cooper he was a fairly clean.....

RB A lot cleaner than Bill!!

GS A lot of people worked that gold at Diggers Creek? Not only the Boltons, the Shannons?

RB Oh there was, back when it was rich there were a lot of people working there, a lot of people. See they worked it right from the Gungarlin River, right up past our hut that would be two miles! Then it went up Jumpers Creek and up in Jumpers Hill they found gold there too. Over in the Back Gully they found gold, and at the foot of the Brassy there, what did they call that creek Harold, that came down out of, not the Big Brassy, going to the Back River to Reid's hut?

HH Oh, Collins.

RB No Collins come out of Olivers paddocks, there was another junction. Well there was gold at Collins too, and it run up there was another branch off Collins Creek just where the road started up to Brassy, I forget what we called it. There was good gold there right at the foot of the Brassy, just a little ridge there.

HH Just at the foot of the two Brassys?

RB Yes the Little Brassy.

HH No I was never in that country at all.

RB I forget what it was called, we had a name for it, I don't know whether it was the right name or not.

HH No I've only ever been about there a little bit, I come in there with Litchfield's wethers one year, I had to muster the Kerries there and I been up there a time or two with Fred Fletcher when he used to cart for the Alpine Hut there. But I never ever mustered any sheep just about there.

RB Well there's a yarn about the Brassy, this bloke went down onto the Snowy and he found this nugget of gold! This the yarn that goes, but a lot of fellows believed him. It was too heavy, he carted it about the top of the Brassy, the Little Brassy and it got too heavy for him. Anyway he left it there, he left this gold there and he was going to go back to it. And a lot of fellows believed him because fellows rode there, but where he left it he reckoned, it was nearly the top of the Brassy and you could see the Snowy River. Well you can't see the Snowy River off the Brassy! And that's why Dad never believed him or anything else, but he reckoned where he left it, so he could go back to it, he reckoned you could see the Snowy River but you can't see the Snowy River. Anyway a lot of people believed him and rode there for weeks and months looking for this, and a lot of them reckoned it was only brass!

HH And that's how it got its name.

RB That's how it got its name, the Brassy, but a lot of fellows believed him. Jim Bolton, he spent a lot of time, he believed him and he lost his stockwhip up in there, riding along, he was always left handed and it must have hooked on a limb and he lost his stockwhip looking for it.

Anyway, where do we go, sawmill at Kalkite..

GS What was that again?

RB See that black strip there, one sheet of iron short? Dad stripped a sheet of bark and put on there instead of the iron. It was still on there when the fire burnt it.

GS So who built this hut, your Dad built it? He built this one then he also built this one, so did you use the same design?

RB Oh well there's no design to them.

HH You put a log on the ground and you decide first wouldn't you? Slabs cut out of the tree.

RB See that iron there how its bent in? Just after, must have been, there was a hell of a fall of snow one winter, and the iron was sticking out from the last batten and the weight of the snow bent the iron.

HH There's a lot of weight in snow.

GS Did you use the same stones in the fireplace?

RB Oh no no!

(General discussion, impossible to transcribe - everyone talking at once)

GS Can we go through these photos Jean?

Jean Yes we might find something interesting.

GS Is that the Tolbar hut.

RB Dad's old Bluey horse, were these some of Mum's.

Jean Yes.

HH Must have been a small camera in them days, a very small camera.

Jean A little box camera ones I think.

GS Do you remember that Harold, the Tolbar.

RB Harold Blewitt was out there...

HH Which Tolbar, there's two Tolbars, one out the back of Adaminaby.

(More general discussion regarding the photographs being looked at)

GS I just wanted to talk to Jean and Cath about their trips up to the mountains with their Dad. How many children were there, did Harry Bolton have?

J Four.

GS Four, thats right two boys and two girls. He used to take you up to the mountains.

J Well the brother that died, he was close to me, my age. We used to go up in those days when Ross was only little.

C Well the first time we went up to Snowy Plains was, the time we went in the buggy and we took the rabbit. We took it, the cage with the blessed rabbit, and Dad reckoned he spent all his life catching rabbits, and we had this poddy one and we had to take it with us to Snowy Plain. That was the first time. We went in the buggy.

J Louis and I we had this sledge and we used to cart all the timber, for the Tolbar hut and we used to drag it.

GS So how many people were there?

C Oh Mum was there, Jean and Ross were little.

RB 1932.

GS Thats when the Tolbar Hut? So Harry went there, did your mother go too?

J Yes, she made bread and we camped and slept on gum leaves.

GS Did you sleep in a tent?

J Yes in a tent.

GS How many days did it take him to built it?

J A good while, but I stayed up there about three weeks and got sick of it and we rode home, mum and I.

C We stayed on Ross didn't we?

(More general discussion about butter and milking a cow)

J I don't know what else we did with ourselves for that time, on Snowy Plain it was different because we wandered around, we swam, Dad made a sort of a little swimming pool with the creek, but I don't know what we did up the Tolbar.

(General discussion about fishing)

GS Did you also go up with your Dad to Diggers Creek to Con Boltons house?

J What do you call Con Boltons?

RB On the Snowy Plain.

J Oh yes but we'd only stop a night there on the way. Never stopped there long.

GS Thats where you stopped on the way to Tolbar and Finns River.

J But then we went out and stayed a night or two out at Finns River and used to help with the sheep up at Farm Ridge there.

GS It wasn't all that usual for women to go up in the mountains was it?

J Oh no, no, not in those days.

GS Out Thredbo way, Shirley McGufficke, do you know her? Shirley McGufficke used to go up with her father, to Dead Horse Gap, there was a hut there.

HH The Cochran girls, Arthur Cochran's girls, they used to take cattle from ???? right over into Gippsland in Victoria! They were better than any man them two

Cochran girls, Arthur Cochran 's girls. They'd have to be a good man to keep up with them.

GS Did you girls do much cooking up there?

J Fried scones and dampers.

(more general discussion, impossible to sort out the conversation!)

J They were good mountain horses, they wouldn't run you up a tree or anything, they had rock salt on their back.

End of tape

Transcribed by Pauline Downing
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