

This is an interview with George Day at his home near Wagga where he now breeds horses. George was the manager of the Chalet in the early days until about 1948-49 and then moved to a property near Talbingo and then that was flooded when the dam was built and he's since been over this way. George was very involved in the early days of skiing, but was also involved with horses, taking groups of people into the mountains on horseback and got to know some of the huts and some of the areas used by the stockmen during that time.

KH: If we could maybe start at the beginning, in terms of when you were born and where you were born.

GD: I was born at Tumut.

KH: In the town itself?

GD: In the town, right in the town.

KH: So the Day family

GD: They're a very old family about Tumut, the Days, some of the very first.

KH: Some of your brothers are still there aren't they. Has one of your brothers got a garage there?

GD: No my brothers are both on the land, my two brothers.

KH: You have a brother, Buster Day?

GD: Yes, he's on the land, he's a younger brother than me and I've got another brother out here between here and Gundagai, at Wantabadgerery.

KH: I've heard of Wantabadgerery. What's so famous about it.

GD: Well I don't know, it's just good grazing country, it's an Aboriginal word, means 'plenty tucker' - a lot of lagoons and possums and things on the river flats there, and wild ducks.

KH: How far is that from here?

GD: Twenty-six miles, about mid-way between here and Gundagai.

KH: You did most of your schooling at Tumut?

GD: No, we lived in the mountains always, my people at Yarrangobilly.

KH: You were born at Tumut but you were actually based at Yarrangobilly.

GD: Yes.

KH: At the village or at the caves.

GD: Well my grandfather had the lease of the caves and also had some property at Yarrangobilly and he had a house there. We lived at both places, backwards and forwards, there was families in both places all the time. We used to run the stock and that mostly at the village, sheep and cattle, get the meat there for the caves.

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KH: That was low enough to have the stock there all year round.

GD: Yes, all the year round.

KH: Even though you got snow sometimes there. So what were your first jobs?

GD: Well we went to school, had to go away to school, we came to Adelong. My mother had friends there.

KH: You'd stay there for the week?

GD: No we'd come ^{home} and be there for a year, it was only horse and sulky those days.

KH: You didn't go home for the weekend?

GD: No weekends, it was a fair scout away. You'd only go home for Xmas.

KH: The track down Talbingo mountain would have been very rough.

GD: It's the same road down Talbingo then as it is now - it was all rough and rocky, it would take a couple of days to get to Adelong.

KH: You were born in 1907?

GD: Yes.

KH: That seems like a hell of a long time ago.

GD: Yes it is a long time, not far to look back, a long way to look ahead, 70 years. I can remember things quite well.

KH: Now it seems that the journey from Yarrangobilly to Adelong, a couple of hours in a car and you wouldn't even contemplate it for a weekend?

GD: No.

KH: You'd only go home in the school holidays?

GD: Not the mid-term holidays, only the Xmas holidays. We'd usually cheat a bit going back and get an extra month till the hot weather passed over.

KH: What sort of jobs did you have when you were back at home?

GD: We went back there and worked about on the place with stock, worked with my father and grandfather. Actually the first job that I had and got paid for was lighting fires up ^{on} the open country at Goandra with the late Fred Lampe and out as far as Currango. They used to burn it off in the autumn and then again in early spring. Old Mr Lampe, we had to ride around, if we even saw a wind fall, a limb would come down or a tree had fallen down dry enough to burn, burn the leaves off and that's the way we kept the big bush fires down.

KH: And it encouraged the grasses I suppose in the following spring?

GD: Yes encouraged the grass and it's the only way they will ever prevent the bushfires, is to keep it burnt down.

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KH: What was it like working for Fred Lampe ?

GD: Well he was a wonderful old man.

KH: He came from out at Coonamble didn't he?

GD: Yes. A quid a week he said, not overpaying you, you're not 21 yet - things like that - he was a very fair old chap just the same.

KH: So you worked at Goandra and was the big homestead there then.

GD: Only for summer, they might have 30,000 - 40,000 sheep there in the summer and seven or eight men.

KH: But was the big homestead there then?

GD: No it wasn't a big homestead, it was a big mess room, kitchen and then just huts for the men to sleep in. There was no such thing as a garden or anything like that.

KH: Was the shearing shed there then?

GD: They had a shearing shed but that was only for crutching, there was no shearing done.

KH: The remains are still there.

GD: They'd just crutch them. Old Mr Lampe would say just crutch around one eye, wig them around one eye, just enough to see them home, don't waste any wool. One of his old things they used to torment about.

KH: He was tight with money you mean?

GD: Yes. He reckoned if you cut a lot of wool away around the eye a lot of it got wasted, leave it there until shearing time and you'd get it.

KH: And the shearing was back in Coonamble!

GD: Yes.

KH: And they'd rail them, they'd send them by rail?

GD: Most of them were railed to Tumut, they'd get a train, a special train. They'd be unloaded at Tumut and then they'd walk them up to Goandra mostly in mobs of between 3,000 - 5,000.

KH: And he'd have 20,000 - 30,000 sheep up there?

GD: Probably yes. I can remember one year on Currango when I went there rouseabouting, sweeping up, they had 108,000 on the place. They'd come in from the various other stations - *belonging to Australian Estates.*

KH: Do you remember the old Currango homestead in the top of the plain?

GD: I can remember seeing the old places, but in my time it was always the present one where Tom Taylor is now.

KH: Was it?

GD: Yes.

KH: That was the stockmen's base?

GD: Yes. And the shed used to be down on the flat. The old men's

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quarters, they're still standing up.

KH: Yes, what they call the pine hut or pine cottage?

GD: The pine hut was for the overseer but the men's quarters were up past the homestead up a little bit further on the knob, near the stock yard, there used to be ^{a big} stockyard there.

KH: Yes, it's all falling down.

GD: There used to be the men's huts ^{up} there, the big mess room, and down near the round stock yard there was another little hut there.

KH: There's a cottage called Daffodil there now.

GD: That's a new name since my time.

KH: That sounds like the cottage that you're mentioning.

So you don't remember much about the homestead across the plain.

GD: No, well that was empty in my time. When I went there as a late teenager, nobody lived over there then.

KH: That would have been in the early 20s, after the War.

GD: Yes, they'd left there then, they'd moved over to the other place.

KH: It's very derelict now, it's still standing.

GD: We used to do a good deal of crutching out at the Pockets.

KH: The Pockets hut was there?

GD: Yes, we camped in the Pockets hut, there was no shed there, just had a little portable two stand plant which you'd drag out behind the tractor - had like a framework put up covered with a big tarpaulin, just bagged the wool up and cart it back and press it at the main shed over at the homestead.

KH: Do you know when the Pockets hut was built?

GD: I couldn't answer that question, no.

KH: It was there when you were there which was ...

GD: Yes, it was there when I first ^{went} over.

KH: And that was in the early 20s?

GD: Yes the early 20s.

KH: Oldfields hut - did you ever go across to Oldfields hut?

GD: No, that was further over wasn't it?

KH: Yes over the ridge, up Murray Creek.

GD: No we never ever got over there.

KH: You would have travelled the Long Plain?

GD: Oh yes up the head of it.

KH: You would have gone to Cooinbil - Cooinbil homestead?

GD: Yes, been up there a lot.

KH: Were there people there?

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GD: In my time, Taylors used to live there and then after they left there, old Bill Taylor, that was Tom Taylor's father, they left, a chap name of Thomas went.

KH: To Cooinbil?

GD: Yes, ^{looked} ^{it for} after Dr Campbell named the place. They must have had it then and they eventually sold it to Naughton. They only took stock up there in the summer, nobody lived there, it just deteriorated.

KH: You're talking about Coolamine or ...

GD: Yeah Coolamine, oh you're talking about Cooinbil?

KH: Yes.

GD: Oh, on the head of the plains. The chap in my time, in my early twenties, who lived there was George Hunt, at Cooinbil. He was married to Tom Taylor's sister and he used to look after it for Reids - no, Reid was the manager of the property down the country ^{that} owned it. I just can't think of that name, but Hunt lived there in my time looking after it. I know old Mr Reid he was the manager of the station down the Riverina - it's on the tip of my tongue - quite a big place.

KH: Do you remember any times there when stock was snowed in, you stayed up too late or anything like that, any dramatic things?

GD: There used to be a little bit but never that they couldn't get them out. In the early days when stock get snowed in, I've seen it happen at Kosciusko. If they try to get them out when they get into trouble, go away and leave them alone, ^When the weather clears and the snow sets, it will get hard, ^{and} the weather fines up then you can get them out. But if you try and get them out through it, you knock the stock about. It was just before that happened - changing the story a bit - when McPhies lost all the bullocks at ^{Consett} Stevens Pass, what they call the head of the Guthega. It snowed very early, a big fall of snow ...

KH: In May or something?

GD: No, it was April, late April, there was a big fall of snow and the McPhies had been in the mountains too, such a lot of snow they panicked and they had a lot of bullocks running in the Whites River area there and they went up and they were floundering about. They mustered them and got a lot together and they drove them right up the Guthega Valley, nearly right to the pass - we call it the head of the Guthega - they call it Consett ^{Stephens} Pass. It was about one or two o'clock in the morning - a beautiful clear frosty night and they'd been ^{dropping} the cattle and they were pretty wild when you got near them, or at close quarters. They were a bit ^{knocked} up, so they left them there, ^{300 odd}.

KH: How many were there?

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GD: 300 odd. They left them for the night and they had a track that they'd broken over to Whites River - there was a bit of a hut there before this other one was built ...

KH: Was there?

GD: Yes, a little old bark one, before this one, Billy Napthali worked on this one.

KH: Yes it was built in 1934 I think.

GD: There used to be a little slab bark hut there, pretty rough.

KH: Like a bit of a galley.

GD: Yes. They went back there because they had a bit of horse feed there and the other pack horses were there. Well it was a clear, cold frosty night and they went back next morning and the bullocks were dead to the hoof. They all lay down, they were real hot and a bit exhausted - the cold frosty night, temperature went down, could have gone down to 5° or 6° or something. Anyway it killed every ^{beast}.

KH: In one night?

GD: Yes in one night - they froze. It doesn't take much you know to get a beast hot to kill it. You can kill one very easily by running it about even here. Here a few years ago, before we come in here, there was some cattle belonging to my son, he had them there on the place and one broke away, wanted to go back to the others, where it had come from - we'd cut it out - anyhow run it around for a while and I said 'you'd better let her go, we'll get her some other time'. 'No' he said, he pushed it and shoved it around, completely knocked up, it lay down, it was dead next morning. They don't take much killing that way. Killed two last year going up on to Davey's Plain from Tom Groggin when we were over there, when I had the boys over there, giving this chap a hand with the cattle.

KH: Davey's plain is on the south side?

GD: Yes on the Victorian side. Dogging them and getting them hot, they don't take much killing. But these cattle were very hot, mustering up, working hard in the snow, one would break away and they'd put the dogs on them - you go near them and they're pretty wild - try to get away until they're completely done and they lay down hot, got a chill.

KH: I suppose the same would happen to a skier?

GD: Well it would, yes.

KH: And it was near there that you had to dig in that night?

GD: Yes, just up on the ridge above that, yes.

KH: When you were going out to meet Tom Mitchell?

GD: Yes.

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GD: But I ^{said} to Ray Adams I said 'We're like the boy that dropped the kettle in the sea and asked the captain, is a thing lost if you know where it is'. Well he knew where ^{it} was but ^{he} couldn't get it. Well we knew where we were but we couldn't see. I said. 'Now what we want to do, dig in and try get ourselves' - see we ^{had} plenty of tucker, we had a sled, a cwt of meat to feed the dogs with.

KH: How many dogs did you have?

GD: Ten.

KH: That was the dog team from the Chalet?

GD: Yes.

KH: This was the team that you managed?

GD: This was my own.

KH: Nothing to do with Ray Adams?

GD: No.

KH: He had a separate team?

GD: Well he had bits and pieces you see and three or four of the dogs that Ray used to use were mine anyway. He used to go and cart these packs.

KH: What sort of meat did you have on the sleigh?

GD: What we did we scraped out of the meat house - we didn't want to carry any bone or anything, so we reckoned we'd be away five days or six days and we wanted to give them two feeds, so we worked it out, made up a little bit and wrapped it in a bit of newspaper, so we could just pull it out and throw it to them in the paper. They'd soon eat the paper off it. We got the chef to trim up everything he could to give us some scraps.

KH: That was quite a lot of meat?

GD: Yes it is.

KH: Most of the sled was meat, most of the weight.

GD: Yes well we had our blankets and our tucker, but it was mostly meat, but without them - you don't feed them - away five of six days as it is - we did need it, you take a little bit for an emergency, you never know in the bush what's going to happen.

KH: Did you take a tent with you?

GD: No we didn't have a tent, we had a sleeping bag each, that's all. We didn't have anything else, apart from a couple of canvas sheets to throw on the ground and pull another bit over you.

KH: Who was with you?

GD: Ray was with me - just the two of us.

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KH: Did you have skis as well?

GD: Yes we both had skis. We used to ski a lot.

KH: You were sliding along holding onto the sleigh?

GD: Well not always holding on, only when you'd come to a bit of a downhill. If you want to go down a long steep hill you just pull^{ed} them up, you've got a little chain hanging there, you just put it round the ^{ru}cker to go down the hill and that holds it back, stops it from running over the top of them. Dead easy to pull and tear up the snow.

KH: Instead of tying a log ...

GD: Yes that's right.

KH: And so you got into this blizzard below the top of the Guthega?

GD: Yes, so we dug in there. I said 'we'll dig in here before we get wet and cold, while we're feeling alright' - tried to get a bit organised. It wasn't too bad, we were crunched up, we had plenty to do. It started to drip. *They created a bit of heat, the dogs.*

KH: You had all the dogs in with you?

GD: Had all the dogs yes. Then they started to growl and fight - we left them harnessed up.

KH: You must have had quite a tunnel?

GD: It was like a long lair, we just went and scalloped it all out and made a wall along, put them in and then we dug a bit out and started blocking it in. It was something to do you see.

KH: So you didn't sleep that night?

GD: Oh no. They got a bit restless, well then we were able to give them a feed, only by feel. We get into the bag and get a packet of meat and just give it to them. They'd growl and fight, theⁿ it started to drip so we were rounding it off, so the water would run round. Then Ray decides to have a smoke, he used to smoke, that was the ^{last straw} - fill the whole joint up - put that out pretty quick.

KH: You never smoked?

GD: No I never smoked.

KH: So the smoke was mixed with the - what was the other thing you said - the ^{fact}ing ^{of the dogs}.

GD: The ^{farting}ing of the dogs, yes. A funny thing - it flashes back - I was telling them this story at the Chalet, it was pretty cold, and every now and then 'How you're going Ray, how you feel' ... 'Oh pretty bloody cold'. After we give these dogs a feed and they started to stink a bit, an hour or two later, Ray comes up with a great saying - 'They're turning the central heating on a bit'.

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KH: It was good in a way having the dogs.

GD: Yes the dogs created a bit of heat.

KH: Even though they smelt a bit...

GD: Yes they stunk like the devil.

KH: You didn't try to get to sleep or anything.

GD: Towards morning you'd have a stiff neck and that.

KH: Did you find everything next morning. You would have had a lot of snow blowing in as well.

GD: Well no, we blocked it completely in, you breathe through the snow you know, you won't smother. You get plenty of air, but it was pretty stale.

KH: So anybody skiing past next morning wouldn't have seen you.

GD: No wouldn't have known, it was snowed over. The wind was blowing, it was still blowing next morning, it was still foggy actually. You'd hear the wind going over, it just seemed to be a continuous roar. Ray had a watch luckily, I didn't. He struck a match every time to have a look at it and the match would hardly burn in the finish. In the very early hours of the morning when we reckoned it would be getting light, we had a look out and couldn't see a thing. Later on we had another look out and it was just breaking day and it was blowing like the devil, but there was no snow, there was patches of fog that would come sweeping over. Then we got out and soon got organised and got on the way and was over at Whites River in two or three hours time.

KH: Once you're on the Rolling Grounds ...

GD: Straight along where the fence goes, there was no time ^{at all}.

KH: I bet you were glad to get to Whites River.

GD: Yes, we got there and had a bit of a clean up, got a good fire going and we stopped there all that day and the next day it was nice and clear.

KH: The next day you went on to Grey Mare?

GD: Yes, we made a bee-line down, we didn't go round above Mawsons, we made a bee-line - had a bit of trouble getting across the Rocky Plain Creek, down there at the Valentine. We had to unload our sleigh, got a narrow place and threw everything over that we had. I think it was Ray that got over somewhere, anyhow he got across the other side, we had a bit of rope luckily, we hooked it on and pulled the dogs through, then pulled the sleigh through. We nearly had a bit of trouble with the dogs, because they were all in a heap and got washed around, got all tangled up in the water and fighting against one another. We could have lost them.

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Actually we should have unhitched them and took them across one at a time.

KH: Yes it's a bit dangerous leaving all there

GD: Anyhow we didn't do it going back.

KH: You'd been better going up higher wouldn't you via Mawsons?

GD: Yes, but we just didn't realise that the creek would have so much water in it at the time, then it was a long ^{way} to go back.

KH: This was about 1936 wasn't it?

GD: I think it was '36 yes.

KH: A year after the Grey Mare, a year after Charlie Bell was at the Grey Mare.

GD: Yes, I think it would be '36.

KH: Then you stayed at the old Grey Mare hut?

GD: Yes. The only thing that was there in a tent was a big camp oven, gee it was a big one. Took the lid off and it was full of wax matches.

KH: Wax matches??

GD: Yes, you could strike them anywhere. That seemed to be the main - they were the main things in the mountains, the wax matches. You didn't go anywhere without a box of wax matches. We always used to have a little tin, a tin box to carry some in.

KH: They were dangerous weren't they?

GD: They reckoned so, but they weren't that dangerous. A mouse could chew them or a rat, they reckon they could start a fire. I think they got the blame for a lot of things they didn't do.

KH: I met a man called Andy Metcalfe down at Tumberumba and he worked at the Grey Mare at the time and he showed me some, he was telling me about them.

GD: They are dangerous if they are left about for rats and mice. If one was on the concrete floor and you trod on it, you could strike it.

KH: Was the old Grey Mare hut reasonably substantial, was it fairly weather-proof?

GD: Yes it was pretty good, it was alright.

KH: It was a big place wasn't it?

GD: Oh yes, a big hut. It had been built on. There'd been a hut there before, it was quite good. They'd dragged in some better timber for the other part of it.

KH: That would have been George Bell.

GD: Kerry Pierce was interested in it in the very early days.

KH: Was he from Tumberumba way?

GD: No down on the Murray, Greg Greg station. He had money in it

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because, a chap that I used to camp with at the Dead Horse hut, Leo ^{Byatt}, was a stockmen. He was a cousin of Kerry P^erce and he did the blacksmithing there one year, sharpening grills and that.

KH: At the Grey Mare?

GD: Yes.

KH: That would have probably been '35!

GD: Well it probably would have been about then, yes.

KH: It only went the one summer at that time. It started again in 1949, much later, and it was going much earlier.

GD: Well it was the early time. Leo was there doing the blacksmithing, for Kerry. I can remember him telling me the story and Kerry said to me 'At least you'll do a bit of work, you won't want to take me down'. ^{Not do enough work.}

KH: And you were going to meet Tom Mitchell there, he was with a group of doctors?

GD: Yes, but he didn't turn up. We played about, skied about, it was lovely weather, waited and waited. Waited the next day until about mid-afternoon, then struck off and went straight right back to the Chalet.

KH: In one go,

GD: Yes, in one hit. We didn't undo the dogs, we got home about twelve or one in the morning. It was good travelling though, it was nice and hard.

KH: Did you go up higher that time, across the Valentine?

GD: No, we went back and did the same thing, we crossed at the same place actually, but we learnt a bit. We went up by Dicky Cooper's hut ...

KH: Was that still standing then?

GD: The little old hut was there but the cattle had all the walls knocked off it. They used to get in there and the walls were pushed and the palings were pushed off.

KH: Do you remember who built that?

GD: No I don't, that was a pretty old one.

KH: There's just the roof on the ground now.

GD: It's finished, yes. Well we past that, we didn't go down into the Whites River ^{Hut}, we kept up on Dicky Cooper's Bogong, went straight up onto the top, right along the ridge to the head of the Guthega at ^{Consett Stephens} Pass, followed the ridge right along.

KH: Then down Guthega river?

GD: No, we went along then on to Tate, down the ridge into Spencers Creek.

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KH: It would have been dark wouldn't it?
 GD: It was moonlight, nice clear night.
 KH: It was dark by the time you were on the Rolling Ground?
 GD: Oh yes, it was dark, but as clear as day sort of thing and hard, lovely travelling, the dogs would trot along on it, no trouble at all, knew where they were travelling too, going home.
 KH: Is the sled still around?
 GD: I left everything at the Chalet. This particular time that I went out there I had a little sled that I'd made myself. I made it out of light conduit, oxyed together. I did a lot of welding, I'd weld it and *braze* it together, out of iron. It had a runner about that wide, not too wide because it fiddles about too much and you put a little strip along underneath and that stops her from broadsiding, like a groove in your ski only this was sticking down.
 KH: But wouldn't an iron sled be too firm, too stiff?
 GD: I don't think so, it would be better. The iron ones, you can hit it up against a rock or a tree and knock the snow off, but with the old wooden ones, they're creaking all the time and something's coming to pieces, screws coming out, they work loose at the joints.
 KH: Did Ray Adams have wooden ones?
 GD: He mostly had wooden ones, but I made a little steel one for him.
 KH: He used to bring the supplies into the Chalet didn't he?
 GD: Well perhaps a bit of fresh meat but not a big lot of supplies. Ray was mostly carting luggage for the people. Actually, there wasn't much money about, it was me who talked Ray into going into that. I had a few dogs and I organised the whole thing for him. Ray would go and cart their packs, we were both in it for a bit of extra money. You had to pick up a quid in those days, things were tough.
 KH: You were getting paid by the Tourist Bureau.
 GD: Yes, a public servant, I hated it.
 KH: I don't know, you were there for a long time.
 GD: It was good for me. My boys went overseas, I had a trip overseas through the Bureau. I brought the snow plough to Australia, I went over for the Government. I had a winter in Canada working on snow ploughs and then I selected one I thought would be suitable in Toronto and had it shipped back, unloaded it at Sydney off the Orangi and drove it to Kosciusko. It was only a big truck, four-wheel drive, had the big snow plough on the front and the wing on the side for knocking the edges down on one side. You could put about 10 ton of rock on it to keep it down, to give it traction.

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There was ^{nt} any four-wheel drives about in those days. *You'd have chains all round.*
 KH: You'd use that to clear the road ...
 GD: Into the ~~Hotel~~, over Renn^{et} Gap. Then in the spring, if you got a bit of early snow, it wasn't skiable about the hotel, you'd keep it open up to Smiggins so the bus could run up. Once the road closed ... then it ^{would} open up again in the spring.
 KH: Is it still around?
 GD: No, during the War it was still running then, then when War broke out we were under the Railway Department and they had use for it somewhere down about Wollongong, shifting coal or something. They sent it back later but it was wrecked then, it had . . . enough - it was a good machine.
 KH: When did you first learn to ski?
 GD: We used to call it skiing, but it was always snow shoes at Yarran-gobilly. We used to go into Kiandra to the sports, but I never skied until I went to the Chalet.
 KH: You'd go to Kiandra to watch the others did you?
 GD: We used to go in and compete, but in those days, a race - you'd get up there to what they call the black stump and up and down to the first landing - you'd stand sideways on them and then kick round and you'd just run straight down and fall over to stop if you didn't lose one of your shoes beforehand.
 KH: Did you have a go on the jump at Kiandra?
 GD: Not at Kiandra, no. But even in those days there was no jumping to it - they'd just run over and depend on a little bit of *space*.
 KH: No techniques, no leaning forward!
 GD: I never bothered to jump - 3 or 4 years before I jumped and that was just for an event. But when I started to jump I rather liked it - I got out to 44 metres - not a bad jump. I jumped 54 metres in Canada, *at Rebelstoke*, a little place in the Canadian Rockies. It was a natural hill, a big hill there, what they call the 90 metre hill. I stayed there a day or two. There was a lot of boys there working in the lumber camps, mostly Fins and Norwegians and all those - they'd be out on this hill jumping and skiing about. 'Have a jump, George, have a jump'. I was ^{nt} game to run down it hardly. They said I'd find it easy, so I ran over it and it was easy. They were good to watch those boys, *they were doing 60 or 70. You were just falling down all the time.*
 KH: What other things did you do back in the 20s? You went to the Chalet in '32, that was a significant part. In the 1920s you would have been from 13 ... by the time you went to the Chalet you were 25. That was your young manhood, what else did you get up to?

GD: Well prior to that I used to break in horses and ride about and work on the places with the stock in the summer. The manager of Currango, Mr Ted ^{Brassil}, his son Len, had a mail contract from Tumut to the Caves. He had so much work to do and stuff to carry that he couldn't cope with it - he didn't have any money, and I didn't have much - he scratched up a bit. My mother put in some money and we bought a truck, it was the second truck in Tumut that Len and I had. It was an International ^{with} solid tyres on it and ^{we} did a lot of carting of salt ^{blocks of salt for the mountains} or anything at all, wire ... didn't matter what it was because the horse teams were working. We used to cart a lot of pipes for the road when they were putting them under the road. I had trucks then for 4 or 5 years.

KH: That was in the summer time?

GD: All year round.

KH: That was quite a good business!

GD: Oh yes, it was alright - we were only young fellows, played a bit, didn't finish up with much in the long run.

KH: Did you get married before you went to the Chalet?

GD: Yes, ^{Gordon was a little boy of two when we went to the Chalet.}

KH: Was your wife a local?

GD: No a Sydney girl originally but she'd been up in the country a bit and round about. Gordon was two when we went over, Margaret was on the way then, Billy was born there later.

KH: The route that you took the truck was mainly from Tumut to Kiandra?

GD: To the Caves, but we would go to Currango.

KH: You could drive to Currango?

GD: Yes.

KH: What was the way into Currango?

GD: We went from Rules Point, up the Long Plain for about a mile and a half then you'd turn right and cross the Murrumbidgee where the old road ...

KH: There's a bridge there isn't there?

GD: It wasn't there when we started, it was built after.

KH: How did you cross?

GD: There was a good crossing, very wide, down below the bridge. Old Mr ^{Brassil} built that bridge.

KH: The concrete one?

GD: Oh no, it was only a wooden one he built across, with a pier of rocks in the middle. I haven't been there since the concrete bridge was built.

KH: It was probably an SMA one I think.

GD: No he had a wooden bridge there.

KH: Then you went up on the Port Phillip Firetrail ...?

GD: Then we went straight up across, where they used to call that paddock 'The Meadows', then we went out right on the divide, the Currango boundary, then down Bald Mountain and then come out where you can see Currango, the old stock yards.

KH: That's now called the Port Phillip Firetrail and Molly Taylor refers to it as that too. There's a Port Phillip Gap and I've been wondering where the name came from.

GD: Well I never heard that name ^{much}. Further round there was a gap but we never travelled it, it was only a bridle track through there, it was known as Dairymans Gap. I used to ride that way over from Rules Point to Currango. There was a big hill that runs down there, what they call Pig Back, it was right down on the end of it, we used to call the boundary where the road came through, the top of the Bald Mountain. You could get out there in dry weather, it was no good in slippery weather. But the road out there, across the plain, most of those places, apart from the little creeks across it, when you wore two tracks you'd get out on to the snow grass and make another one.

KH: Who was running Currango at the time?

GD: Mr Ted ^{Brassil}, he was the manager.

KH: Who owned it?

GD: Australian Estates ^{Mortgage Co.} - they handled a lot of stations about. They had eight or ten stations throughout N.S.W. and they used to send the stock up there for summer grazing. That was one of our biggest things - they feed the stock, they used to in the old days, they never drenched stock like they do now, they used to feed them salt. They'd get very salt hungry up there because there's not a lot of mineral in the ground. Our first job when we bought this truck was a 100 ton of salt.

KH: That would take you a few loads would ^{it} it?

GD: Yes, two ton a time.

KH: 50 trips!

GD: You could put on 2½, but you're overloading, tyres weren't very good in those days, you'd blow them out. If you got 6,000 or 7,000 miles out of a set of tyres you were going alright, not like they are now.

KH: That's a lot of salt, 100 tons of salt.

GD: They ^{paid} us four pounds a ton. ^{Eight quid the trip.} We'd do a trip in a day and one of us would do a trip at night - that way.

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SIDE TWO: TAPE 1.

KH: It sounds like Currango was a really big flourishing place, very active, a lot of money spent on it!

GD: Yes. In the summer there, the men would be up with the sheep and looking after them and they also had another place over near Fairbairn that was under Mr ^{Brassil}'s control, they owned that. Then they had a lot more lease country, out from Kiandra, near the Three Mile Dam. They had a big lease about there and used to take stock out there.

KH: Did you ever take supplies to some of the shops at Kiandra?

GD: Up to the Three Mile, I've taken salt up there, up Roaring Mag, up that steep hill.

KH: What about the shops at Kiandra?

GD: No, all their supplies came from Adaminaby, they never ever got anything up that way.

KH: You would have taken things to some of the other homesteads, like Long Plain and Cooinbil!

GD: Yes we took stuff up there.

KH: You would have driven up Long Plain?

GD: Yes on a few occasions, up to Cooinbil, take a bit of salt up there. As a matter of fact I shifted George Hunt and Tom Taylor's sister when they left there and they got a place over - a job over - they left that and went for another job over at Adaminaby. I went up and shifted there '40 year gathering' as the saying is.

KH: What size were the blocks of salt?

GD: Well mostly hundredweight bags, what they call Liverpool salt, there'd be 12 to the ton - 180 lb bags.

KH: Could you lift those up?

GD: We'd handle them, wheel them on the ground - 12 to the ton.

KH: It was solid or loose?

GD: Loose salt, like coarse salt.

KH: Like cooking salt?

GD: Yes, they used that mostly. Sometimes they'd put rock salt out, the big lumps. It didn't seem to be as good as the other.

KH: They'd just spread it about.

GD: In troughs, big long wooden troughs. Get a fall ^{off a} tree with a fork on the end of it - two limbs stick ^{ing} out so as it wouldn't roll over. ^{Then} it out. Chaps would pack the salt out then on pack horses.

KH: Did you ever do any adging or making of slabs?

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GD: I've done a lot of building ^{of} yards and things, built sheds and things.

KH: Were you involved in the building of the corral at the Chalet?

GD: Yes, I built that, all the men I had there, yes we put that up. You know those old gate posts there ...

KH: Yes, where did they come from?

GD: Now this little round house that I built there, what they called the garage, that's octagon - eight sides - I got the idea from a place that I stayed at in Canada, Mortabella, ^(?) just near Ottawa .. It was eight sides and it all pitched off the one pole in the middle. Well those two gate posts, it was the one tree and we cut it down below the hotel, that was for the centre of the shed. It was in a little bit of a gully and we couldn't pull it out with our tractor, it was too heavy and a bit steep, so we got another one, we felled another one and rather than leave it, I put the saw through it and made two gate posts of it. I reckon they'd last a long time. Fifteen foot round the butt, at the big end, that big post.

KH: Where did they come from again?

GD: Down below the Hotel at Wilsons Valley, below the old Hotel, where the stone hut is now.

KH: The old pitsaw was there somewhere wasn't it?

GD: Well the pitsaw - Sawpit creek was lower down. You know Wilsons Valley Inn, do you remember seeing that on the way to the Chalet?

KH: Yes.

GD: Well the old Wilsons Valley hut was a bit above that and that was a sort of a hut there that belonged the Main Roads Board in the early days and they'd always have a few men there, maintenance on the roads and always a man lived there in the winter to help them get transport through and cutting off wind falls and all that sort of thing off the road.

KH: You would have dragged the logs with a bullock team?

GD: No, no, with a tractor - D4 Caterpillar ^{We had it on a jinker.} We used to go down there and get a lot of timber to make bridges for our tractors. We used to go down the valley in the winter, straight down. You just put it over the little swampy creek

KH: The creek does lots of meanders there.

GD: We'd build these - cut the ^{ash} logs and split them, put two girders across these little swamps then deck it with the round timber, then your tractor wouldn't break through into the creek when it was covered with snow.

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KH: I think some of the old poles are still there. I think the bridges are all gone.

GD: We made a bee-line down over Sugarloaf to the Chalet. Come up out at Betts Camp up over Pipers ^{Gap} - Perisher ^{Gap} - and then down to Pipers Gap.

KH: Before when we were looking at some photographs, you mentioned a Trap yard creek. There's two creeks that come off the back of Stilwell there isn't there - Trapyard and what was the other one?

GD: Onion Garden.

KH: Why was it called Onion Garden?

GD: Well it used to be a camp over at the top of Soles Ridge where I told you we used to go down fishing. There was a stockman's camp there. The old poles were up but there was no hut, but they'd go in the summer and put tarpaulins over it and camp there and pitch a tent. One of the chaps going up with a pack horse, he had a butt of onions in his bag and he lost a few up there and that's how it got the name. A shower of rain came and they put up sprouts, there was a few onions growing there. Old Jack Adams told me that, he was another chap who used to look after sheep.

KH: He was Ray Adams' father?

GD: He was his uncle.

KH: I've heard of Jack Adams.

GD: He spent 60 years looking after sheep in the mountains.

KH: And mainly up high?

GD: Right up high. He used to camp just near the Sugarloaf, he had a hut there, it was called Adams' hut. The Snowy pulled that down, or the Water Commission I should say, pulled down old Adams' hut and built a nice stone hut there. Now the bloody Park Trust has dismantled it. I noticed it gone the other day.

KH: That was a good hut. I never knew the old hut.

GD: It was an old tin one.

KH: Yes Herb Hain was telling me a story about how he'd saved Jack's life one time. Herb said you might know something about it. I can't remember the details but Jack had a fall somewhere and he barely got back to his hut and he couldn't move anymore and Herb came into the Chalet and asked you for help. You said, 'she'll be right' and you went down there in a truck or something.

GD: I just can't remember that now. I used to see old Jack a lot. He used to come up to the Chalet, he was a great old fellow, he had meals there with us and boarding when I was a little boy. I used to go out for the day with him riding.

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KH: He never skied I suppose?

GD: No never skied.

KH: A lot of the old stockmen never skied.

GD: He was a funny old man. He got very old and he used to look after the sheep ^{for Southern and Allens} but then he got very old and he still wanted to go. They said 'you'd better give it away Jack'. Howard Suthern was going up to look after them. Well the first year that he didn't go, they went up to muster - they all go up to muster - they struck bad weather. Remember me telling you the thing to do was to leave them alone. They had a few together and they struck this snowy weather so they thought they'd go home. They thought they might as well take the few that they had mustered and Jack heard of them coming down with a couple of thousand sheep instead of seven or eight thousand and he was somewhere there. The first one of them he saw he said 'You've got a new system of mustering now, you bring the stragglers first'. Well the usual thing was to get the mob, then you'd go back and muster the stragglers. He was like that, he was a witty old bloke.

KH: He'd be pretty dry I should think!

GD: Yeah a pretty dry old stick yeah. Never drank. He had an old brother that was an old drunkard. He was a very honourable old man just the same, very good old chap.

KH: And they mostly took sheep up in the high country?

GD: Cattle too, but most ^{of} the people had a lot of sheep there.

KH: Do you remember when that Foremans hut was first built, Dr Foremans?

GD: No, it was there when I went over.

KH: It was there in 1932?

GD: Yes.

KH: Was it an old hut then?

GD: It wasn't old, no, it wasn't very old then. That was made out of fairly good timber. Dr Foreman sent up - he had a place down near Bombala and he had a bullock team there and he sent his team of bullocks up and they pulled all the stuff in with bullocks, the timber and then it was left there, all the yokes and things. It was the last time they were used because Percy Harris used to look after it in the summer, Dr Foremans. Then when I got bullocks - I had bullocks at the Chalet, I bought the yokes from them.

KH: You had bullocks at the Chalet did you?

GD: Yes, before we got tractors or anything. When I went over we

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just pulled everything down with horses. I had a little old Citroen tractor, but that had sort of worn out, couldn't get tracks for it anymore, it wouldn't pull much anyway. Then I took some bullocks over from Yarrangobilly, got them from my father. I bought two leaders off Tommy Yan - he's in Adelong now, old Tommy.

KH: He dead now.

GD: Old Tommy's dead is he?

KH: I talked to him about four years ago.

GD: Poor old Tom - well he was a great bullocky you know, I bought two leaders off him - Cocky and Pilot were their names - I broke these others in then and we used to pull all our wood down.

KH: How many in the team?

GD: Ten I had.

KH: Did they come right up from Wilsons Valley or somewhere.

GD: No, only from the present road - you know that little road where you turn off the main Summit road - well there wasn't any road then, everything had to be taken down with a slide.

KH: You only used the bullocks for that bit?

GD: That's all, but everything had to be there. Actually I put that road in. They've never improved it, never went round the side or anywhere - we just did that with our own staff and a bit of spare time. The idea was for there not to be a road there because it's not a Chalet any more. In the old days if a road went to it, it was a hotel - a Chalet was a place where you had to get there under your own steam.

KH: Even though it was only half a mile?

GD: That's right. It was a big job you know.

KH: Well all the building material. All the building material for the first Chalet was just dragged.

The Dr Foremans hut, you had a photo there of just the chimney sticking out of the snow and the rest of the hut was covered.

GD: Yes it used to cover. Although it was on a fairly flat place, the trouble was there it was like the snow fences they used to build in Canada - sweeps along and deposits the snow here, it forms a heap and then it keeps building up - it covers the whole thing over. I can remember on one occasion - you don't know why it does it, these things happen - but a bag of bottles going down to the dump, we used to take it down on the road down the valley, then turn up the Onion Garden creek, we had a place up in there - the garbage dump. This bag of bottles fell off the slide and was left there and a snow storm come, drifted over it and it

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started to build up and it formed a big drift, built up and up and we had to go around it with the tractor eventually. There's no reason why it does these things, drifting snow. Sometimes you'll see that it will scour away around rocks.

KH: Yes, that's right, around huts too like Albina hut - it always has a big scour around it on the western side.

GD: I was looking at Seaman's Hut - I was up there a couple of weeks ago. Blizzards and the weather is eating into the mortar, chopping it out in time.

KH: And the Dr Foreman's hut, you moved that did you?

GD: Yes. Bill Wallace had that lease and it was when they formed the Park Trust, he was the last man to have the lease. When he got the lease, it was so much a year, but he had to pay for any improvements, that means that he had to pay a couple of hundred or something like that for the hut that was on it. They wouldn't give him his money back, so he said he'd pull the hut down. They said you could do that.

KH: When his grazing lease became Park.

GD: Actually - when they formed the Park it was still grazing land but there was a strip around there that they called the Natural Chase that stock was prohibited on.

KH: The very tops?

GD: Right on the tops and it included that Foreman's hut area.

KH: That was in '44 wasn't it? The Park was declared in '44.

GD: Yes. Actually they had started the survey, from the Chalet, we were closed then. We were living at the hotel, but the Chalet was closed. I was in charge of the ^{whole thing}... I used to go up there every now and then. The Department let the men use the staff quarters at the Chalet and I organised the horses for them, for the survey and everything.

KH: To survey this Nat^{ural} Chase?

GD: The whole area of the Kosciusko State Park - a 100 horses they wanted. They had about 10 surveyors, qualified surveyors ^{they had the big theodolite}. Then there would be another 10 blokes who would take readings and that. Every surveyor had his chain gang and he needed a horse and they needed a couple of pack horses each - horses saddles - the whole outfit. We hired those from anyone around.

KH: So you just knocked the hut down ...

GD: Well he pulled it down, ^{Wallace} pulled it down and we had two tractors belonging to the place, an Alice Charmer and a Caterpillar and we had trailers. We went up the pass, the pass further up and then went

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straight down, wound our way down through there.

KH: Where did you take it too?

GD: He brought it from there, then pulled the hut, packed it on like - as it went down, in the timber and the iron, anything any good and back up on to the road, then he loaded it on to a truck and carted it away. Otherwise he couldn't have got it out.

KH: When was the first time you went to the Dead Horse Gap Hut?

GD: That would be in the early 30s, about the second summer I was over there.

KH: You'd ride ... down Merritt's Spur or somewhere?

GD: Wouldn't go down Merritts Spur, you'd go up to the Snowy Bridge, that's the bridge you cross over the Snowy before you get to Seamans hut, you turn left there and go over to Rams Head and go down straight under the Rams Head, you'd come out at the ^{Bogong} Creek, right down at the creek where it runs in below the Dead Horse Gap or Groggin Gap.

KH: And Bogong Creek would be on your right coming down the ridge?

GD: It would be on your right, you'd cross it right at the junction with Thredbo.

KH: I think that's a very old track isn't it, a very old one?

GD: Yes. There used to be a big stock yard on the way down there. It was what they used to call Barrys Yard, there was about 2 acres in it. It had been built out of logs and timber, they'd taken bullocks there, dragged all these logs around. They'd go up there mustering and they'd muster for a day and they could put 200-300 cattle in there and hold them for a night or a couple of nights if necessary.

KH: There's several places where it's flatter coming down that ridge, it must have been on one of these flats?

GD: It was pretty clear, yes, just a slight fall. The remnants were there when I - the old yard did you go up that track?

KH: I've been down it several times.

GD: Yes, that's the way I used to go.

KH: I've done it from various directions.

So Dead Horse Gap Hut had been there for quite a while?

GD: It was there when I went there.

KH: Were there stockmen there at the time?

GD: Yes. I got to know them, they used to come over and get a few stores.

KH: Who was down there at the time?

GD: Leo By^{att} and another chap McGuffick^e from Jindabyne - Laurie McGuffick^e they were the first two chaps I knew. Then there was another

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chap Bill McGuffick^e who's still up at Jindabyne. Talked to him the other day on the phone, good mate of mine.

KH: Bill McGuffick^e?

GD: Big tall fellow. He owns a place out Moonbah way.

KH: I haven't met him. I don't know any McGufficks^e yet.

GD: There was another chap, he was one of the poorer ones, Berry McGuffick^e they called him - he drinks about the pub a lot - he's always on the grog. Is that still going [tape].

KH: Yes.

GD: We'll have a cup of tea when you're ready.

KH: Yes. There was a hut - it's in some of the old ski year books, just below the top of Kossie, either on Rawsons Pass or just above Rawsons Pass.

GD: That would be Wraggs^e hut.

KH: But Wraggs^e had a hut right on top, do you remember that?

GD: No, only the remnants of it.

KH: Below that I thought there as a hut at some stage.

GD: No, I didn't know anything about that, not in my time.

KH: You remember Betts Camp?

GD: Yes.

KH: What about the old Betts Camp on the old Summit Road, did you ever go there?

GD: No, I only knew the Betts - lived in it all one summer after the fire while we were building.

KH: You were at the Chalet when the Chalet burnt down?

GD: Yes.

KH: It's surprising that nobody died in that fire.

GD: Oh yes. We lost everything we had - I had a kid under each arm - that's all I got.

KH: What about your luggage, did you get any clothes out.

GD: Oh mum threw a few things out the window, but it was pretty close to us, where we were. We had a girl working there, worked in the office and the boiler room was in the centre of the building in a pit. Right along side the boiler room was the drying room - it was safe enough all round, it was insulated - that was to save any heat

(Tea break)

... It was Ken Breakspear's wife too incidentally, before she was married. She came up and we were in a room upstairs above the kitchen

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and she come up - we'd had pictures that night and there was to be races the next day - Alpine club. After the pictures everyone said, we'll have an early night and all go to bed. Everybody went and about 12 o'clock I shut the engine down - we used to run a diesel and we'd put it out at night. After a while Honour came up and knocked on the door and said 'I think I can smell smoke somewhere' ...

KH: Is that Honour Mitchell?

GD: Honour Henderson, Ken Breakspear's wife now.

I don't know what made me look, but I automatically jumped out of bed and I went to the boiler room and it was full of smoke and I could hear a sort of crackling and I looked up - it was lined with fibro, timber slats along it and the flames were just coming out round the slats you see, it was burning above. What I did, I ran straight up the back to where the staff quarters, woke up a chap that used to drive the tractor, Mick Thompson and a couple of others and I said 'We've got a fire Mick, come on hop out of bed quick, I'll go and put the lights on'. The engine started up first kick, I threw the switch in and it kept ^{tr}ipping, it wouldn't hold, that shows there was a dead short - that's what I think started the fire. It happened to be above the boiler room where all the conduits come along, that's where it branched off to every wing and all the junction boxes and everything were there, so I think that's where - the switch wouldn't hold in you see. ^{We were in darkness.} So then we went out - we couldn't get at the fire you see - so we sent outside, grabbed an axe that was up in the boiler room, got up on the roof and chopped a couple of sheets of iron off so if we could see if we could get into where it was. That was the end of it, it let the smoke come out - flames came out of there like old Mick was on the job. We had to go down and woke everybody up, I went and got my two kids and mum threw a few things out the window, we got out. She was running around worrying about everybody else, to get them out and that's what we were afraid of, there might have been somebody still left in there. They managed to get out and we went right down into the ski room at the bottom and the fire was all burning the other way. Most of them could grab their own things, most of them did you see. Then they got outside and everybody, all the guests, most of them - Ken Breakspear said 'Good-o we'll get a new Chalet after this' - they were all as happy as Larry, they were having a great time, *it was like cracker night.*

KH: Were there any drums of fuel that exploded?

GD: No, all that was up at the back. They were ⁴round it until ^{the} small hours of the morning you know - it was breaking day you see. Then eventually

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we got up to the big shed we had at the back, we had three or four sheds there, I had cows stabled there, I had a shed full of fodder and a big shed we used to put the tractors in ^{and a forge in it. We lit up the forge and boiled some water.} Then got down to the old store - didn't get anything much - there was plenty of tin stuff, the cases had burnt off, but there was all sorts of tin ^{and} food.

KH: It would be a bit of a lucky dip wouldn't it.

GD: By that time most of the skiers were organising themselves and getting ready to move off. Reg ^{Gelling} and another chap went off to the hotel - we had a photographer there, Earl McNeil, from the Sun, happened to be there at the time. I can see him now, out with his camera getting pictures. He wanted to go straight away, and he wouldn't be stopped. I knew he'd get into trouble, so Reg ^{Gelling} and another chap went with him - couldn't ski very much. He wanted to get a big scoop and he had these pictures in the paper. He rang and got a taxi to Cooma - they don't miss much those boys.

KH: So you would have known Ken Breakspear from about the first time he went to the mountains?

GD: Yes.

KH: You'd be a year older than Ken I suppose, he's about 73, 74 isn't he.

GD: I think Ken's got a year or something on me, it's very close. There's Reg ^{Gelling}, Ken Breakspear, Colin Gilder and Curly Annabel.

KH: Is Colin Gilder still alive?

GD: I haven't seen Colin since we were at Talbingo.

We were all about the one age.

KH: He wrote some of the first articles on the huts. He had a hut in the 1935 Year Book - 'Fifty Skiing Huts of N.S.W.' - that's a very valuable piece of information now, 45 years ago now.

Did someone have your job before you went there?

GD: The first winter when it opened - you see my people, mother and father, run the Yarrangobilly Caves and then old Mr Lamb ^{le} asked them if they'd go over for the winter because there was no season much at the caves. So they did that and I went over with them and stopped for a little while and then I came back and looked after the place at home. An uncle of mine went up there in the winter - an uncle by marriage, he was married to my mother's sister - then when dad and mum come home in the spring Rowley stopped on until they got somebody, he stopped on all the summer, then his wife went up - that was my auntie - and they finished up staying up there the winter, then they couldn't get away quick enough. It was right

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at the time of the big Depression and things were tough enough. Old Mr Lamb^{le} used to come to the Caves and he said 'What about you, you're a young chap, you'll enjoy it over there'. So mum and I thought it would be fun just to go for the winter - things were a bit tough and we were going to get a few quid, didn't do much at home.

KH: And you stopped there until 1949?

GD: Yes, late '48.

KH: 16 years.

GD: Old Mr Lamb^{le} retired and it was taken over by another chap Best, he was a superintendent of the Public Servant Board, I couldn't stand a bar of him - wanted to do this and do that - nobody told me what to do, I was the Captain of this ship, as Mr Lamb^{le} said - I told him to jam it. They don't know what to do you see, I don't want them to tell me what to do, how to organise to get things for the winter.

KH: Especially when you've been doing it for 16 years. So you really learned to ski during that time. What was your wage the first year, do you remember?

GD: No, but for seven months - they called it the summer season and five months was the winter season, ^{the busy} period - I can remember the first pay pack that came up, I wasn't even thinking of money, hadn't been there a fortnight - I think I got about nine pound for a ^{few days} - I think about ten or eleven pounds for a fortnight plus keep. When I left there I was only on 500 pounds a year, in '48 - that was big money. Prior to that, up until the time of the Chalet fire and then a season after and Newman was in charge, I was thinking about pulling out because the money wasn't good enough. He must have heard about it and he come to me and said 'I'm going to put you on the same money as the manager at the hotel, George, 500 a year'. That's what he was getting running the hotel at Kosciusko. It doesn't seem much in these days does it?

KH: No.

GD: There was other ways of looking at it, we had our keep, there was no limit to anything we could have, I had a car - we had the department car - but I had my own car, but I never bought any petrol, oil, tyres or anything.

KH: So you had lots of fringe benefits?

GD: I always had good horses, unlimited feed for them - that was part of the deal. That started early in the piece, I got a cow when the kids were small and I ordered a ton of chaff. The old buyer in Sydney wrote me a big long letter, what was it required for and all this. I wrote a short note back - got the girl to type it - saying it was to feed a cow

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to get some milk - I had two small children. Then he wrote another long note back wanting to know what benefit the Chalet would gain from this.

So the next one was fairly brief over the telephone. He went and saw. ^{Mr Lamb} George wants something, and he said 'send it, don't query it, he doesn't want it for nothing,

^ he can't get rid of it or sell it, he's not trying to do us in' - he was like that. So I never had much trouble after that. What got me, I'm not much good at office work - I hated it - wasn't educated for that, but the rubbish they'd write - mostly I wouldn't know so I'd just chuck it out. I had them pretty-well broken in.

KH: Before we were talking about the structure that's still there on top of the hill and that's the remains of the old T-bar.

GD: Yes, it had a shed around it and big doors, we used to close at night.

KH: But the top structure there is iron?

GD: Yes a big bull wheel. That ran on railway tracks, that ^{was} to keep the rope tight, if you wanted a bit more tension you'd put more rocks in it.

KH: You started to build that in 1938.

GD: Yes.

KH: But the posts down the hill, they were wooden weren't they?

GD: Yes, but when they first put it up, they were A-frames, four posts. Two bolted together, two on that side and then two cross lengths. We ^{replaced} those by one big post in the middle and a big T-piece on it, across. They're all gone now. Would you like another cuppa?

(Tea break)

KH: ^{Engl} used to take in Elyne Mitchell, up the Hannel Spur as far as the snow and then go back and they'd ski down to the Chalet, you would have been there then wouldn't you?

GD: At the time he brought them up Hannel Spur I skied across from the Chalet and met her down where they call Byatts Camp, that's right at the top of Hannels Spur. That's where this ^{chap} Byatt used to camp sometimes.

KH: Leo Byatt!

GD: Yes. Right at the top of the spur, at the edge of the timber.

KH: Did he actually have a hut there or something?

GD: No hut, just a camp - a tent.

KH: Did George Peterson ^e come after you?

GD: He went up to the Chalet after the hotel burnt down.

KH: He was mainly the manager of the hotel?

GD: Yes.

KH: Was he there when you were?

GD: He was there when I was at the Chalet. He came at the end of '39/'40 when *Spect* left - he was the manager of the hotel - he went to Orange ^{when} they built that new hotel the *Canobolas*, he went and opened that and managed. Peterson came up and took over from him in '39. When the Chalet burnt down they sent Peterson ^e up to the Chalet for a year or so. He had a heart attack or something, he got very sick and he had to leave. I went and saw him in Sydney not long before he died, he was living ^{over} at Northbridge.

KH: He wrote a whole series of articles in a magazine called 'Snow Revelry' which are very valuable. He wrote down everything he could remember just about.

GD: Yes he was a good writer. He used to go up there a bit, he worked in the office in Sydney at Chalice House, on the staff of the Tourist Bureau for many years before he went to manage the Chalet.

KH: There was another time, Ted Winter tells me the story of one night people having a lot of trouble getting into Betts Camp, coming up the road in ones and twos. Did you ever have any disasters from people trying to get into the Chalet?

GD: We had a few lost at times, but we were always pretty lucky, we found them. We used to usually know where to look for them. What they'd do is they'd come up and follow the snow poles up as far as Spencers Creek bridge and then they'd go up over Sugarloaf and make a bee-line for the Chalet.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 1

SIDE 3, TAPE 2.

KH: That hill that you call the Sugarloaf, that was the weather station later on wasn't it?

GD: That's right, right on the top of it.

KH: Your tracks would have went slowly round the left of the top?

GD: Just a little bit around the left and then made a bee-line, we used to go with the tractors. When you're going, travelling up there in the windy weather, I've done it myself, you put your head down and your're plodding along into the wind, the wind's pushing you round and you don't really notice it. If you're in the night and you think you're going alright and you usually find them up some of those little gullies over there. When

they know ^{they're} wrong, people usually pull up.

KH: Wouldn't they see the lights from the Sugarloaf?

GD: On a bad night you wouldn't.

KH: The Red hut - why was that built?

GD: That was built by the Main Roads Board - maintenance - a couple or three men would camp there with their horse and carts.

KH: Did you ever try and follow the old Summit Road. The old road that Wragg ^e took his bullock team along.

GD: No I never ever did, but I more or less followed the ridge, along the ridge - onto the fall of the Thredbo. You can see remnants of the steep pinches where it's pretty bare. I often heard fellows talk about 'up along the old road' but they followed the high ground.

KH: ^{old} I've tried to find some of it around Mt Stilwell, round where the chair lift goes across, the one that was dismantled. I couldn't see any of it.

GD: It's pretty hard. The only place that it is very noticeable - I've noticed it quite a lot - it's quite bare - it's just a steep pitch, it hasn't guttered out much and that's over near where the old trap yard used to be, lower down the Onion Garden, further down the ridge towards the Kosciusko Hotel, on that side.

KH: Those trap yards, they were still there when you first went up?

GD: Yes but not usable. ^{Any wild} horses ^{had} been driven out of there by that time too.

KH: They were built to catch wild horses?

GD: Yes.

KH: Those horses you showed me in the photographs, were they wild horses?

GD: Some of them, but not all of them.

KH: They come in ^{from} the Cascades I suppose?

GD: No we used to go out to the Cascades for them. When they had the trap yard there, there wasn't so much activity about there. Once you disturb them they move a bit, they get a bit further out. The odd ones would come in, but very odd. Sometimes a young stallion, when he comes of age, he gets hunted from the mob by the older horses, he might wander round, he might get with a few domestic ones, get in a bit closer.

KH: Where did you catch your brumbies down in the Cascades?

GD: All in around that area, anywhere around there.

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KH: Did you have a particular trap?

GD: No we used to run them down.

KH: Lasso them?

GD: Yes. You chase them, you don't always get them either, you miss some, run them till they knock up or get pretty tired, get up close to them and then they sort of get frightened. They very often hug over close to your horse, put your hand over them and the halt around in front of them, put it on them that way, tie them up ^{to} a sapling of something.

KH: You'd have to be a pretty good rider wouldn't you? You'd be going at speed wouldn't you?

GD: You've got to go at times. What you do, starting off after you see a mob, you don't go flat out after them, you just follow them, let them make the pace, sit in behind them. They'll tire pretty quickly because they'd not real hard fed and then you're picking up the one you want which is usually the tailer ~~anyway~~ because you're getting - you've had enough of it too perhaps. Then when you see a little bit of favourable ground and reckon he's a bit tired ^d then you make your run.

KH: This might take all day mightn't it?

GD: Oh no, you might run them for half an hour or something. They want to get away from you.

KH: Did you ever go up into the top of the big Bogg ^y, into Wombat Gully where there is a brumby trap.

GD: Oh yes, all up around there, the head of the Big Bogg ^y.

KH: Did you ever use that brumby trap? It's on a horse track to Drift Hill, it goes past what is now a ruin of Teddys Hut or McGuffickers hut.

GD: Is it still there?

KH: The traps still there but it was rebuilt in 1962, it was built at the site of an old hut. The trap was built at the site of an old trap, it was there a long time apparently.

GD: There used to be a lot of those temporary quick traps ^{put up} around, here there and everywhere. We built a few, but not too many because what happens, very often you build one and you go and look for the horses and they're not where you'd think they'd be and sometimes they go the other way and some other bloke comes along and he catches them in your trap and he has the luck, so we mostly run them down. If you've got a good dog that will heel a bit, that's a good way, put the dog on them and get them a bit tired ^d and they keep kicking and wanting to fight the dog. Once they

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go to bolt the dog heels them and stops them.

KH: You'd use the Dead Horse Gap hut as a bit of a base wouldn't you.

GD: That was our sort of base, we'd bring them back there. What we used to do then is put a chain on one front leg like a hobble, a chain about that long, and cut a stick about the size of a fence post and tie it to the end of the chain, ^{let them drag that} on the flat and they could go to the water, they couldn't go far with it, they could drag it about and get a drink and have a feed, they soon get used to it. In a day or two change it on to the other leg so it wouldn't be too sore, ^{You'd handle them + they} would soon settle them down.

KH: Did you also break them in?

GD: Oh yes, we used to take them back.

KH: Did you personally break them in?

GD: Oh yes, ^I still break horses in, that's part of our job here too, to break horses in.

KH: So you still do a lot of riding now?

GD: Yes I ride track work every morning.

KH: You've got ^{your} own track here have you?

GD: We've got a half mile track and twice a week we put them in our float and take them down to the proper course, put the jockey on them.

KH: You get up pretty early in the morning by the sound of it.

GD: Oh about 6.

KH: Nice and cool then.

GD: It doesn't hurt you, I like to do it while I can keep going, keeps you fit.

KH: Did you ever do any tours on skis? Did you ever go across from the Chalet to Townsend?

GD: Oh quite often.

KH: Did you use skins?

GD: ^{Skins} We have used skins but they sort of went out. I always used the skins, the ones you used to stick on. You'd just clip round your point and they had a little bit of sticky wax on them like ^{climbing} wax - got to be seal skin though ^{no good the plush} no lining in them, just the straight seal skin and lay it down and it would stick there, then you could peel them off and poke them in your jacket. The skins get a bit cumbersome and get a bit wet and you got to have a bum bag or something to stick them in. ^{Skins} invented them.

KH: Did you ever do any trips overnight with a pack on skis.

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GD: I've often carried a pack but never made any

KH: Like overnight - you did that one trip with the dogs ...?

GD: I've often gone down ^{to Bett's} camp at the hotel and things like that.

KH: Did you ever go across to Whites River or to Mawsons?

GD: No, not really. I never ever had to. I often skied up from the hotel at night.

KH: Have you, up the road?

GD: I've gone to the pictures at the hotel years ago with other fellows, we'd be down there and ski up.

KH: In the same night?

GD: Yes.

KH: The run down would be pretty quick.

GD: It's not all that different.

KH: How long would that take you?

GD: You've got to push along to do 2½ hours.

KH: Did you ever have a go at the Summit record?

GD: No never had a go at it. I could have gone pretty close to that, I was very fit, I used to walk a lot, ski a lot.

KH: Did you go down to the Pounds Creek hut?

GD: Often been down there yes.

KH: Was there a radio in that?

GD: No, never, not in my time.

KH: There was a radio at Whites River.

GD: Well that came after.

KH: And there was one at the Alpine. The Alpine was built in '39, you were there then. They would ring up the Chalet wouldn't they? Ken Breakspear would bring groups across from the Alpine to Tin to Whites and then across to the Chalet.

GD: I don't ever remember *We had a job to contact the Hotel.* ; not in our time. ✓

KH: But Ken Breakspear, he did that trip quite a few times.

GD: Oh yes, I've known Ken to come across there, quite a few times. They used to go up there and spend a lot of time, they used to take a cook out and stayed there for the winter - this young chap - I've forgotten his name.

KH: Charlie Fletcher?

GD: Yes, Charlie Fletcher.

KH: Yes he was there cooking, I've met him. Do you remember the time when Tom Mitchell came across with the Landrover?

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GD: Yes I remember it quite well.

KH: Did you know about it?

GD: No I didn't know he was coming. Actually the wife was over somewhere riding about the Blue Lake when they saw them coming around over there - couldn't make out what these things were - Tom Mitchell and Ossie Rixon .

KH: Yes, that's right and Elyne was part of it. I think they got some help from Ray Adams at Whites River to get up onto the Rolling Grounds, they had some trouble there. Do you remember any other huts - was there anything there of - there used to be a shelter hut above Blue Lake, just below the walking track, do you remember that at all?

GD: No it wasn't there in my time - nothing, no remnants of it. No, only the Pounds Creek hut, Foremans hut, Seamans and then the Merritts were over there, they're about the only ones - old Dead Horse. Out the other way there was the little Tin Hut built for the Litchfields, Farm Ridge hut.

KH: Did you ever get to the Tin hut?

GD: Yes I've been there.

KH: Riding in the summer time?

GD: Yes.

KH: The Commissioner for Soil Conservation, Clayton, he was up there ...

GD: I took ^{them} on a big trip - there was Dave Mackay, one of the rangers, Sam Clayton, another chap who was an offsider to Sam, his name was Tom Taylor too and then old Barry, Surveyor General and then old Mr Harnett, he was the District Surveyor.

KH: George Petersen - was he on that?

GD: No he wasn't with us. We went for a trip - we were away a week once when they were first forming the park. We went first day from the Chalet and we went over and camped at the Dead Horse and then we went from there to the Tin Mine and camped there a night - old Carter was alive.

KH: Charlie was there was he?

GD: Charlie was there, yes, he talked about curing cancer and politics. Well then the next day they wanted to go out and we went right out towards the Pilot Mountain, rode around there, and went right round down into the left and camped down in there somewhere, in the head waters of the Ingeegoodbee. We just made an open camp there for the night and then went down the next day to the old Ingeegoodbee hut and came back, stayed another night at the Tin Mine - we caught two brumbies that afternoon, Dave and I - and the following day we went back out to the Cascades and we camped there.

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They were making a rough survey with the eye to get an idea of the look of it. We went from there out on to the Lookout - it's further south-east - do you know those other mountains in there - Paradise, Pergatory ...

KH: Yes.

GD: Well this is further out again, the Lookout - we went out there. Came back in and had another night at the Cascade, went up the Big Bogg~~ay~~ and back to Dead Horse and back to the Chalet. Old Mr Barry - he'd had enough.

KH: What did you think of Charlie Carter?

GD: I'd seen Charlie before, I struck him when I was out there brumby running. You could have a yarn with Charlie, but he'd get on to his cancer cures, you'd get a bit sick of it, I suppose it was his life.

KH: He was quite a sociable sort of guy.

GD: Oh yes, he could talk on nearly any subject - poor old fellow - a hermit's life. I was out there last year at Tin Mine, this chap Bill McGuffick^e was with me and I had Gordon's two boys with me, grandsons and Naomi, that's Gordon's wife - she's a good horsewoman.

KH: You took packs with you, pack saddles?

GD: No. I got the key off the ranger at Jindabyne and Bill took his Landrover and he let us through the place at the Cascade hut, the track turns off.

KH: So you could drive in some distance?

GD: We drove right to the Cascade hut, save taking a pack horse. Gordon drove the 4-wheel drive in, we'd led his horse along.

KH: You based yourself at Cascades and then rode out to the Tin Mines!

GD: Yes and on to Paradise another day, up to the head of the Cascade.

KH: That would be nice.

GD: But years ago when we used to chase the horses it was pretty open - all the scrubs all come up.

KH: It's got very scrubby.

GD: Oh terrible - you sort of get lost. I knew my way about there, ^{like one thing} you can't see now. The only track you see is a brumby track, a few emus. ^{When} there was a lot of cattle there and big salt camps, good tracks, tracks through the crossings.

KH: The fires would keep it open too.

GD: That's right, keep it good.

KH: Apparently Herb was telling me that a lot of the fencing material that went into the Big Bogg~~ay~~ came all via the Rams Head - they took it

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up the Summit Road ...

GD: That's right and packed it down.

KH: Over Dead Horse Gap!

GD: That's right.

KH: That was in your time?

GD: No, that was just before, but they were still fencing when I was over there - three barbs they used to put up.

KH: When you think about it, it's quite reasonable. At first I thought that wouldn't be logical.

GD: They'd just cut a post as near as they'd put along the line and follow a bit of a track along the ridge to the Dead Horse, straight out along the Spur there, what they call Kellys yard out to the J.M. rails. Actually that fence run out right into the head of the Jacobs River where it gets very very rough down in there. Cattle wouldn't go down - steep and rough. What do you think about Thredbo and fire? I don't think Thredbo could last 10 years, I've said that all along, it will be burnt clean out. I saw that valley in fire in 1939, there hasn't been a thing done to it, they've cleared all those ski trails, the timber's still there, piled up, it's got a bit of rubbish over it but it's still there. If it gets alight like it did in '39, there's no such thing as fighting it or putting it out because that year, the year we were building at the Chalet and the fire went right down there, I took 100 men down to the hotel, raked a trail right around ^{above} the hotel and then set a light to it and burnt it back - it jumped clean over there - over the old hotel. It set alight the ridge on the other side over towards Pretty Point and the air was on fire, that's a fact, it was the eucalyptus fire balls. That's what happens when a big bush fires gets into the tree tops, when she starts to burn in the hot weather, sends the gas out and if it sweeps up that valley there would be no such thing as ever putting it out.

KH: Mostly it's very green around there.

GD: Ah yes, but that undergrowth, when she gets all that stuff, like blackberries, you know how they burn when they get terrific heat. It burnt that year - '39. Just skeletons standing about and there hasn't been a big fire through it since - it's getting closer. I tried ^{to go up} the river from the Thredbo Village, we've got some friends there and a particular friend of Naomi, that's Gordon's wife, they've got a lodge at Thredbo, we go and stay in that. Gordon and I got up early one morning and we went up the Thredbo fishing - you can't get in there on the little creek now, the stuff that's grown up. I used to ride a horse in up along there, you can't get through it.

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KH: They've got a track now.

GD: Yes they've got a little bit of a track but to get into the river. Well in the real hot summer weather, that gets agoing, and the green stuff sends out such a lot of gas - eucalyptus goes out of the top of those trees. The first time in the early 30s when I went fishing into the Geehi and Ray Adams was with me and Laurie McGuffick^e, none of us had ever been down there before. We went down behind Tw^{ynam}, Mt Anderson and went down a clear ridge and eventually got down fairly close to the Geehi river, just below where the big fall is, the Valentine Falls. We couldn't get our horses down, it was too steep, so we tied them up and walked down. We caught a few fish and when we were coming back out, it was rough and scrubby^b and when we reckoned we were near enough that we could get a clear go, we started throwing matches and Lord ghost did that fire burn - it was burning for days - you could see the smoke coming out. When we went back next year, it was all cleaned out, but the top of the big mountain ash, you could hardly see the top of them - big tall fellows - all the tops had been burnt clean out of them. It had gone ^{up} and burnt the limbs off the tops and just standing up there like a ghost town.

KH: What time of year did you burn it?

GD: Roughly about January or February.

KH: It would be pretty hot!

GD: It was hot, yes. That's what will happen ^{to} Thredbo Valley, it's got to. They're letting the trees all grow about the village there. I noticed when I was over the other day, I walked all around, there was bark and rubbish all around those places, nothing about cleaning it up.

KH: There's a lot of wooden buildings in Thredbo too.

GD: They don't realise the danger they're in. It will burn in the mountains. I never ever seen any of those right on the tops in a very dry year - you'd throw a match down and it burns away, but you see smoke coming up out of the ground sometimes a fortnight, three weeks later. In the early stages some of those morass swamps, in the early stages are ^{peat} - it will smolder away then, and then a great big cavity will fall in, the size of this room or more, it burns underground. I'd like to see them clean up the village a bit, around Thredbo.

KH: That was an incredible fire wasn't it in '39.

GD: It went all of New South Wales - Victoria was on fire - went up Talbingo mountain - that's when a big fire gets into the tree tops.

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KH: Well I think that will do just about nicely - I'm exhausted, how are you feeling?

GD: I'm alright, it's a day off for me.

END SIDE 3, TAPE 2.

CONCLUSION.