

Bill

from Larry Meavoy
Maxim Brothen
Leane (?)

INTERVIEW WITH MR COTTER A

Mr Cotter: There's the Forest - here we are here, that's the one that goes South, the one that goes West, but this one down here - you come down to there, and you follow over to that, that would be the lowest point, go up onto the ridge - you can tell the ridge by this can you? Follow the ridge down, there's a horse track until you get to there, there'll be a fence there and a slip rail and it joins onto the other road - so you've got to walk from there to there, and the other one is a fair walk but its distinct and you've only got to walk from there Forest hut.

So all the people who were out this way would use them to come in?

Mr Cotter: Yes, well see - the old map you'll see the road to Michelago shown on the Parish map, and the one Br Kevin had - the road to Gudgenby - did you see it? - the road to Gudgenby is marked there ...

Mr Cotter: ... It must be back in the 80's, something like that - see from Michelago. That place just there, do you know where that is - that's Caloola Farm! That's from Michelago, that's just the track up the creek. It goes right down the Naas back to Queanbeyan that one, so it was recognised as the way to Michelago back in the 80's I'll give you another one ... Can you read it - Naas River and Gudgenby.

That's right - people arrived at Forest House, so that one was in 1884 have you got that one - Brother got a few copies of it was there a long time ago. The policemen used to go through on horseback, through the Bobeyan and Gudgenby.. take census out.... That's when they came and I used to hide ...

What do you think would be the best time of year - when would it be too late to retrace - too cold probably?

Mr Cotter: It wouldn't matter. When you go up Orrroral way, Cotter way, you'd be better off doing it in Spring or Autumn. How far are you going to go, what area are you going to do?

It depends how long it is. We'd like to do - we want to use it as our Gold expedition for the Award, so maybe 100 or not as many kilometres - we're not going to walk all of it.

Mr Cotter: Well, I think an interesting one would be the road from Queanbeyan to Adaminaby or Boboyan before Fitz's was put in, Fitz's Hill. We used to go out around Borumberra and Orrroral and out that way. If you get a map of Burrumberra it would probably be able to tell you where that went. It was a bullock dray road, there'd be cuttings in it.

How obvious are the tracks, are there some places where you wouldn't know there was a track, or is it pretty clear all the way?

Mr Cotter: Well I think, anywhere they put bullock drays, they had odd cuttings in. A lot of places you go you'd have no idea now the bush.... They would just pick up straight over the hills, with no cuttings.

Who established it in the first place?

Mr Cotter: Well the bloke who wanted to get transport, he'd have a good look around to see if he could get it there. They'd be taking the first calves(?) from Sydney up there, they'd be out riding the first day, riding a couple of days ahead to see where he could go and where he couldn't go.

Were they property owners?

Mr Cotter: Oh no, not necessarily, they'd be anybody. See they got Joseph Wild on the first expedition, they got him because he knew all about it, been around up there probably himself.

He was an ex-convict was he?

Mr Cotter: Yes, and he'd mix with the convicts and they'd tell him "You can go this way, you can go that way" or something like that, give him rough ideas. You see all those explorers that went out into Central Australia they'd be able to tell the next bloke wouldn't they, where not to go, they would read their diaries camped by marshes and things like that. I think a lot of information came from escaped convicts, they'd know a lot about it.

When was it that Gareth Cotter came out here?

Mr Cotter: About 1824 but there'd be a lot of people about before him. If you read the Government gazettes, if you go the Library in Canberra and read the Government gazettes of the escaped convicts, there might have been hundreds, probably up to a thousand of escaped convicts listed so they'd be roaming about somewhere, wouldn't they. When Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth went over the Blue Mountains they found their way out of the top of the mountains by cattle tracks, the cattle were there before them - so somebody had them there; and one of the explorers that went up north discovered - the first man that went up the Northern Rivers, he came on to a tribe of Aborigines and there were a lot of half-caste kids there, so there must have been someone else there before them. But the escaped convict didn't say "I'm up at so-and-so and there's a good place, I'm running a mob of cattle and getting a good living" did he? They'd go along and get him and hang him. Same with Murray who was supposed to be in ... such and such a date... the first white man, was 1834, and they know he was the first white man because when he rode along with his horse and pulled up, the Aborigines came up and looked at the horses - but they'd been doing that for 200 years, since anybody who rides up with a horse, they'll walk up and have a look at it won't they, so I don't think that was an explanation - if it was the first time they'd seen a horse they'd probably run away.

A lot of history books say the first people around here were, say, in the 1830's and that kind of thing, but that's mainly, I suppose, from the official reports of the past?

Some of you have been reading Murray's book of Yarralumla haven't you?

That was Maria.

Mr Cotter: Well, he was supposed to be the first one to go through Kiandra but on his way back he found a corpse and a bridle beside it, so there'd been someone there.

I suppose explorers would have been pretty disappointed to find out that they were there!

Mr Cotter: Oh well, the escaped convicts tell the story - they went out, they might have survived, a lot of them died - Tasmania I think had better stories of them I think because ... cannibals eating one another over there - but escaping in 1830, they were hanging them for that, escaping from custody. Governor King - Canberra/Goulburn he complained, he didn't mind them hanging them but they were hanging them for too long, some of the skeletons had been hanging for 12 months, they just hanged them and left them there as a lesson for escaping.

How long - what sort of time would it take to get into Queanbeyan?

Mr Cotter: Well, after the train in 1880 - there was a train then - a terminus, so they'd go by train then, Queanbeyan was a town, back a long time they'd get supplies there, further back you'd have to go to Sydney.

So if they were going into Queanbeyan or out this way, how long would that take?

Mr Cotter: Well, they'd probably ride about 20 miles a day - 20-30 miles a day - one old man who used to live down here, he died in 1920, he used to walk to Queanbeyan and back in the one day - that's 30 miles. He'd get up and start about 3 o'clock in the morning, go in and do his business and then get home sometime during the night - that would be 60 miles, it wasn't much trouble to ride the horse. The horse in the sulky used to to about 10 miles an hour so it would be about 3 - 4 hours in and 3 - 4 hours back.

That's not bad. It would be a rough old journey.

Mr Cotter: I had a cousin who used to tell the story about Dr Blackall, he was an old doctor in Queanbeyan, a very friendly old bloke. My cousin was riding to Queanbeyan on horseback and he met the doctor coming out in the sulky at Williamsdale. So he talked to the doctor for about 15 minutes or half-an-hour. The doctor said to him, "Well I'd better be going - there's a lady dying in Jerangle."

(No problem - he takes his time!) So he had another 50 miles to go. You would probably think he was a careless doctor, but while he was talking the horse was having a spell - see he'd have to have a spell whether he was talking to somebody or not - he couldn't dash off and knock his horse up - he had 70 miles to drive.

the huts?

He was once.

Mr Cotter: I might have been talking to him then .. I can't remember. Hal White and, what's his daughter's name? Was it Frances? that politician lady.

No.

Mr Cotter: What are you planning information and then going to put a Research Officer on and find out everything.

What we're looking for is a few main trails which we can put to research and to Adaminaby.

Mr Cotter: Well, see there are two alternative ones to go up Naas Creek. Those lost ones would know all about it wouldn't they, they wouldn't have to go up again

they went up from Naas right up through to Bobeyan. There'd be a trail marked on the map

What about the old Cotter house, would there be one going up to that?

Mr Cotter: Road? Well the one we use now is the original. In 1861, you see there was no measured road, that was there then - they surveyed it down here at about Michelago Creek ..Trevett ...measured from here to Michelago Creek to find out where they were over there, that was the first survey.

They must have been fairly trapped (?) some of them would have run into trouble wouldn't they with their broken axles and things like that.

Mr Cotter: Well, the Naas Creek they'd be bogged in that, the whole problem in those days you couldn't go and put cuttings in, now they'd have dozers, so you'd go up and down Naas Creek, up and down that. They've altered since, but there's such a lot of crossings - if they were going along now they'd just go along one side, but you couldn't put cuttings in so you'd probably go down across the creek here and back there, and you might cross half a dozen times just to find level spots.

Mr Cotter: Whose family has been in Australia the longest?

Danny: Probably mine - they used to work up near the sugar cane areas.

Mr Cotter: It's unusual for Irish families to go where there was work(?), they were nearly all Italians.

Yes, there were a lot of Italians up there

When did you say they were first used?

Mr Cotter: The roads? Oh well, in 1838 Booth had the Demanding Run and it would be used, the Gudgenby one or the Bobeyan one would be used then, but see Cotter was out there in 1824, well he'd be using them, finding some access to go, right from Kelly's Plain and into the Cotter, so he'd be using some of them, but this gap is called Booth's Gap, well he was there in 1838 he had a licenced run.

When did they stop using them - I suppose when we got main roads?

Mr Cotter: When motor cars came in. Well the police, when were the police motorised at Lindfield - that was in about the 40's was it? (Yes, I suppose that would be in the 40's). Well the police were still mounted until the 40's. The clergy they were motorised about 1929 - the police from Michelago used to go to Naas and they'd ride through. But they got a T Model Ford about 1929 I think. In my early days ... they still used to ride through, people didn't have motor cars in those days, they'd ride through and bring stock through and I'd even see tramps walking through there - they'd go anywhere they could get a feed, and so they'd go through that way - it would be a long hike from the Forest to Bobeyan wouldn't it - they'd probably go to Naas or something like that.

My father was telling me once about a man - in those days there were no pensions or anything - people used to have to walk about ...to get a feed - but there was a bloke went through on crutches, he was crippled and had a pack horse, and he had a long rope on him, and he'd walk along on the crutches and let the rope run out and the horse would walk up and catch him up - he'd be getting it hard poor wretch, wouldn't he?

It must have been difficult if it was muddy, his crutches would be sticking in the mud.

These trails - were they just used by the bullock drays, or by horses?

Mr Cotter: Mostly horses, pack horses, Naas Creek was used by bullock drays. (Somebody?) and Bobeyan well they used to take supplies to Sydney and bring them back, and they used it in the early days. In don't know what year it was last used, but Naas was still there in my time and that's where the road is constructed now on the old Naas.

So before they actually built main roads they went up to Queanbeyan and they went to Sydney from there if they wanted to

Mr Cotter: Well, see the train didn't come through ... Goulburn, but the train was only about 1880 in Queanbeyan too see, but they had bullock teams carting supplies - if you read Moore's book there, the .. the Moore's were carriers, see the carriers would be carrying supplies on their bullock teams to Queanbeyan

The Moore's - is that the Williamsdale's petrol station?

Mr Cotter: Yes. Have you read any of his books? Bruce the father - he's written 3 - the Burra, (?Borough) The Moore Family, and he wrote one on Lanyon - 3 good books. I think.

I should be able to get some copies of those.

He was saying that his grandfather was writing a book on the Cotters at one stage. He died before he finished.

Mr Cotter: Yes - he had 2 chapters to go and he died.

Did they publish it anyway?

Mr Cotter: Well, they were talking about it - they want to finish it, but some of the historians reckon they'd be better publishing it as the unfinished works. The chapters he missed out on were on Michelago and the Resumption by the ACT.

Someone was reading about James Ryrie, I think,was his family around here before the Cotters?

Mr Cotter: Oh no, they came about 18--, after Rossight,(?) it might have been 1840 something like that - Rossight was here before - have you ever heard of Rossight - Rossi, Captain - he was a Corsican, he was a first settler out here - they've still got his hut over there at Michelago Station.

Afterwards take the track up to Blue Water Holes - how often - you'd only go up there for summer grazing would you?

Mr Cotter: Yes - we were in the Blue Water Holes, we used to agist sheep there from the other owners, but then we got a snow lease in the 40's that was on the Murrumbidgee River and Tantangara ~~and~~ and Nungar(?) Creek, they were grazing rights

and you could use them for 6 months of the year, I think it might have been 1st December to 1st May or something like that.

Before that, did you used to take stock up ...?

Mr Cotter: When we got the opportunity - my father he spent his early years shepherding up around the Blue Water Hole, then when they got a drought, he'd ring up some of the people ... it was mostly owned by very large land holders, they'd own most of the land there - the Australian Estates and all those people, he'd ring them up and they probably wouldn't be using it and they'd lease you a paddock out. T.A. Fields he owned a lot of land, it was nearly all owned by big land owners down the West, the Riverina down there, they'd bring them all up in summertime.

Who would have been the biggest round here, Cunningham?

Mr Cotter: The land owners out there, nearly all West on, in my time, nearly all West on. Campbell from Yarralumla - he originally had Coolamine - he selected Coolamine.

Who were the people

Mr Cotter: Cunninghams were but I don't think Cunninghams were into (?) the snow leases at all.

I was reading some history notes and it said, I think, Cunninghams had all the sheep and the rest of them had the cattle.

Mr Cotter: Well that book written by Bruce Moore on Lanyon will tell you all about the Cunninghams - his whole story is of the Cunninghams

Which way did they take the cattle?

Mr Cotter: From here to the snow leases?

Yes.

Mr Cotter: Well, if we were going to Cooleman, go to the Forest, down to Naas then back up Orroral, but if we were going to Tantangara we'd go to Bobeyan, Yaouk (?)

How long would it take roughly?

Mr Cotter: You'd travel about 10 miles a day - taking them up, we'd leave the Forest one day, we'd go to Mount Clear one day - 2, 3, 4 days - that's summertime. Wintertime might put an extra day in, something like that if its short days, take a day to ride home, about 40 miles.

It would be good to retrace that. Is there an actual road there now, a trail?

Mr Cotter: The problem is, a lot of these tracks, the horse tracks there, and then those that came in the Snowy, especially up there, and they went and put roads suitable to them and following the old trail, but they'd be pretty close to it I think, the ones going through Yaouk, through to Tantangara.

I'm more interested in the ones that haven't got the road on them at the moment, like the ones that are a bit harder to findif you're following a road...bit

boring ...looking for one that going to be overgrown in a few years.

Mr Cotter: Well I think the one around Booramba (?) into Orroral would be difficult that way, because it hasn't been used for many years - 70 years or something like that.

(End of Side A of 1st tape).

Tape 1 - Side B.

Mr Cotter: ... people in the Army, or the forces, they got grants of land ... and if they bought any, they could buy without paying a deposit, whereas free settlers or ex-convicts had to pay cash for it.

Are National Parks and Wildlife taking surveys of the Hill?

Mr Cotter: Yes - some out Reedy Creek - we've got 200 or 300 acres there and they're negotiating ... the price now.

You were saying before that you took the stock up to the grazing leases, how would you camp at night. How would you keep them altogether?

Mr Cotter: Oh, well you build what you call a "break" - a yard out of bushes, cut trees down, but after you'd been doing it regularly, well you'd have the yard there and different people would be using it. On the initial trip you'd go ahead and you'd find a place where there were a few trees, or if there happened to be a fence, and then just build a brush yard - just cut trees down and build it around.

And do you still remember where those were?

Mr Cotter: Yes.

So maybe we could find where they were and ...

Mr Cotter: Yes, a couple of Parks they burnt those things, most of those things, any houses they'd pull them down and any fruit trees they'd cut them down.

Mr Cotter: ... turn off here and it goes down the Limestone.

Oh, yes - that would be down there towards Our Beach - I think we've walked along part of it.

Mr Cotter: You go down here and it comes out just before Dick's Hut - that's where they crossed the river there - this is only a new road this one, this has been put in since the Landrovers.

Livingstone and the Gully?

Mr Cotter: This road?

Yes.

Mr Cotter: No it would be shown on your 1 in 25 - its a measured road. I could have taken you down but it would be easier to walk down. It is possible by 4 wheel drive, it's just that it's rough. That's the way the bullock dray used to go - if we've got time we might come back up.

Did they use those drag logs around here? You said something before about dragging logs behind.

Mr Cotter: When you get over the hill there, there's a lot of erosion and that is caused from the drags. If you get onto the old road on Fitz's Hill you'll see where all the trees have been cut down there for drags - up the top of the hill there, there'll just be little stumps left.

Mr Cotter: Well yes, on sidelands - you get that in that book by Stevens - O'Rourke's going down to Gippsland, they took the wheels off one side to drag it around the side of the hills.

Be good for the dray. What about the axles did they have to cover that with something?

Mr Cotter: Oh well it didn't matter much - probably only be short distances, and the axles would be pretty rough.

What would they do if they did break an axle or something like that?

Mr Cotter: Well, I don't know - they just didn't break them I suppose - just tie them up is about the only thing they could do - very seldom axles would break - I've never heard of them breaking because they were very big and they didn't get any heat in them - they'd be going that slow, and with a bit of grease on them.

All those trees down there, are they all planted? The pine trees on the hill.

Mr Cotter: No they're all natural - Black Cypress - they're all natural.

Brother said they used shoes on the bullocks as well.

Mr Cotter: We've never shod them, not in my time, they were doing a lot - on the roads they'd shoe them.

We're thinking of...finding and taking photographs of some of the old trees that were used as markers.

Mr Cotter: Yes. There's one down there, its well kept, its a dead Black Cypress on the corner of his block, Marist block.

A lot of them wouldn't be there now though would they?

Mr Cotter: A lot disappeared but there's quite a few about - some of them grow over if they've still got bark on them, or green they grow over them.

Mr Cotter: ... finishes up - it turns round and comes down onto Dicks. Along the top of that limestone where you can see some rocks. That's only been, the road - previously it just came straight down and came into the river down there and came across the willow trees - the woolshed was down there just on this side of the river.

These disturbed rocks there you can see, is that where it used to come down? They would have been the bullock drays?

Mr Cotter: Yes. That's the road. The ... on this side and they'd put about 4 bales of wool on the bullock dray and take it up and drop it off on the Limestones. You can see some logs lying there, can you see them on the ground there? Well, that's where they dropped the wool off about there - I think that's the log, they'd drop 4 bales off, then come back and get another 4 bales and then go over and roll the other 4 back on top and take it down to the railway. The crossing is very sandy as you know, it couldn't pull very much through then - the bullock drays - but when they had a load on going up there with the bullocks, they'd be pulling hard and the hooves would burn - you'd smell the hooves burning.

There are so many things you just wouldn't realize - you'd walk right past them and you'd never know that they'd been involved - like the drag logs.

Mr Cotter: ... The Old Bullock dray road went there, but they only used that going up - they couldn't use the cutting coming down, because you were on the wrong side of the bullocks - they used to go straight down over the hill, you couldn't keep them in control.

How many bullocks were there in a team?

Mr Cotter: About 10 - 12 - 10 mostly we used here. If they got out in the open country they used more. They used all drays here, no wagons.

What's the difference?

Mr Cotter: Well the dray's got 2 wheels, a wagon's got 4 wheels, and you couldn't turn sharply with the wagon, but see on these bends you could just turn it around. They took the bullocks up this way because you're on the near-side of the bullocks and you could keep them in ... keep them in there, but if you were coming down you'd be on this side and the dray was running free you'd have a job to keep them in, so they took the easy way if they had a tree on them, they just went straight over the steep place... I'll just show you, its up here.

Well that's where they went coming down, they went straight down there, it was very eroded down at the bottom there they'd have a tree on, little bits of gullies and things down there. They went off just - they reckoned that was better than trying to get around here - straight down there, so you'd want a fairly good tree. This was the steepest part of the road - when they were bringing supplies over - there was a hut down there at the river, they'd leave half at the river and bring half the load up then go back and get the other half.

Did they change the bullocks around often?

Mr Cotter: No - only had the one team, and what they would do, they'd leave them down there and let the bullock go there - take them down of a morning, pull them up, bring a load up and let them go, and they'd be anxious to get up. Instead of coming right through to Michelago they'd knock off - they'd unyoke them there and let them go, they'd yoke them up of a morning and bring them up early in the morning and let them go again.

Oh, so they'd be looking forward to going free again?

Mr Cotter: Yes. Well if you got them tired and on that hill there, ... second load, they'd be a bit like human beings, they'd be a bit reluctant ...

Did you have names for them all?

Mr Cotter: Yes. The road came along here, it wasn't as wide then, but you'd bring your dray out to here and the bullocks would be way out there, so you'd lock the wheels of your dray and just turn around and take the bullocks back around. But if you had a wagon you'd have to make a big circle - which we won't be able to do now. So it didn't matter how sharp the turns were they could just turn round. See that's one of the problems, why they had to put a tree on - when you put your brakes on a two-wheel, it puts all the weights on the wheels and it pushes the pole down, you know - the bullocks are holding it up, and the wheels locked and pushes it down, so going down hill apart from going fast, you'd put your brakes on and push the weight down on to the bullocks, so by putting a tree on it lightened the weight - then you'd have to shift your load going up hill and down hill - steep down hill so you'd shift your load back so it wouldn't be too heavy on them and coming up hill you'd have to put your load forward because the pole would come up and lift the yoke up and choke them.

A lot of hard work!

There's a tree down there somewhere that's been blazed for a road.

So mostly this road is the same old road is it?

Mr Cotter: Pretty well, yes. It used to come down there, but it was eroded too from - come around there - see just a little bit lower there, it came out to the corner there. But a lot of the dirt would be brushed off it with the drag so we put this one (road) a little bit higher. It came down there - that bare spot there - it came back up here - but otherwise it would come straight down.

Mr Cotter: Back up there - instead of having a cutting, they just followed the level.

Mr Cotter: This tree, that's numbered over here.

Is that marking the corner of the property?

Mr Cotter: Where this road goes through this block (The Forest) - out of this block into the next block. You've got the tracings that Brother Kevin had, well this is the measured road - its not up there, the measured road is here and that the tree - if you get out you'll see 17 carved into it. Although the tree is marked there, the boundary is about here - I think it might be down there at the fence - that would be about the boundary - one boundary is up on top the hill there, and the other one's over - that tree's marked over there on that corner. Did Br Kevin find a name for it yet, for his block there?

I don't think so.

Mr Cotter: We used to call it - there was an oak tree there that was supposed to be the biggest oak tree around and we used to call it the Big Oak, but Br Kevin didn't like Big Oak because the Greenies have got - what is it? - One Oak or Oak Hill or

something up there at Bredbo and they're always in court - Jimmy Hand and Morosi and those.

(Gap Morosi, Crocodile Dundee etc)

It's good to see a bit of water out here - it was as dry as a bone last time.

Mr Cotter: It will only take a minute, I'll take you down to this tree then you'll know where it is in future. There was a tree there but there's only the remains left of it lying there.

Mr Cotter: North West corner of Br Kevin's block. Can you see that tree up there that's broken off and it's got a scarf on it, well it'd have the number on. If you went up there it would say - can you see the tree? Just over the ... its got a scarf out of it and it'd have the number on it - it would have 2 numbers ... that block. That tree, if you looked at the reference it would say about 40 links South West you would find the corner of that block - that's the corner of the block - see those rocks there - so by going back to the tree, then it has an arrow in the tree and you measure from the arrow, the point of the arrow and the surveyor, even if there's no mark there he'll let you know exactly where it is. So if you paint that one, if you paint the number in it you'll be able to pick it up. I think there were 9 posts there on that..... Do you think you'll find the tree again?

Yes.

Are we on the road down to Naas now?

Mr Cotter: No, we're on the Canberra Road - Smith Road.

Down to Williamsdale?

Mr Cotter: Yes .. well, down to the cliffs at that camp, what do you call it?

Excalibur.

Mr Cotter: Been around this road?

No.

Mr Cotter: You should be able to find the one (marker tree - dead Cyprus) down at the river now if you get those tracings. On the southern side of the gully near the sheep bridge above water level. Just off the river a bit in a lot of tea-tree. The numbers on it are very distinct.