

INTERVIEW with DUNCAN PROSSERINTERVIEWER: Klaus Hueneke

Interview with Duncan Prosser in Tumut - April 1980.

KH: One of things you were talking about was Vickerys. Who was the man who had the lease before Vickery?

DP: Dick Chave - it was freehold - the Forestry bought it and then the Park took over - he had horses there.

KH: Draught horses - this would have been in the 1920s-30s?

DP: Way back, 1912-14.

KH: Quite a while - when would he have started there?

DP: He started there about 1910.

KH: Was breeding draught horses a fairly unusual thing?

DP: Not at that time it wasn't. There was no cars or anything about then.

KH: There is 3-mile dam up near Kiandra, would they have used draught horses in the building of something like that?

DP: Yes, horses and carts or bullocks.

KH: Did they use those big scoops that a man would hold onto and direct? That would be pulled along by a draught horse?

DP: Yes that's right.

KH: Chave - he would have 20 or 30 draught horses?

DP: More. He was there until about 1920 then the Forestry took over and then the Park took it.

KH: Did Vickery then take it on as a lease?

DP: The Park.

KH: Vickerys wasn't built until the 40s was it? The Park was declared in 1944 and I think I have somewhere a figure - a date of 1945 for the building of Vickerys.

DP: About that time.

KH: The other thing you said about Chave was that he had a potato

DP:

patch down there.

DP: Yes he did have one, one time.

KH: So there was a previous shack there before the one that is now known as Vickerys?

DP: Yes - have you ever been down there?

KH: Yes, Jack Bridle took me down there - a two room structure - slab hut.

DP: It was burnt down years ago before Vickery had it.

KH: Chave built that?

DP: That's right.

KH: You were born near Jounama Ponds?

DP: I was born more over towards Jounama Station.

KH: Where there any log cabins associated with that area?

DP: There was

KH: Jack Bridle may have shown me a photo of that - fairly big structure?

DP: Four rooms.

? How did these places burn down - was it the fireplace catching fire?

DP: The fire in 1965.

KH: That was called the Lick Hole. I ask that because log cabin style buildings are fairly rare in Australia and there is only 3 or 4 that I know of in the mountains. Do you know who built it?

DP: Fellow by the names of Ray Bones. He had something to do with the Trocadero in Sydney.

KH: Would that have been a very old building - Lick Hole?

DP: Yes, built about 1930. There was another old place across the creek - 4 room place. The Gibbs had all this country in the first place - Bob Gibbs.

KH: Did he own the country that includes Vickerys?

DP: No, on the other side.

DP:

KH: Vickery would have used local timber?

DP: Yes all local stuff.

KH: The structure of it at the moment - it starts with big logs at the bottom and then the logs get smaller and smaller, whereas a lot of the log cabin style, like the cheese house at Coolamine are the same size.

DP: A lot of them built that way because they had the strong stuff on the bottom, to take the weight ...

KH: The bottom ones would act as a foundation?

DP: Yes that's right.

KH: It's rather a nice little style. Where would Vickerys have got the idea for that from?

DP: I don't know.

KH: How long was he in there for?

DP: Only 6-7 years, until the early 50s.

KH: The grazing lease just ended or went back to the Park?

DP: Well he went out of it and then a fellow by the name of McGrath took it - Ray McGrath - he had it for a few years and then the Park came.

KH: That would have been about '58? That was a fairly short one?

DP: Yes, he only stayed there a very short time.

KH: We were talking about the Long Plain and Yorkies diggings - how far are they away from Ibbotsons, which is now the Long Plain Rest House?

DP: Just down from that, right on the Plain ...

KH: On one of the creeks on the plain! Not on the Murrumbidgee though ...

Duncan Prosser
: No on the same side of the road as Ibbotsons. Bill Oddy that was built for - had sheep there every year - looking after it for a fellow by the name of Campbell.

KH: Was that a Dr Campbell?

DP: Could have been, I couldn't say.

KH: Was there any association with Canberra - this Campbell?

Bill Oddy worked for Campbell?

DP: Yes.

DP:

KH: Would this have been about 1916-1917 when that would have been built?

DP: Yes that's right - a fellow by the name of Bobby Joyce. He also built the hotel at Rules Point and while he was building that they got him to build that place of Oddy's - he put a couple of his men on there. Masters from Tumut ...

KH: Masters was the name of the builders?

DP: Joyce had the contract ...

KH: So Masters were sub-contractors were they?

DP: Yes.

KH: That place is lined with tongue and groove boards ...

DP: That's pine.

KH: It's not Oregon.

DP: No.

KH: Would that have been imported from New Zealand or somewhere in those days. I don't think there was much pine grown in Australia then.

DP: No, I don't think so - it would have to be imported.

KH: It would have been fairly expensive to line a big place like that with imported pine.

DP: There is a lot of that pine at Tantangara - have you been out there?

KH: Tantangara dam?

DP: No, Tantangara Homestead.

KH: That's not Gooandra ... yes. That was Lampe's old place wasn't it?

DP: Yes, it was lined with the same pine as Ibbotson's hut.

KH: That homestead is still there. What about the old chimney that is next to that homestead? It looks like there was another old building next to it ...

DP: It was a slab place I think.

KH: That looks to be very old.

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DP: Yes, its out on the Little River.

KH: Do you know anything about it - who might have built it or who Stokes was?

DP: Stokes was a miner ...

KH: Is it on a creek? ... the Little River - is that a tributary of the Goobarragandra?

DP: Yes.

KH: You call the Goobarragandra the Little River?

DP: Yes, when you get up there is a right hand branch and a left hand branch - the two of them meet at the bottom of the hill. There's a gold mine up there - I worked in one of those tunnels.

KH: When would that have been?

DP: I was 18 then.

KH: 1904 you were born - 1922 when you were there.

DP: Yes, Jim Bradley and I - he was the boss.

KH: I'm quite intrigued by these mining concerns that sprang up in the 1920s and 30s - when would that little show have started? Bradley - when did he start that mine.

DP: One little tunnel we put in about 1920s, the other big one - Stokes put that in. There's two tunnels - horizontal, straight into the hill - one was straight above the other. I put the bottom one ⁱⁿ with Bradley in 1920s ...

KH: Were there other people working with you?

DP: No only the two of us.

HA: How deep did the tunnels go?

DP: About 200ft I think.

KH: This was quartz gold was it?

DP: Yes, we were looking for a reef. Some of them will go a ¼ mile, they have just got a little seam and then they'll open right out. I don't know whether they got any gold out of the big mine or not.

DP:

KH: How much higher is it than your little one?

DP: About 100 yards - our s was practically on the creek - on the Goobarragandra.

KH: This is all above the Dubbo Falls isn't it?

DP: Yes. On Emu Creek not Dubbo Creek - they all run into one another.

KH: There's a creek here - Emu Flat Creek - that's a little bit lower down than Dubbo Creek. So this other mining concern, the one up on the hill, when would that have been put in?

DP: It could have been put in in the 1880's.

KH: Before the turn of the century?

DP: Yes.

KH: Do you remember who did it?

DP: Stokes. It was some company but Stokes was involved.

KH: Was Stokes involved with grazing at all?

DP: There's a funny story about that - he had sheep up there, very old man and they struck this alluvial gold right where Stokes hut ...

KH: This is the alluvial gold at the top of the Goobarragandra you call Little River. The miners of 1860, the gold rush from Kiandra, must have also looked at that?

DP: I suppose they did in the first place. They all rushed to new diggings ... I think you can use a dish ...

KH: What about metal detectors?

DP: No, not allowed.

KH: Did you ever go back to do any mining?

DP: I was dog trapping then, in that country for about thirty years - all through there.

KH: From the 1920s on?

DP: I was about 16 when I first started with breaks inbetween - I used to do a bit of prospecting then but I never got anything - nothing worth talkin

DP:

about.

KH: Have you still got any gold?

DP: No.

KH: This Stokes hut - it was built by Stokes before the turn of the century?

DP: I don't know about that one, I mean the top mine could have been before the turn of century.

KH: But the Stokes hut would have been built later on?

DP: Yes.

KH: It's not on this map, but it's on one of my other maps in more detail - I've never been there, but I've got to get in there.

DP: You go up above the Goobarragandra Station and follow the river right up.

KH: That's how you used to go in there?

DP: Yes. Then when you get to the two branches there's a track goes across from the two branches, that takes you right up onto the mine.

KH: People talk about a big race line. Either a race line or an access track cut into the side of the hill.

DP: There is a race cut into the hill but it's not very long ... but the Horseshoe mine out on the peaks - its 20 miles long that race ... they must have struck a creek I think - there's a little stream comes out of the mouth of the tunnel now.

KH: There's a race down there twenty miles long? Where does that get water from?

DP: Gets water from right up on top of the Peppercorn that's out towards the back of the Yarrangobilly River. It runs right down to Horseshoe mine.

KH: Was that gold?

DP: Yes.

KH: Did they get any gold out of there?

DP:

DP: Yes.

KH: Was it a tunnel mine?

DP: There is a hell of a lot of open sluicing there too.

KH: Did they do hydraulic sluicing there?

DP: No.

KH: That was old alluvial?

DP: I think McEvoys had that - I can't be sure of the first part of the history - Jim Cunningham was working there - he came through one day ... he took £300 out of it.

KH: That's a year's salary in those days. You didn't work that mine?

DP: No, that was before I was born.

KH: That had already finished in your time?

DP: Yes.

KH: So that would go back to the 1870s/1880s.

Did the mine where you were working have a name?

DP: I think the top one was called Stokes mine. King was the manager of the top one and of ours too. I don't know how much they got out.

KH: You didn't get much out of the one you were working in?

DP: Nothing.

KH: Was Bradley a local or did he come from Sydney or somewhere?

DP: He was a local, he had the Yarrangobilly hotel for a while. His father had the first place.

KH: It would take a bit of money to start one of these things off - he had to pay you, he had to keep himself and possibly a family.

DP: It wasn't him, he was only working for the Company. The company got it somehow or another - he was just working for them.

King was the manager.

You should see Herb Buckley. He has a place on the Goobarragandra.

KH: What was your style of mining then, what was your technique, did you used to use a hammer and big long drills?

DP:

DP: Yes, hammer and drill and punch it in ... then shoot it.

KH: Just with one at the end of the tunnel - one hole, or would you have to make several?

DP: I'd make four or five sometimes - at the front of it was earth ...

KH: What sort of rock was it?

DP: Granite - very hard.

KH: You used those drills of varying length?

DP: Yes, we'd have a wet bag over it to stop the dust from coming up.

KH: How did you get the little fine powder out? Would you take the chisel out every so often and ...

DP: Yes

KH: It would take you all day to make one of these holes wouldn't it?

DP: Yes. Some of us were very good at it ... hold it and hit it with the hammer.

I was working at the mine near Yarrangobilly - silver there - 3 or 4 shafts - lost a crow bar down the shaft - rattled for about 4-5 minutes - he might have stretched it a little bit.

KH: Did they get any silver out?

DP: Just a little bit.

KH: Did you have a stamper battery down in the Goobarragandra?

DP: No.

KH: What did you do to check to see if you had gold or not in your rock?

DP: If they saw anything that looked like it they'd build a dolly pot.

KH: What's a dolly pot?

DP: It so round and so high, put your sample in it, build a big piece of iron like a ramrod, then crush it by hand ...

KH: There is apparently still a stamper down there - something to do with Stokes mine.

DP: This Buckley fellow, he took the machinery in there - pulled it in with bullocks.

DP:

KH: There would have been a steam engine in there too?

DP: Yes.

KH: Apparently it's very overgrown with blackberries and things - it's very hard to get in.

You don't know anything about this big cutting into the side of the hill, somewhere up the Goobarragandra - maybe it is this race line - are there any cliffs in the side of the river?

DP: Yes. There's a cutting where they took the machinery down to the mine.

KH: As far as you know, there is only the two tunnels?

DP: Yes.

PA: These race lines - how much water do you get down the river - how much do you lose - 20 miles is a long way.

DP: You cut little creeks about so big and block them.

KH: I'm quite interested in this.

DP: ...

KH: Three pieces of wood?

DP: (Describing levelling - surveying technique).

KH: They had a string and a plumb bob in the middle of the triangle and they put this bottom piece onto the bottom of the race line and the plumb bob slightly to one side ...

DP: Yes, about a quarter of an inch.

KH: That race finally goes for 20 miles - when would that have been put in?

DP: I don't know - I think it was put in before the tunnel was put in at the Horseshoe.

KH: That would have all been pick and shovel would it - building of that race line?

DP: Yes and bullocks.

KH: What would they use the bullocks for?

DP:

DP: Ploughing - plough it and then shovel it out.

KH: What sort of a plough?

DP: Just an ordinary plough - what we call a bullock plough - 3 or 4 bullocks.

KH: How deep would that dig in?

DP: I suppose a couple of feet, when it was rocky they would go on with pick and shovel - just wide enough for a man to work in.

KH: So the bullock plough actually made ^{most} of the race and then cleaned it up with a shovel.

DP: Yes.

KH: With a bullock team you could run a fair length of race line in a day couldn't you?

DP: Yes - they could have had a scoop or something - I don't know. I used to trap in there. I've been right along there.

KH: You used to set big dingo traps?

DP: Yes.

KH: They're quite a bit bigger than rabbit traps aren't they?

DP: Yes. I was employed by the Dingo Board.

KH: Does that still exist?

DP: Yes.

KH: Is it part of the Lands Department ...

DP: I suppose it would be. I think the Park had their own trapper.

PA: What was the bait that you found most effective for trapping dingoes?

DP: A decoy made of a dead dog and would put it on the top of the trap.

KH: You used to wander around with a horse and cart?

DP: Just a pack horse.

KH: Your own horse and a pack horse?

DP: Yes. Two pack horses.

KH: Were you raised in Tumut?

DP: No, at Yarrangobilly.

DP: . . .

KH: Were you paid so much for each dingo or just a wage?

DP: £4 a dog.

KH: How many dogs would you get a week?

DP: One or two or maybe three or four.

KH: What was your best week?

DP: Eighteen I think.

KH: You must have covered a lot of country in that time?

DP: We did. Both sides of the Tumut River and Buddong Creek.

...

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KH: You would have know that place in its heyday I suppose

DP: way over on the creek, straight over ... Long Plain ... log hut. I suppose the old walls ... right down to the ground, the fire might have got it.

KH: What was Pether , a miner?

DP: No, he was a stock owner/grazier. He had the Goobarragandra Station one time, he had all that country right across there.

KH: Pethers hut is gone now?

DP: Yes.

KH: What about further along, the Peppercorn hut, there was little Peppercorn and the big Peppercorn hut, did you know those?

DP: Yes.

KH: Were you ever snowed in up there when you were out on your rounds?

DP: No I was never snowed in, but I did get lost in a snow storm in July.

KH: This was up in the top of the Goobarragandra?

DP: Yes, right above the mine - from the mine to Yarrangobilly, I was

DP: going across country.

KH: You came out near the Fiery Range?

DP: Yes.

PA: Which year was that?

DP: I think 1923 - I was 22 - only there nine months. I lost my horse. Carried a swag. There were no huts to use.

KH: What happened in the end, did you get out by yourself?

DP: Yes I got out by myself - I followed the creek down.

PA: What is your feeling about the seasons - have they been getting lighter or heavier or was there some years that were much heavier than others?

DP: They're getting much lighter

PA: But you think possibly the clearing of the farm land has warmed it up?

KH: What about the dams, Tantangara Dam and the Eucumbene Dam and so on... This Yorkie fellow, do you know anything about him?

DP: He was an Englishman, came from Yorkshire, hence the name. I never knew his real name ...

KH: Bill Harris reworked that later I think.

DP: Yorkie is buried there, just over from Ibbotsons.

KH: Was his grave marked in any way?

DP: It's right in the timber, just near a shed behind his hut ...

KH: When did you finish dog trapping?

DP: About 20 years ago I suppose.

KH: So you did it for 20 years or so or more?

DP: About 30 years.

KH: You have trapped a few dingos in your life. Are there some dogs that you got to know that you never caught?

DP: No.

KH: Did they have a large territory - did they range a long way?

DP:

DP: Yes, from Yass right across into Victoria. One dog may have travelled from Murray's Gap to Talbingo.

KH: Did you ever see many dingo pups?

DP: No.

KH: Did you mainly trap males or females?

DP: The whole lot.

KH: Do they have a lair when they're pups? Did you ever find a den?

DP: Only one. There 4 or 5, mostly four in the litter.

KH: What about pigs?

DP: A lot of pigs, wild ducks, plenty of fish.

KH: So you lived off the land did you?

DP: Yes I did.

KH: What about any fruits or anything like that?

DP: A few berries or grasses, I never bothered about it much.

KH: When did the blackberries start spreading - was it before your time?

DP: Yes, long before my time - the birds scatter a lot of the seed.

KH: Did you ever know Bob and Bill Hughes from Kiandra?

DP: Yes.

KH: Did you ever go to mines like the Elaine or Lorna Doone or the Kiandra mines?

DP: No. A lot of those huts burnt down before the Park came in there.

KH: ^{Dhullis} Dowling always refers to Cooimbil as Long Plain and the other one Col Ibbotson. Col Ibbotson in fact, only used it for a period of time.

DP: Yes, he wasn't there. Bill Oddy was there.

KH: So over a period of years it has had a number of people and the name has changed according to who was using it.

DP: It was Yorkies in the first place, but he had another little hut.

KH: Do you know how Yorkie died?

DP: I don't know. The drovers talk about him.

DP:

KH: Was he just found dead in his hut?

DP: No, there was someone looking after him just before he died.

KH: Did they bring him some tucker every so often?

DP: When he got sick they were there every day - he used to keep himself in meat, he had his own pigs.

KH: Any stories about Yorkie? He got around on snow shoes - home made ones!

DP: Yes, he never did any skiing.

KH: I guess when the snow is very heavy the horses can't get about very well.

What about a fellow called Mick Shanley, did you ever know him?

DP: Yes, he died between Kiandra and Lobbs Hole somewhere. He was coming up there and I think he must have got off and decided to walk ... he got off in the deep snow ... his horse would have struck a branch.

KH: How old would he have been then?

DP: A fair age.

KH: Did you know him?

DP: Yes, and Jack Spring - he's a character, could tell you some wild yarns.

KH: Why was he a character?

DP: He'd build a yarn up and keep you there for half an hour. He worked with the Hughes ... stock. Also worked at Lobbs Hole on the copper mine.

KH: Did you do any writing at all?

DP: No.

KH: What about songs when you got together?

DP: ... He~~ther~~ingtons ... Christy He~~ther~~ington wrote a poem about Gundagai. Bill He~~ther~~ington got poisoned.

KH: Poisoned by what - food?

DP: They reckoned his wife poisoned him. They had a row. She went to jail for 15 years, poor old soul.

DP:

KH: What was her christian name?

DP: Burgess was her maiden name.

KH: What about Bill Glennie, had a mine out around Four-mile?

DP: No I didn't know him.

KH: You knew Bill Paterick I guess, he had the post office?

DP: Yes I knew him - he married a Yan.

Poem by Boasten:

"Caught Georgie Yan frying chop in a pan
Singing songs to Yankie Kiandra
Spilt the fat in the fire
And flames they grew higher
And burnt all the chops to a cinder
What have we here cried noble Fred?
...
But he skinned a sheep ...

KH: There was another guy who used to write poetry and used to visit the Coolamine Homestead?

DP: George Morris.

KH: He wrote a long ballad about the Coolamine Ball. Jack Bridle recites some of his poetry occasionally. Buntly Morris - did you meet him?

DP: I knew him well. Jack wrote a poem too.

KH: Yes he's written a few.

DP: His eldest brother was called Boogong - terribly big fellow.

KH: The Boogong is an old Aboriginal name - big mountain isn't it?

DP: Yes.

KH: There is another lady called Prosser ...?

DP: Yes, that's my brothers wife. He's dead now.

KH: She's at Rules Point - I wanted to see her. And Mrs Cottrell.

DP: Mrs Cottrell is in Canberra staying with Jim Pattinson.

DP:

DP: Herb Buckley lost a watch up here for 15 years - one day he found it and it was still going. It was ^{an} an ants track and he reckons every time they stepped over it they wound it up.

KH: Does he live up there by himself somewhere?

DP: He's got a little place just across the river - you couldn't miss it - Herb Buckley ... go and see him, it would be worth the trip.

KH: I must get up to the Goobarragandra mine.

DP: He'd know all about that - comes from up there - he brought in the machinery ...

KH: The one that you worked on?

DP: No, the top one.

KH: He must be pretty old then?

DP: About 90. He was in a car accident - both legs broken.

KH: He must be pretty tough.

DP: Couldn't kill him with an axe - my God he's a terrible liar.

KH: The yarns are very interesting.

DP: He bought a horse for himself the other day and he's got a little platform to get on it.

KH: How many dingo traps would you have with you?

DP: I never carried any more than about 12.

FINISH