

INTERVIEW with FRED FLETCHERINTERVIEWER: Klaus Hueneke

Interview on 15 June 1980 with Fred Fletcher who lives at Bellevue on the road to Eucumbene Dam just past the turnoff to Nimmo. Nimmo is the way in to Snowy Plain and all that country that the Fletchers, Boltons and Flanagans have used for a very long period of time and one of the old access routes into the Kosciusko National Park. Fred Fletcher helped to build Alpine Hut which is now burnt down and the family, one way or another has had a long association both with Alpine as well as the higher elevation grazing leases.

KH: You were saying that your first involvement with the mountains was in 1936 was it?

FF: About 1936 I went with a mob of sheep over onto - Alec Kidman, a chap from *Moonbah* owned the property at the time and he took sheep from next door down here. I went with the old chap who used to be mountain man - Tommy Naughton. Nothing to do with the Naughton you spoke of that was with George Finch on Round Mountain. *There was a Naughton over there.*

KH: That must have been someone else - that must have been Aubrey Hosking who spoke about that.

FF: Probably. Then in 1939 - it was very drought stricken about here - I went with a chap, Billy Naphthali - he lived there at Snowy Plain in his early time - I went with him. There were 4,000 sheep in the mob - there were several owners from roundabout and we took them past Kidmans and the Tin hut, Whites River and out onto Adams Lookout to Pounds Creek, near Twynam for the summer. We camped at Whites River all the summer and a neighbour of mine, Clive McPhie *was* fencing there for a month. We put up what would be the first electric fence in the hills. Billy Naphthali was experimenting with an electric fence - it was two wires on pegs with batteries ^e on it, but it wasn't a success - cattle fouled it up.

FF: We used to have good musters, we were there for five years with sheep on that block and that was my first experience with many huts in the mountains.

KH: The electric fence - you must have carried in a motor or generator or something.

FF: No, dry batteries - it was a dry battery turnout.

KH: How long would they last?

FF: I suppose it was supposed to last the summer. We would only be there until March. It would give you a bit of a kick if you rode up to it and grabbed hold of it - you'd feel it. It wasn't any good to sheep, they jumped over it. One mob used to live out on Twynam and it didn't wheel them. Going out that time was when they asked me to cart the stuff for the Alpine hut. That was New Year's Day, 1939 and from then on I worked with them for 10 years - the Alpine hut - got it built.

KH: Was this Oliver Moriarty who approached you then?

FF: Yes, I saw him on New Year's Day 1939.

KH: He came to see you here?

FF: No, up there, we were camped that night at Kidman's hut at the Back River and he was there with Charles Lane-Poole and her father and Doctor Mackindoe, I think it was.

KH: And you called it the Back River too, not the Burrungubuggee.

FF: It was known to me as the Back River.

That came in through the Snowy Scheme I believe?

FF: No, it was always Burrungubuggee I think. It was when I first went out. We always called it the Back River - Kidman's hut on the Back River. I'd camp there - because there was a good little horse paddock there - had to cart the stuff from about 2 miles this side to 2 miles the other side with two horses and a slide.

KH: This was the material for Alpine?

FF: Yes.

KH: So it was taken in via Nimo^w and up the other side ...

FF: Yes, up Teddy's Creek, past where Collin's Creek joins Teddys and on up about another three-quarters of a mile to what we call the foot of the Brassy. It wasn't a bad track really for a slide after I'd run it a few times.

KH: But it was taken to that place by bullock ...

FF: No, truck - motor truck - by a chap called Ernie Scarlett from Berridale.

KH: So it was taken by truck to there ... they must have had to build a few bridges to get the truck in.

FF: No, Ray Adams - he's another mountain chap - he directed him in through the way we used to go with sheep and however this fellow took the truck load of timber first go, I don't know - but he got it there - good driver. It was a dry year - the summer of '39.

KH: That was when the great fires were on?

FF: Yes. The fires were on before I started the carting while I was out doing this fence at Whites River. The fire had been burning down in Geelhi for a couple of weeks and then all of a sudden on this windy Friday night, it burnt up out of the gorge, up onto the tops above Whites River hut and then blew itself out. It was the Saturday that burnt everyone out down here and Dalgety way.

KH: So it came up to the Rolling Grounds, the back of the Rolling Grounds?

FF: Yes, right onto the top there above Whites River hut, up out to Dicky Cooper, over the Rolling Grounds, right to that fenced in country. The fence wouldn't be there, when you would see it now because I was there a few years ago and it's all disintegrated and rotted away.

KH: It didn't come into the Whites River valley?

FF: No, not down there.

KH: Did it go up Gungartan at all ... Kerrys?

FF: No.

KH: It didn't go up on that side?

FF: It was further the other end. Between Whites River and Adams Lookout, towards Kosy - back of Twynam - down in that Geehi gorge

KH: Who had that lease that you were taking the stock into?

FF: Neighbours here - Fletchers, of Fentonville.

KH: They were relations of yours?

FF: Yes, my first cousins and this Billy Naphthali was their uncle.

KH: But whose grazing lease was it - the one from Pounds Creek up to Twynam?

FF: It belonged to M.J. Fletcher - Mrs Fletcher. She was a Naphthali that's why Billy took the stock for her.

KH: Then Pounds Creek hut would have been there?

FF: Yes, I was never to it but we used ... back this side of it. You see Pounds Creek hut is over the Snowy - we are on this side of the Snowy, back up to Mt Tate.

KH: You called Tate Adams Lookout?

FF: Yes that's right. I knew then that it was Tate, but everyone always called it Adams Lookout.

KH: Do you call the Rolling Grounds, the Rolling Grounds all the time?

FF: Yes.

KH: And Dicky Cooper Bogong at the end of it?

FF: Yes, Dicky Cooper Boogong and below it Dicky Cooper Swamp on down to Dicky Cooper hut. Have you seen where the little hut was?

KH: I know where the site is - I haven't been to it in the summer time.

FF: I was there two or three years ago - not to where the hut was but on the road - looking at it from the road - we decided where it was - you could see where the walls had collapsed and the roof had sagged down.

KH: That was the last time you were in the mountains was it?

FF: Yes, went to Whites River with Oliver Moriarty in a car. There was a mob of us went - Bruce Adams. The Alpine hut - they had two goes at building it - they built accommodation for 14 the first time, without a woodshed and the next year they built a woodshed and accommodation overall for 20 and it went on like that ... but in war years - the war years I suppose spoilt it. My brother used to go out and look after it and cook for them.

KH: Yes I talked to Charlie in Canberra when Oliver Moriarty was in Canberra. Oliver rang up Charlie and got him around as well. I have some of his story. Did you go up there to ski at that time?

FF: I used to go for a few days now and again, yes.

KH: Are you a reasonably proficient skier?

FF: Oh no, only just ordinary.

KH: Did you ever do any long trips - over to Grey Mare?

FF: I'd go over to Mawsons, out onto the top of Big Boogong as we called it - Jagungal. Over to Mawsons and up to Tin hut but I never went for any days - camping or trek from one place to another that took a few days, I never did that - but would have liked to have done. I would sooner do that than ski up and down the one place all day. I think there will be a lot more of that done now, don't you? It's getting very congested in one area now.

KH: Did you meet Elyne Mitchell up there - the lady who wrote 'Brumbies'.

FF: No, I know who you mean, but I haven't met her.

KH: Tom Mitchell.

FF: No, I've never met Tom but I've always heard of him and know where his place is at Corryong, but I haven't met him.

KH: Lindsay yesterday, mentioned an old pole line for Tommy Bolton when he was delivering the mail to Grey Mare mine.

FF: Yes I've heard of that, but I haven't seen it. I always understood the phone just went from Adaminaby to Farm Ridge when Rial got put on - for his convenience. I never heard of it going to Grey Mare.

KH: Well I'm not sure about it - I've seen one reference to it, but I'm not sure how reliable it is. Lindsay mentioned this pole line for delivery of mail that went past the Mail Box and the lower slopes of the big Boogong through to Grey Mare mine. I thought at some stage you might have come across the poles of it because I've never seen them or any remains of them.

FF: I can honestly say I've never seen them either and I've never heard anyone say that it was pole-marked either but I've gone mainly to Grey Mare from Mawsons - that's due west, I haven't come from up the northwest way - from Farm Ridge to Grey Mare.

KH: The wireless link-up at Alpine Hut - how well did that work?

FF: Pretty scratchy I think?

KH: Was it in morse or was it voice communication?

FF: Voice, yes. They used to contact the Chalet and Whites River - they put another set in Whites River.

KH: Would they get through every night or say one night in three?

FF: I suppose they had their times arranged wouldn't they?

KH: But I mean there were conditions such that sometimes they made no contact all day ...

FF: I don't know. I have heard them talking on it but I was only there occasionally.

KH: Were bookings made through that or checking of parties ... what sort of use?

FF: I don't know. I suppose just to keep in contact with one another generally. I don't know why they went to the trouble of putting it in - another chap Dave Mackay and his brother dragged the stuff in from this

side the same way as I took the material in for the hut. I don't know how they got it over to Whites River - it was all just length of piping connected together and a lot of guy wires on it. I think its still standing at Alpine isn't it. What will they do with it now they've burnt it down?

KH: Well there's supposed to be - they've talked about taking the materials left, out by helicopter but some of it is still quite useful for us for repair to other huts - some of the iron is still alright and there's a stove there and a few things that are still quite useful.

FF: Have you been there?

KH: No, one of the members of the committee has just to check it out.

FF: Ever since I heard it was burnt I have meaning to take a ride out just to have a look at it. I've always been interested in it.

KH: That's right. You had a life-long interest really. Did you help to build it too?

FF: Bill Brooks, Kevin Clarke and Fred Clarke built the hut - I just carted the stuff there. That took me all my time. I was carting for a week for a start and they put up all I had carted in a week in a day.

KH: Did they?

FF: Yes, the frame of the hut ...

KH: This is what we heard about Mawsons too. It was virtually built in four days which is astonishing. Because Mawsons is quite a substantial place.

FF: It's a good hut. When I first went there ... it was on a lease we had from 1944 to 1950 - for seven years. It was in good repair. When they redid the mountains and re-allotted them - like the big companies that owned and built Mawsons - there was Dromora and Bobundra - they were both owned by this one New Zealand Land Company - or whatever it was called and it was cut up - we got the Dromora lease and others had

the Bobundra side.

KH: Did they sub-divide some of the leases about that time?

FF: Yes in 1943 or 1944. There were surveyor mobs all over the mountains - there was new maps came out - 200-300 leases.

KH: Was there another stage before that? It seems to me from what I have read and so on that initially back before the turn of the century the grazing leases were very big and then there was a period possibly in the 1920s when they sub-divided them further as well.

FF: That must have been when these Bobundra and Dromora companies got leases and then built that hut.

KH: There was a lot of building activity in the 20s and 30^s. A lot of huts went up then. I didn't realise there was another period in the 40s ...

FF: Yes they redid them all again - I can remember when there were surveyors everywhere.

KH: ... And every time they redid them it seems they made them smaller - there were more of them.

FF: The one that Dromora had, there were two leases in that, we had one and the neighbours had the other one with a fence around the lot. It went up past the Tin hut over towards the head of Whites River and down Dicky Cooper's Swamp to Ghost Hill - head of the Valentine. It wasn't far from the Valentine Falls from there, then back up past Mawson's hut.

KH: The fences were intact.

FF: Yes, they were good enough. We used to go out a few days every year because the snow flattened them every year. It wouldn't matter if it was an old or new fence, it would be flattened every year with snow.

It didn't take long though - a mob of us would go out and do it in a week. It was put up by this New Zealand Land Co. mob that owned

Bobundra and Dromora .

KH: You were working for them as a stockman?

FF: No I never had anything to do with them then. Not until it was taken off them and we got it and that's when we used to do the fencing.

KH: I see in 1944.

FF: Yes.

KH: So your main base then was Mawsons.

FF: Yes.

KH: Until 1950?

FF: Yes.

KH: Did you ever meet bushwalkers?

FF: Yes, quite a lot of them. We go there that time you were talking about snowing on the 12th January. We took our sheep and let them go just as the snow started about lunchtime and we made for the hut. When we got there, there was six blokes there, just arrived before us. They stayed on there and then there was 3 or 4 of us and those six and then four more chaps that owned the lease joining which Bobundra used to have - Wallaces' and Reids' - and they arrived back in the snow. We sat about the hut and got wood in the buggy - it snowed a good lot - there was over a foot up on top and then that's when this mob walked past the window - another six. They tramped around and then came in all wet with snow all over their packs - dumped it down in the middle of the floor and wet the place. We all bedded down later. They all woke up all right the next morning. There was 18 there that night.

KH: I got that story from Selby Alley. He was a Newcastle bushwalker, he was one of the first group of bushwalkers that was in there - loading up the spring cart and all that sort of ... do you remember that at all?

FF: I think so. I was just wondering who was there - I know we all got out and got wood that evening. Wood wasn't very plentiful about the huts ...

KH: Not at Mawsons ...

FF: There's timber about but only springy timber but not much good solid wood. We all sufficed - you just got what you could, always had plenty. The next morning they all trooped off again - this mob that arrived after dark, found the hut - they were at Alpine hut in fine weather at 3 o'clock and left that to climb over to a hut they had never been to and rough weather coming. It was fool-hardy you know, because they weren't equipped for it, a lot of them ^ewere only in shorts - not a great lot of clothing. They were lucky enough - they made it.

KH: ... they went past the window ..

FF: Yes, I was sitting on the seat near the window and I saw these heads bobbing pass the window. They were following the river around - the river went way down there and the hut was up here - they could have missed it.

KH: Was ^{the} there snow poles across the valley then leading up to Mawsons.

FF: Not that I know of.

KH: There is some now.

What about a group called the Squirrels - a fellow called Kenyon from Sydney, did you ever meet him?

FF: No.

KH: It must have been in the 50s when they went there for the first time.

FF: They closed all that country then. We had it from 1944 for seven years. After the end of that seven year term it wasn't relet, it was closed for the Park. Previous to that on the Kosy end it was closed before that - it was closed for those previous seven year. Country further south. They progressively closed it and we shifted from there over to the Boobee.

KH: You shifted from Mawsons to the Boobee?

FF: Yes.

KH: You got another seven or eight years there did you?

FF: Yes. I think we had nine years there then.

KH: How big was your lease at Mawsons, in acres?

FF: 3,000 odd. There was four of us in it - me and three other neighbours - the McPhées.

KH: The other one you were involved in - that Bill Naphthali was involved in on Pounds Creek - how big was that one?

FF: I suppose it was 4,000 - 5,000 acres - it seemed to be a good bit of ground.

KH: Then the Boobee one - how big was that?

FF: About 2,600 acres. The Boobee country was in about 12,000 acres.

There was three or four other leases all bounded by the one common boundary, like rivers or fences - Happy's River and Tumut River.

KH: That would be most of the Happy Jacks Plain wouldn't it?

FF: No, over the river from that.

KH: On the southern side of the Happy Jacks Plain?

FF: Yes or west. Over the Happy Jacks River from here. It fronted down onto it - faced east. All that clear country this side was known as Arsenic Ridge but we were over the river from that. You know Far Bald Mountain - that was on our lease.

KH: Did you ever call that by any other name?

FF: No, only the Far Bald Mountain.

KH: Tom Yan called it the Dodger!

FF: No that's another one. The Far Bald Mountain - the hut down under here and you go up that way to follow the ridge and go down to the Tumut River and you go over the Dodger. It was a high knob. Down to the Junction and the Tumut.

KH: The Junction of the Happy Jacks and the Tumut River ...

FF: No ... from this lease looked over to Farm Ridge hut and you could see the old road going over the Doubtful and up to this Farm Ridge hut - we were back on this side of it. Mackays hut joined this lease we had.

KH: Your lease didn't include Mackays?

FF: No. It's on Tibeaudos Creek.

KH: Do you know why that was called Tibeaudos Creek. Do you know where the name came from?

FF: No.

KH: But Mackays - you'd know who built that wouldn't you?

FF: The Adaminaby people - Norman and Sam Mackay.

KH: Was that in the 40s?

FF: Yes it would. They probably got it the same time as we got the ~~Dromore~~ block - the reshuffle of the hills.

KH: About 1944.

FF: I'd say it would have been built round about then.

KH: Yes, it's a fairly new hut - in pretty good condition.

FF: Something went wrong with the fireplace I believe.

KH: It's very smoky.

FF: Didn't it want repairing?

KH: It should be pulled down and rebuilt.

FF: It hasn't fallen down or anything?

KH: It was rebuilt 5 or 6 years ago - the rest of the hut is in good condition. And at Boobee you would have had 2 huts there wouldn't you?

FF: Yes, there was the old wooden hut that was dragged there by Tommy Yan - old Mick Russell told me it was the manager's cottage from the ^WNine Mile and they dragged it up to the mine. However they got it round ...! It was very old - two room weatherboard structure and this next one was a red painted corrugated iron shed next to it. Have they put a chimney in it and made a hut of it?

KH: Yes, this year.

FF: Did they?

KH: We had a slow combustion stove in first - somebody knocked it off so we had to build an open fireplace.

FF: That's good. I would have donated that then because I owned that - this McPhée chap and I. We'd bought the buildings off the previous ... that's what you did when you went into a snow lease once - you bought improvements off the previous owner. We paid about £100 for that shed.

KH: Did you get any money from the National Parks and Wildlife Service?

FF: No. You'd pay so much for fencing which was on your block and that sort of thing.

KH: So it was the old one then - you reckon it was dragged there...

FF: So Mick Russell told me.

KH: Maybe that's the one that Tom Yan dragged?

FF: Probably was.

KH: Do you remember Tom with his bullock team. He talks about having a bullock team.

FF: Yes, he'd be the sort of fellow that could. I wouldn't know whether it was him or not or whether it would be before him.

KH: He is adamant that he dragged a hut and he thought it was Broken Dam hut - the hut we now know is Broken Dam, and the fact that its on those big runners and they stick out both ends, fits the story, but you have a story that maybe it was the Boobee hut as well or Tom Yan got it slightly mixed up as to which hut he dragged there. His story was that Broken Dam came from the Nine Mile too! If it was dragged to Boobee - that is a long way. You've got to get it across the Happy Jacks River.

FF: You'd have to take it around the other side of Tabletop ...

KH: You'd be better to dismantle it, put it on a bullock dray and take it around with a team of bullocks.

FF: I don't know then - that's what Mick Russell said - it was the manager's cottage at the old Nine Mile Diggings.

KH: Mick was Leo's father?

FF: Yes. He knew a lot about the hills. This old chap Archie Rial was one of the first fellows who took stock into the mountains. He took a lot of stock from down country. Did anyone tell you these stories?

KH: No.

FF: I don't know the dates - but early - he had thousands, hundreds and thousands of sheep from down country - Riverina down that way and you hear of mobs, 60,000 and likes of that in the Bogong Swamp when the muster was on and he had them right through the mountains, right over towards - past Whites River, right back through with camps and boundary riders and shepherds ...

KH: Is this the Rial who then had the Farm Ridge?

FF: Yes, Farm Ridge was his headquarters and that's why he had the phone onto it.

KH: That would have been around the turn of the century?

FF: I'd say about then because old Mick knew the bloke. It wouldn't be too far back in the 1800s - I reckon it would be about then.

KH: Could have been built in 1890! I reckon Farm Ridge would be pretty old.

FF: Because there was an old fence that went up between Mawsons and Tin hut along the tops, the back of the Big Brassie and Billy Napthali told me once it had been up 40 years then - well that could be 30 or 40 years ago now.

KH: Apparently some of the ^{Rials} are still over Tumberumba way ...?

FF: Probably.

KH: They'd be descendants of Archie ^{Rial's} I don't know much about the ^{Rial's} yet.

FF: I think the son has a property - I used to know where - he had a lot of foresight - he could see the possibilities of relief in the mountains. He has the credit of being one of the first blokes that

brought a lot of stock into the mountains.

KH: This old Boobee hut - it apparently was burnt down, do you know anything about that?

FF: Yes, a chap from down the road here, Rick Weston, gave some chaps a lift or directed them to it or something - I don't know whether they were walkers or how they were travelling - it was about that time it was burnt down - I don't know what happened. I've been there since it was burnt - you can only see the few stones ...

KH: It's hard to recognise there was another hut now.

FF: There used to be ^{stables} in front of that shed that you have made a hut of now - stables a chap built. A fellow by the name of Dick Haggar - he was out there with a boundary rider or stockman one summer and he built this stable - a very sensible turnout - and then someone pulled the iron off it to build a hut somewhere else. After they closed ^{the} Boobee country this chap ^{Leigh} McPhee and I had a lease out near Currango - out Rules Point area.

KH: You kept on moving along?

FF: Yes, we were there for nine or ten years. That's when we used to go up from Nimmoto Kellys, across Tabletop and come out at Kiandra and go along the road to Rules Point.

KH: That lease was on the Long Plain?

FF: No. There is an old rickety bridge down over the Murrumbidgee River, a couple of miles in from Rules Point where those few pines are ...

KH: It's called the Port Phillip fire trail or something.

FF: Probably yes.

KH: You go into the back of old Currango that way.

FF: We used to go on the Currango road and down over this old bridge. When you went over the bridge, you were up a 100 yards and in the lease.

KH: That's lovely country ...

FF: ... through that plain there where the road goes.

KH: There's an old telephone line through there.

FF: Yes, they had great work with that line you know. When we were out that way - Tommy Taylor was head ranger and he wanted to put the phone on ...

KH: That was the old line ...(Lindsay Willis on the phone re Blue Lake shelter)

FF: ... there was several places where there has been little bits of ... I remember - I know where that place was that Lindsay just mentioned. It's the remains of an old bit of building or shelter of some description.

KH: The foundations are still there - he just told me that he thinks it was blown up by lightning in about 1910. It was built as a small tourist shelter about the same time when they first put the road up to enable Wragge to build his observatory. That only lasted about 10 years or so.

FF: How long was Wragge up there?

KH: Well Wragge himself wasn't up there terribly long, he mainly set it up, but his men were there for three or four years.

FF: Yes, because I know the neighbours over here a few years ago had an old Cooma paper and something in it that Wragge predicted on weather in 1912. That would be around about the time he would be there.

KH: 1898 to 1902 they were there.

FF: Because I know the first time - we were kids - we went to Kosy for a day and I remember the remains of a little old hut just down under the top near that first saddle.

KH: That was something else - just above Rawsons Pass.

FF: Just down from the Summit a little bit - a ¼ of a mile I suppose.

KH: I've seen that in old photos - I'm not sure why that one was built - that wasn't Wragge.

FF: Where was Wragge?

KH: Right on top.

Do you remember Foreman's hut at all?

FF: Yes I remember seeing it - I never saw it when it was functioning as a hut but I've been there since. My brother and I walked to Blue Lake and went past it but it was only the chimney.

KH: You weren't there in your very early time?

FF: No, but when I first went to Whites River in 1939-43 it was operating then because there were musterers on that block - it became wet in the later part of 1939 - creeks and rivers were up and we used to be hearing about the goings on at different huts. Mawsons was another one before we ever went there - they used to bring sheep from the Gundagai into the Bobundra country as well as from this side and drovers would come up to take what ^{Ellerslie(?)} Elsely had and they they'd be marooned out there because they couldn't get them over the Valentine. When they had them drafted ready to go they couldn't get the sheep over the Valentine to start.

KH: Did you know anything about Dr Foreman?

FF: No, not himself. There was a chap Percy Harris from Jindabyne took sheep from Fentonville - that was my uncles - onto this Foreman country. Foreman had this lease joining the Blue Lake and round in that area and then Percy Harris had it leased and took sheep on agistment - he'd take a mob from here. I suppose others as well that I wouldn't know about, because this country that I talk about - that Fentonville had later that I went to in 1939 - Pounds Creek was part of it and it had this old wire fence on it - there was miles of it - all iron posts.

KH: Would they have put the one in from Carruthers to Townsend - right along the top there is an iron picket fence?

FF: That's it - that's the one I'm speaking of, when Foreman fenced it in that's where it went - from all this way of Twynam, right along

that top and used to come across to Adams Lookout and then down into Guthega Creek. They pulled it down from Twynam across here and put it down onto Pounds Creek.

KH: What about - it went right along the tops towards, what we know as Mt. Northcote - how did it go back towards - how did it come back down again from up there?

FF: It would come from Northcote along the top above the Blue Lake down Twynam to here and then across to Adams Lookout and down into the Creek there and that bounded all that area. Then they pulled it down from Twynam to Adams Lookout and put it down there - cut the lease in half - down onto the Snowy to No. 1 hut or Pounds Creek hut we called it.

KH: Yes Lindsay mentioned No. 1 hut.

FF: That's the same one isn't it?

KH: He said they were different.

FF: I got my information about all that area from Billy Napthali . He's very interested in the mountains and a top mountain fellow.

KH: How long ago did he die?

FF: He died about nine years ago.

KH: Did he build the hut we know as Napthali s'.

FF: No, that old Napthali house was built by a Jardine. It had a saw mill there. If you look now at it you can see - I can show you where the water wheel was - it's just below the old house site.

Jardines owned it and Napthali lived in it.

KH: Jardine built it?

FF: Yes. Jardine had a saw mill - used to be at Nimmo and when shifted up to where Napthali 's house was and then up towards where I used to start with the slide on Mill Flat. The same mill kept moving on. There's ash up there, just over the creek where I used to start with the slide to cart the stuff away to Alpine hut.

KH: What about Hedgers or Davays - almost on the Gungahlin - do you know who built that?

FF: Tommy Bolton built it when he got married - he married a Crowe from up here at Adaminaby and lived at Snowy Plains - what is now known as Davays hut.

KH: So it was originally known as Bolton's hut?

FF: It would be Bolton's house. Up about another mile further round, Harry Bolton had a house. I think his father's name was Jack ... John ... anyway Harry Bolton and his son Ross is still at Berridale. He had a little block at Digger's Creek and quite extensive gold digging went on there. I was there last summer - quite extensive when you get a look at it. Later years there was a mob of four Italians built a hut above this old Bolton one, but it's fallen down now. They started to dig a bed of a creek up a hill - but water beat them - there wasn't enough water to wash it.

KH: There is some story about those guys being poisoned by sleeping in a hut and they got carbon monoxide poisoning?

FF: No.

KH: Tom Taylor told me about - it might have been to do with the Snowy Scheme, I'm not sure.

FF: The only chaps I know that got poisoned was two blokes who stole a truck in Cooma one day belonging to a Kidman fellow from Moonbah and in the truck he had two bottles of poison to put on sheep skins and these blokes stole this truck and went on to Sawyers Hill the first night - they drank some of this stuff out of the bottles and one or two of them died. That was later years.

KH: What about Happy's hut or Montagues - did you go there?

FF: Yes, I went there a lot. We used to go from here to Kelly's the first night over to the Montagues the second night and we'd stay

there for perhaps two nights to give the sheep a day's rest. Then we'd go over to Tabletop to Kiandra and then to Rules Point.

KH: How long would that take you?

FF: Five days.

KH: With how many sheep?

FF: We were only allowed to take 1200. Montagues is a really good little hut - in a good area.

KH: Would it have been Montague who built it?

FF: I wouldn't know who built it. I think up from Adaminaby, Ted Eccleston was the builder, but probably Montague - they had that Arsenic country there once. They were people from the other side weren't they?

KH: The Montagues!

FF: Yes.

KH: I don't know where the Montagues came from.

FF: They were nothing to do with this firm in Cooma, Pitt Son and Montague. Montagues¹ a Cooma name - they have been an auctioneering firm for donkey's years - Bill and Jim Montague.

KH: These Montagues came from Tumut way.

FF: Yes, over the other side somewhere. I thought they came from over Gundagai way.

KH: Going back to the hut that Tommy Bolton built - was it then later on that different people had that lease like Davies ...?

FF: Davey Williamson owned it for years and years.

KH: After Tommy Bolton would have been the Williamsons perhaps?

FF: Yes, I'd say so. I suppose Boltons owned it when he built the hut there - he'd own the ground he'd be building it on - it was all freehold ground. Hedgers used to be just over from him - there is still descendants over here. They had a house not far on from Daveys but it is only just ruins now.

KH: It was Davey Williamson - so the hut was called after his

christian name?

FF: Yes.

KH: That's how it became known as Daveys.

FF: Then Roy Hedger bought it and had it for quite a number of years and fenced it up well and looked after the rabbits on it - then the Park took it and now its just going to ruin again.

KH: Yes, it needs a lot of work.

FF: Are they doing it up?

KH: It depends on whether we can get a work party in there. There have been some people who have done a little of work. There are newspapers on the walls back to 1909 - so it's one of the oldest huts in that area.

FF: That was one good thing - all those old slab or timbered places were lined with newspaper - it used to look nice and clear and there is a lot of good information today on those walls. The old Napthali house was interesting. Billy Napthali used to paper it every now and again and it had some good news on it.

KH: Coolamine of course goes back to 1883.

FF: It's quite a place isn't it. It must have been run as a real business once, to have all those buildings. Was it a going concern year round?

KH: Yes.

FF: Gooandra is another one isn't it. There used to be the remains of an old shed there - the house would be still there wouldn't it?

KH: Yes.

FF: Traces was not a bad hut either - out towards Tantangara Dam.

KH: It must be gone now.

FF: Probably might be. It was a big old wooden hut - slab hut.

KH: I know there is Witses.

FF: No, I stayed in Witses with that old fell-down house and little

shed near it. Is it still standing?

KH: Witses is. We have done a lot of work on Witses.

FF: It's a slab hut isn't it? A chap by the name of Reg Billman had that lease - and Clarie Butler. I suppose they built it out of material as it fell down.

KH: The slabs are from the old homestead.

FF: They are! I had two nights - we were taking the sheep out to Rules Point and we went that way once - it wasn't any shorter. Someone advised us we should go that way. This Kelly hut is an old weatherboard place ...

KH: Do you know who runs it now?

FF: It belongs to Ian McPhée of Nimmo. McPhée owns the block that its on ...

CASSETTE 1 - SIDE 2

KH: It needs some work done on it - the fireplace is going now.

FF: It has a lean on it doesn't it?

KH: The hut's not too bad ... the chimney is leaning - there's rabbits under it or something.

FF: When that hut was built it was lined with lath^e and plaster - like grating - little strips of timber put on so far apart and plastered with lime, sand and cow hair to make it bind. It was like being in an oven when you got a good fire going.

KH: Do you have any idea when that might have been built?

FF: No.

KH: It was Mawson who probably built it?

FF: Yes, Mawson.

KH: Wragge Observatory was built by Mawson too. The Mawson who built Mawsons must have been a son.

FF: Probably - Frank. He was manager of Bobundra when he built Mawsons I think.

KH: Yes Lindsay worked with him.

...

FF: They did carry stuff into Alpine hut and did something to it, didn't they? Did you know anything about a Yeti club.

KH: Yeti Ski Club - yes.

FF: It was them - or Outward Bound.

KH: Outward Bound was in there for a long time, then a group of scouts had it. But the Yeti Ski Club has been active with Wheeler's hut. Did you ever go to Wheelers?

FF: No. There is a pilot, Stan ? - anyhow I went for a fly around the mountains one snowy time with him and he was telling me that he used to drop supplies in from the plane to the Alpine hut.

KH: There is an enormous stock pile there of food - dried onions ...

FF: They must have put that in because in my time, anything that was put in, most of it was used.

KH: Ken Breakspear extended ^Kfurther after the war.

FF: Yes I was there - sorry I left. Put in a good bit of time carting the stuff in and then I left this snowy day and Ken was there on his own. He built that big room on the far end with the fireplace in it and put a verandah right along the front of it to take the traffic out of the kitchen - that spoilt it. We had some photos of when it was at its best - it was quite a respectable looking building. So I can't see if they lit a fire in that fireplace he had there - it was a sawn timber frame with iron all over it but it was rocked in. It wouldn't be wanted there from the Park's point of view.

KH: But then a number of other huts have burnt down though - like the old Boobee went up - that wouldn't have been intentional, that would have been an accident.

FF: No I don't think so. It was a hut - would be very inflammable - it was all old weatherboard and was lined with tarry stuff. When we first went there there was a bees nest in the ceiling. Then there was another little one burnt down just up from Napthali's. Billy Napthali's brother Albert, built himself a room, just separate but off the end of the Napthali house and they lived there and eventually when Harveys' got the lease Broken Dray, about a mile or two up from Napthali's on the way out towards Kidmans, they dragged this little building up and put a chimney in it - it was only a little hut but a good hut.

KH: What became Harvey's hut?

FF: Yes, but it got the fire stick in it too.

KH: Yes, that was deliberately burnt down.

What about the Mould - do you know the Mould's at all?

FF: No, I'll leave that part to Ron Flannagan. I don't know that area very much at all. The other ones back this way from Kelly's - that little slab one. It's an intriguing little hut - Wheatleys.

KH: Was that also known as McPhées?

FF: No.

KH: You know it as Wheatleys - slab hut off the ground with a wooden floor.

FF: The floor has been cut right there - slab floor - intriguing you know, they made a very good job of it. They have just redone the fireplace. Phillip, the son of the bloke who would have built it - George only died just lately - George Wheatley and Jim, his brother - both dead now. Back this side of that again, another mile or so there is what we call Billmans hut on the Gungahlin. It's a slab hut with a red roof and verandah along the front of it - two rooms and a little shed

adjacent to it.

KH: Was that built by Billmans?

FF: Yes, Billmans built it - there was an old hut just around a bit towards the yards - it was built in mid 1930s - its fairly old now but a lovely warm hut. Over the river and across from it there is Jardine's hut. I haven't been there for a few years but I have stayed in it years ago.

KH: What about the two huts that you can go past in order to get to Hedgers - two very close together. One is always locked up with shutters on the windows.

FF: Yes, that's Mrs Casey. She and her husband built that when they bought this country. This clear country up here on Snowy Plain used to belong to the uncles here at Fentonville and in 1937 I think, it was sold and this pastoral company near Cooma bought this country. Where that second hut is, there is a lot of old scrubby looking silver poplar - suckers all around it - that is where the original homestead was - Ryries. Ryrie and his daughter had blocks there and they built this house on the boundary because in those days when you took up country you had to do residence on them.

KH: You mean Ryries way back in the 1840s built a road through the high country.

FF: Probably. There was Cecil Ryrie - they owned all that clear Snowy Plain country. When Caseys bought it they liked the view and built this hut near where the old house was. Prior to that, the old uncles, in 1932 built this first hut you come to, pulled the old house down - we call that the Chalet hut.

KH: Who owns that now?

FF: The Coolringons still own the country.

KH: They still take stock up there?

FF: Yes, stock have just shifted this week.

KH: I was surprised they took it in quite late because I was there in early January and they hadn't gone up there with their stock.

FF: Yes, it was very dry this last summer everywhere and they had to use it this year I suppose. They didn't use it last year - I had it last year for a while - leased it from them for the summer.

KH: Do you go out there on horseback?

FF: You can drive a car there - but I used to ride up mostly because you'd want the horse when you got there.

KH: After your lease at Rules Point - that was it then wasn't it, in 1959. You'd had leases since 1944 - 15 years ?

FF: To 1969 - seven years at Mawsons, nine at Boobee and ten at Rules Point - I took stock for 26 years from here to leases plus five from '39 with Billy Napthali at Pounds Creek.

KH: So they let you in at Rules Point country until 1969?

FF: Yes.

KH: That was the last of the grazing leases then wasn't it?

FF: Yes. The only one left is in Gungahlin country and that's privately owned.

KH: Is there talk there of that being resumed?

FF: No not yet. They say they are not interested just now, but if they had the money they probably would be. It still changes hands - it's been bought and sold. Only last year there was a couple of blocks sold. Coolringdon country - there used to be an old hut up there too - Coomaton hut we called it - I spoke to you about Allan Sturgeons hut on the Bulls Peak, the yellow one. Have you been there?

KH: Yes, on from Wheatleys.

FF: It's on the Bulls Peak just where Bulls Peak joins the Gungahlin. Before you get there the country is laned off - there is a lane from Snowy

Plain from Sturgeons hut. Off this lane there used to be an old hut - that country Coolringdon owned and it was sold last year - 2500 acres.

KH: Do you remember any particular times when a lot of sheep were snowed in - when you lost stock due to the snow coming early?

FF: No, personally I haven't but I have heard of it. Flanagan lost a good few sheep one time - had sheep snowed in about the Boogong.

KH: Do you always abide by this magical date the 21st March to get your stock back out again.

FF: On the higher country - no - we would be a little bit later than that, but when we were out at Mawsons we'd go out early April and fine weather like we have had lately - first year we'd start to muster and before long - the next day there was a foot of snow - just that quick.

KH: There was one old timer who believed in this date?

FF: Yes - Jim Kidman. He had a block out at the Back River and in a fine summer Jim would be out getting his stock - he got caught once and said never again. Litchfields used to own the Tin hut country and the chaps who were there were always out by the end of March - they owned a lot of country there - Litchfields.

KH: Did you ever go to Bolton's hut?

FF: No I was never down there. Have you been there? How do you get to it?

KH: We walked up from Island Bend, up the escarpment - 3,000 feet. The easiest way is to go down from Tin hut or even come in from Constances too.

FF: Have you been to Constances?

KH: Yes.

FF: It's a great little hut - it's still standing isn't it?

KH: Yes.

FF: ... up over the Tolbar as we call it. There is Tolbar up here but that was Tolbar too - from Constances over to Boltons.

KH: Yes, I've been through there too - that's an old stock route I believe. Tolbars is a ruin now - you never went there?

FF: No. Is Bolton hut out on Finns River?

KH: It's above the Finns - it's on a little tributary. It's very open there.

FF: I believe it was a nice bit of country when Harry Bolton had it. Did this hut collapse?

KH: The slabs had dropped - they are all still there and could be used. Do you know of any poetry that has been published.

FF: I've got some - Elsie might know where it is. There is a verse that was written - they were hikers and they landed at, I think the Grey Mare because McPhées used to be out there - they landed out there and then they were going to go away again and they got back there and were there for several days and ended up writing this piece of poetry.

KH: Our little hut in the west - or something like that? A poem written by a fellow named Richardson.

FF: Of course it might have been a lady that wrote this. "There was gently Billy Primmer and there was Andrew Adams gay" - that's two fellows they mentioned in it. Then there was Laurie Adams - he had the bullock team at the time - he's in the poem.

KH: It's the one by Beryl Heather - "The Riders of the Range!"

FF: I think that's it.

KH: We have a copy of that.

FF: Good, it's one of the best I've seen in those days.

KH: Was there anything else?

FF: Reg Gelling and Maru - did you ever strike any of their writings?

KH: Yes.

FF: He was a summer man and visited all the huts mostly every summer and left a note at each hut to where he was going to the next one.

KH: He wrote an article about the hut in the Ski Year Book back in the

1930s - 1935s.

FF: I know he came to the Alpine hut in his early days. That was the first time I saw him.

KH: What about at the Valentine - do you remember an old stockman's hut above the Valentine Falls?

FF: No, the only hut I think I know there would be a little water-gauging hut the Snowy would have put there.

KH: You don't remember any other hut?

FF: No. The only one in that vicinity would be the Dicky Cooper hut. Dicky Coopers hut was built about the same time as the Boobee - Montagues^d hut - Happys. It was built by the same bloke - Ted E leston from Adaminaby.

Some of these mountain fellows are good cooks you know. Lindsay was the bread cook at Mawsons and Amos Blyton made good bread at the Tin hut, Ray Adams at Whites River. They all had their yeast bottles sitting up in the fireplace - hop yeast.

KH: It would have been a modified damper in a way wouldn't it?

FF: Instead of using compressed yeast like we had used here for donkey's years they had hop yeast. The way a lot of damper is made too is flour and baking powder.

KH: And they made these in the camp ovens?

FF: Yes. They were big camp ovens - 2'^{feet} across. Some at Mawsons were the biggest one^s I saw - easily 2'^{feet} across. Hang them up the chimney and I'd put some coals and ashes on the lid and away you'd go.

KH: How long would that take?

FF: I suppose an hour and a bit. A good coal fire like that under it - have it hanging up so far off it and then you'd heat those red coals and ashes on top of the lid - as good as a stove. You cook bread in a stove for an hour and a bit.

KH: What else did you eat when you were out in the mountains?

You'd take pack horses.

FF: Bread and cold meat mainly.

KH: Cold meat - like corned beef.

FF: Not salted - fresh mutton cooked. We mostly took a good supply from home when we went out and then cooked it out there or take some cooked and then if needs be we'd kill out there. If there was a mob of fellows in the hut we'd kill.

KH: Did you go up for three months at a time?

FF: I'd keep coming back though. Went for a month the first time - in 1939 - We were out at Whites River and Ray Adams' stock there and we'd kill a sheep there now and again. Beautiful flavoured meat after it had been out there for a while.

KH: Lindsay used to go out for 3 or 4 months at a time!

FF: Yes he'd stay all the time ...

KH: He'd come back once every 2 months or so.

FF: Yes. Old Amos Blyton has stayed at the Tin for 16 weeks. He'd go out before Xmas ...

KH: Was he a married man?

FF: Yes.

KH: His wife didn't mind?

FF: He wasn't married all the time I don't think. I think when he got married he didn't stay as long.

KH: Where did he come from?

FF: Round about here. Blytons were natives of here. An old chap Simon Kidman was with him at the Tin hut. There was the two of them for years with Litchfield sheep and Simon used to come in every week or two to contact the owners and Amos would stay out there. They'd cook their own bread and kill their own meat.

KH: What about vegetables?

FF: They'd take a few potatoes I suppose.

KH: What about you?

FF: We'd take a few potatoes and cook them.

KH: Apart from that did you eat fruit or anything like that?

FF: Not much, mostly bread and meat, bread and jam.

KH: Did you crave vegetables when you came back?

FF: My mother always had a good meal on - I suppose we did like it.

KH: You'd survive quite well - I mean for months at a time?

FF: Oh yes. There are other chaps I know of that probably never had any vegetables - they'd just have a bit of meat and dry bread.

KH: Did you take butter with you - they didn't I suppose.

FF: Yes, most chaps would take a bit of butter.

KH: They would have to take a lot to last 3 or 4 months?

FF: Yes, but I think within that 3 or 4 months they would be getting replenished along the side - there would be someone bringing a bit in. I know when we were at Whites River for this month, Billy Napthali used to go over to the Chalet and get supplies - he'd come back with a great lump of butter.

KH: So for breakfast you would have bread and butter and jam?

FF: Yes, and cook a chop.

KH: You'd have meat for breakfast! Was breakfast your biggest meal?

FF: Sometimes you'd have hot meat for tea at night but later years - that first time when I went out we didn't seem to have any vegetables at all that month.

KH: Did you take eggs at all?

FF: No. I don't say never - later years when Lee McPhée and I went to Rules Point we used to have a vehicle and you could take what you liked - even a bottle of rum.

KH: How much alcohol would you take?

FF: When most men got together in later times in the mountains - it would be at mustering time - you'd have a couple of weeks in the hut. There would be 8 or 10 blokes at the Boobee and each of them would have a bottle of rum - we'd only have one of a night.

KH: Did you camp out at all - were you equipped with a tent?

FF: No, we were lucky enough to always land at a hut at night.

KH: So you planned your journeys - even when you went to Rules Point?

FF: Yes.

KH: You went across country in the summer didn't you? then a vehicle came by road and brought in supplies?

FF: Yes. Another chap and I would start with the sheep, we'd go over past Nimmo and up to Kelly's hut and then round the Bald Mountain road and down to Kelly's hut and the vehicle would be there when we got there. Then he'd come back out that way and come down Tolbar to the old Providence hut by the old road into Happy's hut. He'd be at Happy's hut the next night. Then out he'd come again and down Kiandra Road - we'd stay in Kiandra in a hut, which is gone now, but when you go over that first creek going into Kiandra, 100 yards to the right was a nice little hut.

KH: That might have been Hughes old hut!

FF: Harry McGufficke I think might have owned it. Then out to a little hut on the lease - I'm going out one day and see if that hut is still there - it belonged to Millers I think.

KH: Not Hainsworth, there is a hut in that area called Hainsworth on what they call the Mosquitoe Fire Trail. You didn't know it?

FF: No. As you go on that road you go on the Hedgers hut and on out to Coolamine if you follow the power line. What happened to Hedgers hut - did it get burnt down?

KH: There was a Hedgers up there was there?

FF: Yes, relations to the Hedgers here but they came from Numbla Vale the other side of Dalgety.

KH: That makes it confusing. I didn't know about that. Is that anywhere near Old Currango? You're still talking about further up along Long Plain/

FF: Yes, it wasn't far.

KH: Near Cooimbil - that is along there?

FF: It wasn't far from Rules Point - up the power line, along Long Plain.

KH: There is Long Plain homestead which is also known as Col Ibbotsons or Dr Campbells.

FF: I don't know that area. I know over to Currango.

KH: Was anyone ever there when you were there?

FF: Yes, Tom Taylor lived there and his wife Molly.

KH: There is Old Currango and Currango - Currango is a big complex ...

FF: Yes, that's the one I mean.

KH: There's an Old Currango on the other side of the river.

FF: That's right - that's where they used to shear - that was in the early days. Is there a shed there in this complex?

KH: At Currango where Tom and Molly are? There are all sorts of things there.

FF: We stayed in a hut there for a week.

KH: You know Tom and Molly fairly well?

FF: Yes, I know Tom well. Tom was head ranger - we used to see a lot of him when we took our stock there.

KH: It seemed rather odd for Tom to be head ranger. I guess the Park Trust then was different. He worked for the Trust before ...

FF: With the Lands Department. When we first got our leases the rangers used to have to count the stock in. Dave Mackey was a ranger.

KH: That's Dave Mackay of Mackay's hut?

FF: No it was Dave's uncles that owned Mackay's hut and Dave was a stockman around the hills.

KH: They were there to police the leases weren't they and check on you fellows?

FF: Yes.

KH: You got on alright with them?

FF: Yes, fine fellows.

KH: Different perhaps to the rangers of today?

FF: Oh yes. These park fellows are a bit stand-overish. They are reasonable enough. Paul Harding is alright but I don't get involved with them at all now and they don't worry me although I join the park over here - down over the Eucumbene on the Spoils area. If a cow gets out onto there they might let me know or remind me. They know very well that it wouldn't be put in deliberately. George Freebody is one of their stockmen and Paul Harding'.

KH: Paul Harding has gone somewhere else now hasn't he?

FF: I don't know.

KH: What about way back - did you ever hear of any stories of cattle rustling?

FF: No not in these hills.

KH: Way back in the turn of the century - are there any legendary figures who ... like in the Victorian Alps there are - notorious characters who ... what you hear about is probably a lot of half truths now. Was there anything ever like that?

FF: One little story I could tell you. When Bill Napthali lived up here at this old Napthali¹⁵ place - there was a chap came there one evening leading a blue-heeler dog and he talked all night about how he was going back down to Berridale the next day to sow potatoes. Bill just listened to him and the next morning this fellow got up before

daylight and set off. Bill was still in bed. Bill must have got thinking and he rode up a track that he knew, round onto a road on the top and came back down and met this bloke with a mob of his bullocks heading for the Murray. That was a yarn that was right I think.

KH: How many head were involved?

FF: Ten or twelve I think - not a very big mob.

KH: They would have been branded?

FF: Yes.

KH: How would they get rid of the brand?

FF: They usually take that risk. But the shrewdness of Bill Napthali - just listened him out and never said a word and then got up the next morning and rode up there and met him going with them.

KH: This was Bill Napthali himself?

FF: Yes.

KH: Do you remember any heavy snow years. Ken Breakspear talks about 1946 for instance.

FF: 1939 was in the mountains. I was up about Snowy Plain - going out to the Alpine and it snowed for eleven days after the 21st June - that's why I maintain that snow that falls before the 21st June - you don't take any notice of, because I've seen a lot of it and it goes. But your mountain fall is after the 21st June. Alec West and I were taking meat to the Alpine hut in early July - before the 8th July and we could only get to Kidman's hut - it was too heavy - we left the meat there and went back. But in 1946 - about here we had 3'. It started to snow after dinner on a Tuesday 19th June and snowed until after dinner on the 21st June on the Thursday.

KH: You had 3 feet here in 1946.

FF: Yes.

KH: That's when Ken Breakspear apparently skied most of the way from Cooma Railway Station to the Alpine. He couldn't see the hut - it was

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all snowed under but he found where the chimney was. There was 8' or 9' of snow.

FF: That would be before the party - the parties didn't start until early in July and that fell in the middle of June.