

Tony Sponar

*(Tape now distorted - too fast)
except for end. 1993.*

This is an interview with Tony Sponar at Jindabyne on 15 December 1986, by Klaus Hueneke. Tony was a hydrographer with the Snowy Mountains Authority from 1954 to 1957, and as part of that did a ski trip from Happy Jack's Plain through to Spencer's Creek, which features in my coming book. He then, during the 50s, became a keen promoter of a resort at Thredbo which finally got off the ground in 1957. Then, in 1959 to 1966, Tony was involved in managing Sponar's Lakeside Inn, which was the servants' quarters of the old Kosciusko Hotel that burned down in 1951. He is also quite a good downhill skier, being a champion from way back.

KH: I will probably ask you some of those things again. They will probably come up again.

TS: Yes, all right.

KH: I had "managed Sponar's Lakeside Inn" from 1959 to 1966."

TS: Yes, proprietor.

KH: Proprietor.

TS: Yes.

KH: Can I start at the beginning? Have you got any other names apart from Tony?

TS: No. I don't use any.

KH: When were you born?

TS: 8.4.20.

KH: And where were you born?

TS: Prague, Czechoslovakia.

KH: And what are your parents' names?

TS: My father is the same name, only it is pronounced differently as I am - that is Antonin. And mother was Bertha.

KH: That is a very German name, Bertha.

TS: Not really, that was a Czech name at that stage.

KH: I have got an aunt called Bertha, that is why.

In the north of Germany.

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TS: You have been born here?

KH: No, I was born in Germany. I came out.

TS:

KH: I came out when I was a boy. And where did you go to school?

TS: In Prague. After the primary school, I had more or less a technical line of education. High school was technical, and then I learned mechanical and electrical engineering, part of Prague University. It was the beginning of the war, and when the war started the universities were closed, and it was the end of my formal education. In the war, I mostly, for the first few years, winter - ski instructor - and in summer I learned the trades of gilder and cabinet maker, because my father was in that kind of business, and it fitted whatever the war years offered. But most of the time I spend skiing, I somehow managed to slip through the rules and all that, and although after the war I, for a little while, started to study architecture. My mind was made up that I will have my future in anything connected with mountains and snow, which I managed eventually.

KH: How did you get out of not serving in the war? Were you a soldier at all?

TS: I was a Czech, and Hitler did not want Czechs to serve. He wanted us to work for him. I was supposed to work for him, but I think it is somewhere in that article there, that I managed to get medical certificate that I had epilepsy.

KH: Oh yes, that is right. I read that, yes.

TS: And with that I was able to slip through all those nets. Of course, if they had caught me I would have been shot.

KH: Oh, I see. It was that serious. So what happened then? You came to the end of the war and you, what, you slipped back across to Austria, or - - -

TS: No, I was supposed to either study or take over the family business. And already the clouds were - pretty much bad indication that something is going to happen to Eastern Europe.

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I served in military service, 1947, already in the new Czechoslovakian state, but it did not look well. And in 1948 I was in the Olympic Games, and straight after the Olympic Games the communists took over Czechoslovakia and I knew that I would not last there. So I started to plan to escape. As it happened, it was not necessary to escape. I managed again by certain ways to - actually I constructed, designed and constructed, a ski lift, and I managed to secure permission to take the ski lift out of Czechoslovakia for the purpose of training of the national team of Czechoslovakia.

KH: What sort of a lift was it? I mean, it seems very easily transported.

TS: It was mounted on a jeep.

KH: Oh, right. So you used the motor of the jeep?

TS: Yes, the motor of the jeep. Yes, it was mounted on it, and the jeep winched itself up the mountain into position at the top, and it had a huge winch in front which had on the end a series of T-bars. And these had to be taken down by one person, and the people got on to them and were towed up.

KH: So it was not a rope?

TS: It was a steel rope. I have a few pictures here. This was when it was installed in St. Christof in Austria in Aarlberg. It winched itself up. It had sort of skids under all four wheels, and 500 metres of steel rope. On the bottom - these were prospective customers, these were all war cripples.

KH: Oh, they all have one leg.

TS: One leg, and there were about 12 Ts, and they got on to it and the motor was started. There had to be one driver and one or two to It was the first ski lift ever in St. Christof.

KH: Oh, was it?

TS: Yes.

KH: Gee, they have changed a lot over the years, haven't they? Ski lifts have come a long since that system.

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TS: They were really grateful because, for instance, people like this find it extremely difficult to climb the mountain. They have to go sideways and carry everything on their arms. They were very grateful. It was a state-operated resort. And they were very glad that they had a means of transportation.

KH: St. Christof, that was in Austria?

TS: That is in Aarlberg, Austria . yes, Tyrol.

KH: And then did you also take that further, that lift?

TS: I took it to Australia with me, without the jeep.

KH: Oh, I see.

TS: Just all the equipment which was necessary to convert again - I intended to buy a jeep in Australia, and then just install it on to that. It was suitable for that. I did that. I bought a jeep first, here in Australia. And I installed the lift. Well then, I fell ill, and had to give up that idea for a few years.

KH: So how long did you then spend in Austria?

TS: In Austria, only two years, 48, 49, 50 we started for Australia, and arrived 1 January 1951. Easy to remember.

KH: Right. And when did you meet your wife.

TS: I met her already in Czechoslovakia. She is English and she worked for a film company, American film company in Czechoslovakia. And then we married in Austria, in Innsbruck, and somehow through my wife's job in Austria, she worked for the International Refugee Organisation and for a while for the Australian Mission. And I could not - I wanted to go to USA or Canada, but for that the waiting time was very long - 10 years for USA, 5 years for Canada. And these people from the Australian Mission suggested that there is snow in Australia and they need people who know something about snow and snow business, so I said, "OK, why not?" Never looked back.

KH: Oh yes. What level did you reach in skiing, back home, back in Czechoslovakia?

TS: I was unbeaten Czechoslovakian champion at that stage.

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KH: What, in slalom or - - -

TS: Downhill slalom. And I was - my best placing was in Olympic Games, six, and I was placing regularly among the best then.

KH: So you came to Australia, what, in 1951?

TS: '51, yes. And already it was arranged that I would be employed as a ski instructor, because I was, as a refugee, under contract to do whatever the government requires, and this was as good as anything.

KH: Well, that was a pretty good job. You came over by ship, presumably, like lots of other people?

TS: Yes, yes.

KH: And who paid - were you assisted?

TS: Yes.

KH: Fully assisted, what, by the Australian government, or - - -

TS: The Australian government, yes. And, of course, that was a condition of the fully assisted people that they do whatever they are told to do for two years.

KH: Right. And you were told to be a ski instructor!

TS: Yes.

KH: Did you know very much about Australia before you came?

TS: Very little.

KH: You knew it had snow, though?

TS: We learned only - it never occurred to me to think of Australia to migrate to, because.....because I knew that skiing, as a business, as a sport, was developing very fast at that stage - just on the threshold of developing in the United States and Canada. And I wanted to be part of that. Nothing happened here in Australia, I did not know about that. But I thought if they have snow, well maybe I will be able to put my foot into it.

KH: Because not many new Australians knew that Australia had snow, from what I can see.

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TS: No, absolutely none. No idea, until these friends - we became friendly with the Australian Mission, and not until then did I know that there was skiing - as a sport in Australia. I knew there was snow ~~but not any development~~

KH: But did you bring any skis with you?

TS: Yes, of course I did, yes. A couple of pairs of skis, all this equipment for that, which was a huge wooden crate. And that wooden crate later became the first structure at Thredbo. I put it on the narrow edge, stood it up, and ~~one~~ could get inside - the first structure ever there.

KH: A lot of people turned those big crates into garages. I know where I lived in Orange, they did. They were so big.

TS: Yes. This was not big. I made it myself, not that big. But it made a useful storage because I needed a few tools at the beginning, and useful storage which you must lock up.

KH: So you did not spend any time in a migrant camp, then?

TS: Only very shortly before those - organisation of the government got through. So only about three months.

KH: Was that at Bonegilla?

TS: No, in Bathurst.

KH: In Bathurst?

TS: Yes.

KH: Yes, that is right. There was a camp there.

TS: Yes, three months. At the beginning of April we arrived at the Hotel Kosciusko. That was a government-run hotel, very nice. At that stage there was only a Chalet at Charlotte's Pass, also government-run, and the Hotel Kosciusko, as public accommodation for skiers. Also there was about 30 beds available at the Kiandra Hotel, plus very small - two buildings. One was ~~Batts~~ Camp between Charlotte and Smiggins, and at Smiggins there was a cafe, but no accommodation.

KH: Was that cafe run by Johnny Abbotsmith then?

TS: No, no. That cafe was also by government - everything was run by the government.

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KH: Oh, I see.

TS: Everything at that stage was government, because the rules of the park required it. And rules had to be changed, and they were first time changed for Thredbo, which I was part of.

KH: So were you there when the hotel burned down?

TS: Yes. A week after we arrived, it burned down.

KH: Oh, my God! What a welcome to the mountains.

TS: But we used to joke about that.

KH: Before or after?

TS: No, after. We used to joke who put the match to it? Whether it was my wife or myself. I was actually one of the first ones to see the fire, because I was living in what is now called Sponar's. And I was on the second floor, and from the top I could see this big wooden building, and all of a sudden - I don't know why I woke up at night - I saw these yellow *tongues*jumping on the ceiling, so I looked out of the window, and here was already a nice decent fire on the roof. At that stage somebody started to scream and it went very fast. It was lucky that nobody was killed because - very fast.

KH: Were there people sleeping in that part?

TS: There were. I was sleeping in this concrete building, which is Sponar's now, which was staff quarters. But I was so-called outside staff, and my wife was employed as inside staff, and we were not allowed to associate. She had to sleep somewhere else, and I had to sleep somewhere else.

KH: I see.

TS: So she slept in the hotel building, which was made out of wood, timber.

KH: Oh, is that right?

TS: Yes.

KH: But it had stone cladding in some parts.

TS: Only very few. The front entrance was stone cladding, but very, very little.

KH: It is funny, that. Because it makes it appear like a

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very solid building when you see all the photos of the front of it. But the rest of it was just wood.

TS: Come and have a look at - these here.

KH: Right. So what happened when the hotel burned down?

TS: Well, there was at that stage - the hotel had ^acapacity of 150 guests. But it was run by government, it required 170 staff to run those 150 guests. And so most of the staff had to be dismissed, and we were lucky that we were transferred to the Charlotte's Pass Chalet. I was a ski instructor, and my wife as a receptionist. Which was so much better than the hotel, because the hotel never really was deep in snow, and I preferred to be deep in snow.

KH: So then you instructed that winter.

TS: Three years, yes.

KH: Three years.

TS: Yes.

KH: So you were at the Chalet for three years.

TS: 51, 52, 53. And 54, I was already with the Snowy.

KH: And did you do much trip skiing on the Main Range?

TS: Yes, quite a bit. In 51, the Ski Tourers Association started to build Albina Hut, and Charles Anton was the president, a very active, energetic man, who organised everybody to help with that. So right from the beginning I sort of volunteered to take trips to Albina transporting materials and all that goes with that. And then very early also I started to look at Thredbo Valley, because on the map it looked promising. It was the highest vertical drop for skiing. And finally summer 51/52, the first summer, I had a look at Thredbo. Thredbo was inaccessible at that stage.

KH: Did you walk in, or ride in?

TS: No, we rode in from the Chalet, from the Kosciusko Chalet.

KH: Oh, across the tops?

TS: Yes.

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KH: Across via Merritts - - -

TS: Not Merritts. There was another track, overgrown. I had a very good friend at the Chalet, Graham ^{Chalker} from Cooma, who was a bushman, and he knew the track. It was not easy to find, and so we went into Thredbo Valley the first time.

KH: That was an old bridle track, was it?

TS: Yes.

KH: Was that an old route that they took cattle up?

TS: No, no. Cattle was apparently taken - according to Elyne Mitchell - was taken on the Merritts Spur. I am not sure about that because it does not make any sense. It is very steep and was always overgrown. I am almost certain it must have been from Dead Horse Gap.

KH: Yes.

TS: Because from Dead Horse Gap it is very easy. It has never been overgrown, ~~crossing the river~~

KH: That is my impression, too, that Dead Horse Gap was the access. So you rode across from the chalet and you rode right down into the valley?

TS: Yes, and we finished down in the valley. We finished at a location which was at that stage already known as Horse Shoe Bend. Very good fishing, we were always fishing - - - and as it happened, it was very, very close to a location where only three years later the Australian Ski Association decided to hold National Downhill on the Thredbo slopes. They were well advised because it was a very good run.

KH: They did that without having lifts there?

TS: Without any lifts, yes.

KH: They went across from the Chalet, did they?

TS: From the Chalet, they had to ski down and go up again to the Chalet. As it happened, a girl racer broke her leg right on the bottom there. And they had to carry her all the way up to the top of Kangaroo...Range and all the way to the Chalet, because there was no way of access from Jindabyne.

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KH: But there was a bridle track along the river.

TS: There was a bridle track, yes. There was a bridle track, but the downhill finished more or less on the tree line. And to get through the bush would have been impossible to carry an injured person.

KH: But those slopes had been skied earlier in the 40s.

TS: Yes, they had, yes.

KH: In the old Ski Year Book.

TS: Yes, that is right, yes.

KH: So did you then go over there and ski as well? The following winter?

TS: Not in 1940s?

KH: No, after you did your horse ride to have a look at it, did you then ski it in the winter time?

TS: Only the first time when - I would have to search my memory. I must have, because I was very, at that stage - a ski instructor. We were only two ski instructors in New South Wales at that stage.

KH: Who was the other one?

TS: Rudy Wurt, a Swiss fellow. And we were both at the Chalet, because there was nothing else anywhere. And we were - as ski instructors, it was almost our duty that we have to help with all the racing. And whenever the racing was, we had to set the courses, and often it was here and there. So already at that stage it was near the slopes of Thredbo Valley - were racing courses. And whether we wanted to or not we had to go there.

KH: So there ^{were} other people who were already skiing those slopes.

TS: Yes, yes. I believe that first - well, Elyne Mitchell again records the first time skiing to Dead Horse Gap. And about 1943 - I have got it written down somewhere - Dr Peter Blaxland skied Thredbo slopes much lower down. Very probably very close where we went down on the bridle track in 1951.

KH: And you got the idea that this might be suitable for a

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resort. But what steps did you then take?

TS: I started to talk about it, and nobody would listen, until one year, it was 1954 when I was in charge of the meteorological station at Spencer's Creek, the job of ski instructor at the Chalet was inherited by Sasha Nekyapi!... And one day I met her, I was at Spencer's Creek, which was only 2 kilometres from the Chalet, and she said she had found somebody who is interested in doing something about developing Thredbo Valley. It was a Sydney architect by the name of Eric Nicholls. And he knew the ways of publicising and he did quite a few clever things, like inviting a Swiss designer of chairlifts to visit the mountains, which got publicity. And then people I used to talk to who would not listen to me, all of a sudden started to - "Oh, we want to be in it, we want to be in it." And that is how it started. Everybody wanted to be in it, but nobody wanted to put any money in it.

KH: I mean, skiing was so - it was the pioneering era still. Even then there was very little skiing in Australia. How did you - what were the factors that led you to think that something might take off? I mean, it was all an unknown. Now we look at it with hindsight. But in the 50s it was all unknown.

TS: When I decided - it was during the war or maybe already before the war that my future is in snow. And I started to look around and I travelled quite a lot, even during the war I travelled quite a lot. And I loved the atmosphere of whatever this way of life of skiing brings along. I knew that it was the right, correct, thing, and I wanted to be in it. And I believed that whenever there is snow there should be some kind of facilities to use the snow. So I was convinced that the same thing could happen in Australia, that it has to happen.

KH: So you got these people to visit the area, and so on. And then what was the first tangible thing that happened?

TS: Well, the first thing which happened was we very early formed a syndicate of four skiers, Charles Anton was one of them;

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Eric Nicholls and another man from Sydney. And this syndicate started to investigate ways of getting the thing under way. Of course, the worst problem was that no-body had any money for that. At that stage, it was actually in 1954 when Eric Nicholls, the Sydney architect, invited this chairlift designer from Switzerland, and we visited the mountains, which was damn good publicity. At this stage already it was known that the Snowy wants to push roads through Thredbo Valley, and connect with Victoria. And already the road was under construction, and it was possible to - I think the road, at the visit of this chairlift manufacturer - definitely was not through yet, but it was as far as - pushed through by bulldozer - as far as present Thredbo. I already had under investigation several locations which I wanted for the resort of Thredbo, and I took this party to Thredbo Valley by my jeep, and we walked up from the river, near this location which I mentioned to the - Horseshoe Bend - and we walked right to the top, through the bush. And at that stage the chairlift manufacturer from Switzerland was very, very doubtful about the whole thing, because he had never seen anything. There was no road; there was no people; no nothing. Who wants to build a lift anywhere where there is absolutely nothing? Not only that, but with the jeep one would get bogged many times to get to the location only, because they just bulldozer pushes, nothing more. But it started to move. By sheer chance we found a man who had money. He was prepared to - his name was Thyne Reid - and he was prepared to finance the very beginning of - - -

KH: What was his christian name?

TS: Thyne - T-H-Y-N-E, Reid. They are from the Hardie's people. Hardie's - Hardie Asbestos. John Reid is his nephew, who was the chairman of the Bicentennial.

KH: Oh, I see. Yes.

TS: He is also chairman of Hardies, Hardie Asbestos.

KH: Right. So he put up some money?

TS: He used to say, "I have to also put up money for my

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little nephew." That is John Reid - he is not very little any more.

KH: No. And what, he put up some money for the chairlift.

TS: He put some money in for the investigation purpose.

Four huts were purchased at Munyang Camp, which were left over for the Snowy by the contractors, Selma Engineering, the Norwegian people who constructed Guthega. And we bought these huts for 500 pounds each, and we transported them to Thredbo. Not all of them, one at the first stage. And that became the Thredbo Lodge, the first hut, built in '57. And right next door was a Club...lodge which was also finished in '57, called Crackenback Ski club. So in '57 there were these - one was financed by the club, the other one was financed by Thyne Reid. And I had the use of the lodge rent free to run it as business. Also ^aski tow was constructed, not starting on the bottom, but starting in the middle of the slope, so in the morning everybody had to walk half an hour to the middle slopes before they could get the ski tow.

KH: Is this the same - it is not the jeep system?

TS: No, no. It was a rope tow.

KH: Was that somewhere near the middle station, that flat sort of - slightly flat.

TS: Yes, that is where it started and finished near Kareela. And that was the only transportation at that stage. In the meantime, more people joined the syndicate and decided to float a public company.

KH: Who else came into it?

TS: Thyne Reid came into that, and in my days, Peter Lloyd. Peter Lloyd is a well-known aviator. He is, I think, president of an international body of aviators, or something like that. He used to have a car dealership, Peter Lloyd Austin, I think.

KH: Did that become a public company?

TS: It became a public company in 58, but did not get anybody from the public.

KH: And people could buy shares?

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TS: Yes.

KH: But they did not.

TS: No. So it was completely left to Thyne Reid to finance it. So by '58, there were already 15 huts, and a chairlift. The huts were ~~club~~...huts, but the lodge was enlarged to about three times its original size by '58. And the chairlift was operational. And it was already a running concern.

KH: I see. So that company put up the money for the chairlift.

TS: Yes.

KH: And built it.

TS: The company, it was actually Thyne Reid, but the company, yes.

KH: And who did the clearing of the ski runs?

TS: I did. Actually, the first chairlift line was not what became - where the chairlift was later built. I wanted to have it somewhere else, not very far, but for some reason, the planners in Sydney decided they did not want it there, and they wanted it where it is at the moment, which has proven to be a very **grave** mistake right through the years, because my line - and I have pictures of that - was supposed to finish in the golf links, what are now the golf links at Thredbo.

KH: More in the shelter.

TS: More in the shelter, more snow. Every year there is at least 3 or 4 weeks longer skiing to the bottom. And it was a great mistake.

KH: And closer to the Spider Run, is it?

TS: Yes.

KH: There is a chairlift goes up that gully now.

TS: No, no. Nothing there. There is a chairlift - all these chairlifts start at the central point in the middle valley.

KH: You would have put that central point further up the valley?

TS: Exactly. Where the old tennis courts and the golf

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links are, and that would have been - Thredbo's reputation would have been much better if that had happened. Because Thredbo has a reputation that very seldom there is snow to the bottom which is true. But for every year to get three, four, weeks extra, without snowmaking ~~of course~~... those days, would have been very much different, and to the village, nothing, absolutely nothing happened.

KH: You still have the problems of winds at the top, I suppose, no matter where you go?

TS: At that stage the technology of chairlifts was not good enough to take it into the wind. So we finished the first chairlift at ~~Kareela~~.

KH: Oh, I see.

TS: Protected.

KH: What happened to the technology - what changed to enable it to go right up?

TS: I think it was simply that they did not dare.

KH: That is right, because the chairlift stayed the same, didn't it?

TS: Yes.

KH: The chairs stay the same.

TS: I think that is all what it was. When Lend Lease took over in 63, they said straight away, "Let's go right to the top with that." And they did. And well, they had to close every now and then. But not so much damage done.

KH: And you left that group?

TS: Yes. in 58. It was not very pleasant, but it was the end.

KH: Why did you leave? Why did you - - -

TS: They kicked me out.

KH: Oh, did they? I see. Oh well. That seems very strange, that they were able to do that. I would have thought that you were one of the prime - I mean, a person who, because you started the whole thing.

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TS: Yes, there was - it is hard to explain, but I think there still is in business - a lot of jealousy. And any ideas, like the chairlift idea, for instance, I could not simply get through, and they said no. They had no idea what it was about. And any suggestion, any planning I did, they always said no. And then started to do it a year later. But it was already too late. Something else happened. So, of course, I did not like it. I told them so. So they said, "All right, you go." But in the meantime I signed a - what is the name for it - a certain contract that I would never be in competition with the company. But they kicked me out. I was not allowed to go into any kind of business in Thredbo Valley for about 10 years or so. So I could not go there. So I started to look around, and here was this burnt out building at the old Hotel Kosciusko site. So I applied to the government and they were very glad to get rid of it because it was an eyesore, and so they gave me permission for occupancy of that for two years. And depending how well I am going to perform that they will give me a lease, a long lease.

KH: Were the floors burnt out in the building too?

TS: No, the floors were concrete.

KH: Oh, were they?

TS: Yes, the floors were concrete, but between '51 when it burnt out and '59 when I took it over, a lot of skiers were camping in the building. And they used the floor - actually one *and a* half floors were burnt out, including the flooring. Which meant the flooring - although the floors were concrete, the flooring was timber. And the timber was burnt out in about half the building, and the rest the campers used to start fires inside the building so that they had some warmth there. So eventually it was almost every bit of timber was burnt inside for campfires.

KH: And there was no roof over it at that stage?

TS: There was. The roof came pretty soon after the fire. The government decided that they will rebuild Hotel Kosciusko, and put that roof on very early after the fire. I forget which

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year it was, but it was very soon after the fire, within possibly two years or so. And also the windows.

KH: They put all that in?

TS: They put the windows in, yes. So by the time I took over, it was weatherproof already.

KH: Do you have any records of when that was built, that whole thing?

TS: Yes.

KH: It was the servants' quarters.

TS: Yes. '26.

KH: '26 it was built. Right.

TS: There is a plaque in the back of the building still there, when it was opened.

KH: Oh, is that right?

TS: Yes.

KH: Because there were a number of lower buildings behind there before that.

TS: Yes. Well, they were added up, like all the government is, you know, they build a little bit - originally the Hotel Kosciusko was very small. And it kept enlarging. I have some pictures of the original Hotel Kosciusko. And they kept enlarging all the time, and those outbuildings in the back, they remained after the fire. Actually one of the outbuildings was converted then into a public bar, and a man from Ireland who used to go to drink there - that was the only public bar there, there was. It had a dirt floor, and I helped. In summer I was employed as a carpenter. So we built the first bar there out of what remained. The government would not put any money into materials, so we had to pull down some buildings to make the counter for the bar.

KH: Who ran the bar?

TS: It was a dirt floor, and one of the remaining employees was, I think, after the fire, about three or four, maybe a bit more people - were employed to clear up and stay around. And as I say, Graham Chalker, the fellow I mentioned before, and I, we

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were the carpenters. So we built the first bar there, the first counter, in 51.

KH: So did you also use those buildings to live in while you were fixing up to change the whole place into a chalet or a hotel?

TS: No.

KH: Like, after you dropped out of Thredbo - - -

TS: Oh, the other buildings?

KH: Yes.

TS: The small buildings at the back?

KH: Yes. Did you - - -

TS: No, I had no access to that. And there was very little left of that. There was the postmistress, Mrs McManus, living there, and then there was - when I came in 59 I think it was only Mrs McManus who remained from all the staff there. She was the postmistress. And they still had these buildings which were empty and rotting. They were all wooden.

KH: So what did you start doing when you got the lease to the building?

TS: Well once I got permission for occupancy, I started on the walls, because they were so - and tried to find out what condition it is in. And as it happened, least of all affected by the fire was the second floor of the building. Everything was burnt out on the top. Everything was burnt out on the bottom, but the second floor was least affected. So I decided to use the second floor as accommodation; do absolutely nothing about the staircases and things like that - they were terrible, slime and water running and dirty. But there was no time. I got permit for occupancy, I got in Easter. I had to be open for winter, so - - -

KH: So you had to install a kitchen?

TS: There was a - also on the ground floor, there was one corner of the building was least affected. And during those intervening years between the fire and me taking over, they cleaned

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up this corner and put a kitchen there. It was a pretty cosy little kitchen. And whatever staff remained there, they used to eat in this kitchen. And for a while there was an old laundress living there, and she used to cook in the kitchen for the remaining staff. Originally, there were a few, about five, but by the time I arrived, I think it was only Mrs McManus was left.

KH: So you operated that first winter, in 1959.

TS: I repaired it, I cleaned up about one-third of the ground floor, and used the kitchen, and we had a small room which was the lounge, lounge and dining room combined, very small with entrance in the back, because the front was ^{horrible} - it was still falling off - the masonry, and there was no door even in ^{the} front.

KH: That was very primitive.

TS: Very primitive.

KH: But you got some customers.

TS: Yes, yes. There was no accommodation. After the fire, all there was in the whole NSW snowfields, was 130 beds.

KH: Like, the Thredbo ones?

TS: No, after the fire, 1951 - - -

KH: Oh yes, that is right, yes.

TS: Only 100 beds at Kosciusko Chalet, and Charlotte's Pass, and 30 beds in Kiandra, and people wanted to ski.

KH: But by 59 Thredbo was already off the ground.

TS: Thredbo was already off the ground.

KH: Perisher had a few lodges, I think.

TS: Perisher had a few, yes. ^{Snow Revellers} in 59 actually Perisher opened. The Sundeck opened the same year as I opened, 59. The Sundeck and one t-bar.

KH: But you had enough customers to bring in enough money - - -

TS: Yes, because people were keen and there was nowhere to stay. And I got a contract with a sporting firm called Mick Simmons who guaranteed me certain occupancy, and with their publicity we were able to give reasonable business.

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KH: How many beds did you have at first?
 TS: Thirty beds.
 KH: And that slowly expanded, I suppose?
 TS: Yes. Eventually I finished with officially 100, unof-
 ficially more.
 KH: And so you slowly got enough money together to restore
 the rest of it?
 TS: Yes.
 KH: And then you built some more things around the bottom,
 too, didn't you?
 TS: Yes. By 1964 it was already finished, 5 years was in
 this state - - -
 KH: You must have worked pretty hard.
 TS: I did.
 KH: But your wife was working with you?
 TS: Yes. That first year, the first winter, most of the
 winter we were alone, just 30 people.
 KH: Just the two of you?
 TS: Yes.
 KH: Cooking and - - -
 TS: Everything. I made the beds, she was cooking. I was
 serving.
 KH: And the next year you employed someone?
 TS: Oh yes. Next year, by '63 we had already - yes, every
 year one extra floor opened, and more space on the bottom.
 In '63, it was already the third floor - was already operational
 for accommodation.
 KH: I mean, it is a very big building from the looks of it.
 TS: Yes.
 KH: It seems as though it could hold a couple of hundred
 people.
 TS: Well, I don't think it would have been permitted by the

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Park. The Park actually insisted that I have only 100 beds.
 KH: And that is pretty large by Park standards, isn't it.
 I mean, most of the lodges only have 30 or 36.
 TS: Yes. This is right, but somehow the Park's regulations
 seem to be less strict when you go a bit lower down. Wilson's
 Valley Motel is able to have large - they want to protect as much
 as they can higher up.
 KH: And then in '66 you handed over the management to your
 wife, did you? And you went to do other things? Was that about
 the time?
 TS: It was a bit earlier than that. It was 64. I still
 was there. I was still was around for emergencies. But I
 started to make films in '64, and that consumed almost all my
 time. It was something new; I had to learn it, and my wife
 proved capable of doing it, so why not?
 KH: And she enjoyed it?
 TS: No.
 KH: Oh, she didn't?
 TS: I think she did, but she liked to ^{be} bossy, so...
 KH: She liked to be bossy, oh, I see.
 TS: The more employees there was to push around - - -
 KH: You would not have done much skiing for those few
 years.
 TS: I did none at all. I had no mind for it because - ab-
 solutely consuming work to try to do something about it. None at
 all until I stopped making films. Then I said, well, it is about
 time that I start to play. It was '68.
 KH: But the making films was playing, too, surely, wasn't
 it? Or did you - - -
 TS: Well, hard work because I had to learn it.
 KH: But you did not think of it - did you make money? Did
 you go out to make money from your films?
 TS: I tried, but I did not. I won Australian Film Award,
 but I did not make any money.

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KH: What were the films called?
 TS: "Which Mountain."
 KH: Right. And there were some others. That was the only one you made in the Snowy Mountains, was it?
 TS: No, I made - I was ~~at the~~ stage stringer for Channel 9, Sydney, and I did all these short documentaries and news for them. I had an open - a sort of open invitation to film whatever there is newsworthy, and so I did. And of course, I used quite a lot to publicise Sponar's, which I did. And it was very good.
 KH: That sounds like a good system.
 TS: Whenever snow fell, of course, I got out to show there is plenty of snow around. And it worked quite well.
 KH: Did you and your wife manage to have children at all along the way?
 TS: We had a daughter, yes.
 KH: Where is she now?
 TS: She died in a car accident.
 KH: That was unfortunate. How long ago?
 TS: '71.
 KH: And did you build the swimming pool at - - -
 TS: Yes.
 KH: You got what - I guess you got someone else to dig the hole.
 TS: Yes, yes.
 KH: Was that heated?
 TS: Yes, it was heated, yes. I wanted that lake in front, which became a bit swampy, I wanted to make it bigger. And I got the Park's permission to build up the dam wall. I did, and it looked beautiful, and then came the biggest floods there were ever at Kosciusko, it burst the dam ^{wall} completely... I lost... the whole lake.
 KH: Really? It drained totally?
 TS: It completely destroyed the Island ^{Bend} road over Diggers Creek. It took away the power station. I had a little power

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station there.
 KH: Yes, that is right. The remains are still there.
 TS: Yes, that is right. It took that away - it got right through it, the water. And of course, I wanted the lake back, but this time I had to pay for it.
 KH: What year was this when the big flood came through?
 TS: I forget which year it could have been - it could have been about '63, '64. I could find it somewhere. The Snowy Mountains also was hired to repair the wall.
 KH: I never realised that. And did you then build it higher again?
 TS: No, no.
 KH: Back to the old level.
 TS: Yes. Actually, while we had - we had a fantastic opening for that bigger lake. I had pamphlets printed, where they stated, you know, how much material was used on that building - building the extra height of the dam. It was very - supposed to be funny - and Sir William Hudson, who was the chief of the Snowy was invited to open the extra dam, and how many litres of water there was extra, and how much power - it was all a joke, naturally. But if all the concrete was put into a column of concrete between Sydney and Melbourne, it would ^{be} one quarter inch high and one-eighth of an inch wide. I still have got those invitations somewhere here. It was a big party, but unfortunately it did not last - - -
 KH: No. Because the original dam, I think, was built by gold miners, wasn't it, they say.
 TS: I am not sure. They say - I am not sure, because I never read anything about that. Because there is the other reservoir there - higher up - for the water supply.
 KH: For the Kosciusko Hotel?
 TS: Yes. That is a very nice little lake. I gave it a name, Rainbow Lake. And I see now that they use the name.

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KH: Did you use the water from the lake for power generation?

TS: Yes.

KH: Oh you did. You had a wheel down the bottom, did you?

TS: Yes, in that power station, yes. It was extremely ancient and neglected, a lot of trouble. I used that until about '63, '64, but only two or three years I used it, because it was very troublesome. I bought a generator. I had a generator installed already in 1963, I remember. And then 65 came, about 65, came council power.

KH: You had to have your own power?

TS: Yes.

KH: That was the only power you could - you had to make your own power?

TS: Yes.

KH: So what did they use to do in the Hotel before?

TS: Make their own power.

KH: From?

TS: They had three hydro - electric generators, down in the power station, plus a huge diesel outside the hotel. It was in that building which only disappeared about a year ago. Do you remember that building - it collapsed a few years back.

KH: Yes. Someone pulled it down, didn't they?

TS: I don't know.

KH: Surely, I think so.

TS: I have no idea. But the Soil Conservation used it as a storage. But it was very rotten, very rotten.

KH: Was it?

TS: Very. It was all the time falling something off. And I notice, only one day, I noticed that it was not there any more. It was collapsed. So that was the power station.

KH: That was where the motors were? I see..

TS: But I used originally only the hydro one, which was also very troublesome.

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KH: And who did you sell to? Who did you sell the Chalet to?

TS: A fellow called Maurice Green, a keen skier from Sydney.

KH: What year was that?

TS: '80.

KH: Oh, '80. Oh, only a few years ago?

TS: Yes.

KH: So you were still the leaseholders - you and your wife were still in charge of the place?

TS: Yes.

KH: Until 1980.

TS: '80, yes. On my 60th birthday I sold out.

KH: Right. So you were involved with that for 21 years?

TS: Yes.

KH: Oh, I did not realise that. So your wife was manager for quite a few years?

TS: Yes, yes. That water from the Rainbow Lake was not the only water used for power generation, but when the power generation stopped, it was also the water supply, but it had a fantastic head, of course, because it was 400 metres vertical fall.

KH: No, it would not be in metres, it would be feet, maybe.

TS: No, no. 400 feet, yes. But still, you could not use it daily, because all the taps would blow off. So it had to have feeding tanks on the slope behind. And of course, I had to look after all this. I had to look after the power generation, I had to look after the water supply, after - we had a very good, for the time, sewage treatment, which was very much praised by the health inspectors who visited, at that stage already, which is still there, which is in use.

(end of tape)

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KH: What were the characteristics of the sewerage treatment plant that made it so efficient?

TS: Well, I don't know enough about it. But it had troughs which worked on overbalancing as the water was dripping into it, and then it overbalances ^{the other way, so that} the effluent was all the time naturally put through all the filters, and they were very happy about it. At once stage they asked me to do more about effluent, which I did. I got from the Snowy those huge ventilation pipes which they used in the tunnel, and I buried them in ^{the} flats for the ~~absorption~~ trenches and all that. But everybody was happy was about that.

KH: Because it is a major issue now, isn't it?

TS: Yes, very much.

KH: Sewerage from Perisher and Thredbo.

TS: Yes, very much, yes.

KH: And Guthega, too.

TS: Yes. Even in 1980 when I sold out, I saw that one of the stumbling blocks may be that the health people will require the new owner to put a treatment in which already then was very expensive. It would have cost as much as I got for the place. But they didn't, they were happy.

KH: So it was not all that difficult to get the place going again? I mean, it was a bit primitive, but you could manage.

TS: Yes. The water was there. The sewer was ^{practically} not available, because it was all overgrown, there were bushes in side the pipes. The pipes were one and a half kilometres long.

KH: Really?

TS: Yes. And everything ^{blocked up}. The manholes were filled with rubbish; the concrete blocks which covered them were smashed up, ^{everything} down in the manholes. So the sewerage was not really available. It was worse and worse, but through the years as blockages occurred, we had to dig and find where the blockages are and improve them. That was my work, also.

KH: Did people ski around there very much? You still had a ^{few on that I think}

TS: In 1964, I started a poma lift on the Kerry

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(15)course which was just around the corner. It was good, but one learnt with the skiers all the time, and one thing I learnt that people really want to ski where there are a lot of people around, although they complain there is too much waiting, but they would not ski where there is only a handful. So already Smiggins was functioning; Perisher was functioning; and I simply did not get enough business on this tow, on this poma lift, for the reason that there were only, at the best, 50 people skiing.

KH: Do people still use some of the other tracks that have been cut? I mean, one had been cut right up to - - -

TS: No, no, none at all. They were right to the top and they were nice tracks, I used them myself, if I could ever get somebody to drive thatmachine. I would get towed up and ski down in deep snow. I love deep snow skiing. So if I find a good driver who would take me up and down - but that was after I started skiing again. I started skiing in '68 again.

KH: So when you worked on the Snowy Scheme, that started, what in - - -

TS: I started in 1954.

KH: 54. And did you start as a hydrographer?

TS: Yes. I wanted to be employed by the hydrographic section because, for some reason or other, there were quite a number of my friends, Czech friends, working for them. The hydrographic section was almost ^{entirely} composed of Czechs.

KH: Yes, this is very unusual in the Snowy Scheme. I am finding this again and again, people telling me that such and such a nationality was in charge of that more. The Italians were in the tunnels, blasting and involved with the earth; the Germans were on the technical side.

TS: They were surveyors. Germans were surveyors.

KH: There was another group. The English and the Australians tended to be on the administration.

TS: Yes.

KH: In Cooma.

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TS: Yes.

KH: Poles - I don't know about them. What were the Poles, the Polish?

TS: I don't think they had any speciality. But I know that when I moved to Cabramurra, our office, hydrographic office, ^{had} on ^{me} side surveyors, who were Germans; on the other side the drillers, because we were three, investigation. And drillers were Australians, for some reason.

KH: Right. And then the Slovenes, they were more the chain gangs and helping with the surveying, I think, out in the hills.

TS: Yes, yes. They were the helpers in this, yes.

KH: I mean. I don't think it was intentionally designed that way.

TS: I think it just happened that a couple of Czechs were all of a sudden, or accidentally joined hydrography, and while these Czechs ^{were there,} well, the others said, "We will join."

KH: Because it was not just because of the skiing. I mean, hydrographers did a lot of skiing, didn't they, by comparison to the other workers.

TS: Yes.

KH: So for those who had a skiing back ground, it must have been quite attractive to join hydrography.

TS: Yes, it was, yes. And it was an extremely interesting job, a very interesting job. I was hired as - although it was the hydrography section - but in hydrography as well as, I think, some other investigation branches. I had to start AS chainman class 2, which was the lowest paid job on the Snowy.

KH: You had to?

TS: Yes. Everybody had to.

KH: It was a little bit than class one, was it?

TS: No, it was worse. You first had class two - if I remember - it may be the other way round. But I know that there two classes ^{of} chainmen, and we started all on the lowest paid job. But very soon, they started to ask me to do things like - well,

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one of my first jobs, I remember, was to ride to the Tin Mines with the horse boss, on pack horses.

KH: Who was in charge of the horses?

TS: Harvey, a fellow called Harvey.

KH: So you rode out to the Tin Mines?

TS: Yes, we had to ride to the Tin Mines to find a location for a gauging station on the upper Murray. And it was very interesting.

KH: Did you put that one in? That one on Tin Mine Creek, I think?

TS: Tin Mine Creek came - we found the location on this particular day. Tin Mine Creek is where the upper Murray - we found the location on this particular day. And it was put in later by some kind of building gang. But later I put in several gauging stations all around. And this was interesting trip. I remember on the way back, my horse got ^a terrible gash in his stomach. It did not look like that it would survive. And I had to walk the rest of the journey, because the horse was ^{too} lame. into Jacobs River in to deep water and tried to wash it down, and there was blood and a big gash - but somehow he finished the trip all right.

KH: That is right, the old access was via Jacobs River, wasn't it?

TS: Yes.

KH: There was no road in.

TS: Well, there was a bridle track. There was a jeep track as far as Jacobs River, and from there ^{on} was a bridle track. But without me knowing at that stage, about two weeks after this trip, they let me know from Cooma, "Now, you are in charge, so build a road to the Tin Mines." So they said, "We will get the power - you get three Poles -" yes, I had three Poles there.

KH: Three what?

TS: Poles, Polish fellows.

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KH: Ah, yes.

TS: Three Poles, and an Irish bulldozer driver, "and you build a road."

KH: Oh, I see. That was a quick promotion from a clerk to chainman.

TS: Well, that was the way the Snowy operated. As soon as somebody showed some kind of prowess, they used him. They were fantastic. That was Sir William Hudson; he was a fantastic man. He forced everybody - "Use him. If he has any promise, use him."

KH: That was his dictum?

TS: Yes. Sir William Hudson, very soon, when I started with the Snowy I was the lowest paid employee. He learned that I already am agitating for Thredbo. And he called me to his office, and all my bosses said, "He is going to sack you because you are not supposed to have any other interests in the Snowy." And he said, "We are building the road; we will seal it as soon as we can. And if you ever need anything in relation to Thredbo, come direct to me."

KH: That is interesting. Why would he do that, I wonder?

TS: He liked the mountains to come alive, the potential of the mountains. And any functions originally - he would come there, anything which had anything to do with promotion. He liked public relations very much. It was his ideas, those public relations trips by the buses. He wanted to promote the mountains.

KH: He had a fantastic public relations department. The way they churned out little plastic models, brochures, pamphlets, trips for schoolchildren.

TS: Yes. And the buses, all the time, buses. They accommodated all that. This is only later, after I became established in the mountains, I had, not really an argument with him, but sort of friendly discussion. I wanted a little bit of his business off those buses. And he wanted to keep them all by himself, every - these camps like Island Bend and Cabramurra and all of

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them had very nice accommodation for buses. And I tried to talk him into letting me have a little bit of it. And I achieved that.

KH: Did you?

TS: Yes. At one stage I was open year round and almost every day of the year I had a bus..

KH: Did you? And they were people coming to look at the Snowy Scheme?

TS: Yes.

KH: But otherwise, all those visitors were all accommodated at the big camps?

TS: At the camps, yes.

KH: Fed at the canteens.

TS: They were very nicely built, those accommodation - very warm and comfortable. Good food and plenty of it. It was an interesting time, although I spent only four years there. But it was so interesting that it was so free of any industrial problems. Everybody was glad to go ahead, and nobody asked for higher wages, better conditions. And everything was just harmonious.

KH: I was talking to Danny Collman the other day, and he said that - he showed me a photo of the wooden base, the sled, that the motor was mounted on, I think, for that first lift at Thredbo, that was dragged up the hill. Apparently he built the base. Do you remember that? It is a big wooden sled thing. He must have towed it up the hillside.

TS: Yes, that would have been - that '57 one. Yes, that was quite correct. It was a very heavy motor, and it was pushed by manpower, only manpower pushed it up.

KH: Pushed it up the hill?

TS: Up the hill, yes.

KH: That big thing?

TS: Yes. I don't know if it is the same one, but if it is the one which started the middle slopes at Thredbo, it must be the one. Otherwise, '58, we had a lot of trouble getting the

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first generator in - not the generator, but the motor for the chairlift. A lot of trouble. It was bogged here in Wollondilly for a long time. And when it arrived, it arrived when it was snowing, and we had to build a kind of ramp out of earth to unload it. There were no facilities, no cranes, no nothing.

KH: Now they fly the pylons in with a helicopter.

TS: Our generator, which arrived at Thredbo in 1957 was in a tent, and that one took about two months to arrive, because it was bogged here in Wollondilly.

TS: And when you worked for the Snowy, what was the first camp you stayed at? What was your first base?

TS: Well, the first year they used me for these kind of jobs, like building the road.

KH: Out to the Tin Mines.

TS: Up to the Tin Mines, and we had to establish our camp. We were given tents, and ^{build your tents} and once a week I took the ^{power} wagon to Jindabyne to buy supplies for the fellows. And we used to shoot kangaroos and catch trout, and eat anything what came along. So I was just from camp to camp. I was in Nimmo Camp. From Nimmo I built several gauging stations on the Gungahlin tributaries, Burrungubogee, and so on. But the next winter, they put me in charge of Spencer's Creek Met station. That was - do you know where it was?

KH: Yes, on that little knoll.

TS: Yes. So I had that, and two Czechs working with me. That was very interesting, measuring snow, water. A lot of skiing, I mean, a lot of ^{cross country}. We averaged 10 kilometres a day. And it is not easy to average with blizzards and all that. Right through the winter that was our average.

KH: So mostly you were in tents?

TS: No, no. That was at - - -

KH: At Spencer's Creek you had huts.

TS: Yes, Spencer's Creek we had huts, very comfortable huts. But before that it was tents, and sometimes camps. There

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was a camp at Nimmo where there was accommodation.

KH: Was that near Nimmo Hill?

TS: It was right on Eucumbene River.

KH: Oh yes, on the road in.

TS: Yes, on the road in.

KH: Near that bridge.

TS: Yes.

KH: Oh, I see.

TS: Just downstream of the bridge.

KH: So some of them were established camps with little cabins.

TS: Yes. As long as they were close enough so that we could sort of go to the work from there, in a reasonable time. Otherwise it was tents. Like Jacobs River was tents.

KH: They were double-skin tents, were they?

TS: ^{Very} heavy tents.

KH: Heavy canvas.

TS: Yes, very heavy tents.

KH: With an outer sort of roof over the top, I think.

TS: I do not remember exactly, but it could have been the case. We had a lot of trouble with rats, of course.

KH: Rats?

TS: Yes.

KH: Did you? What, getting into food supplies and things?

TS: Biting.

KH: Biting you?

TS: Yes.

KH: Oh yes, really?

TS: I don't know what we used to do. We used to dig a trench around and put kerosene into it, I think, or diesel, something like that. They had no floors, these tents.

KH: Oh, right, they would come in under the sides. But they were that bad. They would bite you in the night?

TS: Oh, they were obnoxious. When I was doing Thredbo

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there was a hut at Dead Horse Gap - those rats, Jesus, they were biting! Another hut I used to sleep at Snowy Plains, also rats.

KH: Really? Because I mean I have heard them at night. I have slept in the huts. But almost never got bitten.

TS: But they crawl over you every now and then, not very often. But it is possibly the memory which remains ingrained, that you were bitten by a rat.

KH: I know, it is an awful thought. It is hard enough just going to sleep knowing that there are going to be rats in the night. It is an awful thought.

TS: We are going - a party of friends, we are going camping this week to Snowy Plains. And I cautioned them to be ready for the rats.

KH: Are you going to take a tent with a floor in it this time?

TS: Probably.

KH: And you also spent some time at Cabramurra, but that ^{was} later?

TS: Well, after this winter, they asked me to go to Cabramurra, and I became the regional hydrographic officer, which was quite a big promotion, from chainman second class! Which I did, and I had then a team of - I think it was five teams. I had one team in Geehi, one team in ^{Coulton's} Camp; one team in ^{Bob's} Hole, and our own team - that is four teams. And I had to sort of organise them. The Geehi one went as far as Tom Groggin, all the stations around there, Geehi area, and top stations.

^{Coulton's} Camp - sometimes I had to travel through Victoria to ^{Cowombat's} Creek on the other side, the beginning of Murray River. Everyone had big regions. And we had to keep them supplied. And of course very often there was a little bit of sport in it. We had a friendly competition with the drillers, whose vehicle can cross the Tumut River at the highest possible level.

KH: How many vehicles did you lose?

TS: One day it was very high. Of course, I knew the

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levels, and I took up our wagon and in the middle, of course, I started to float down. And on the other side - we were in contact by radio - waiting for supplies, the ^{Coulton's} Camps fellows with a Land Rover, they could not cross ^{with a Land Rover}, so I tried to give them supplies by water. But it was winter, bloody freezing, ^{hanging on rocks,} so there was absolute no other way than get out into the water; get the winch out with the other side, and winch it out.

KH: You winched it across?

TS: Yes, yes. It was all right. For some reason, I had a funny - underneath, I had funny pyjamas underneath, and it was cotton pyjamas. And as I got wet the sleeves started to be longer and longer. And the trousers. And I could not move because I did not want to undress because it was cold enough.

KH: But you did not have to wade through the river?

TS: Yes, yes.

KH: Oh, you did. You had to wade through it, the flooded Tumut River.

TS: Yes, I had to wade through it. That was Tumut Pond. There was no bridge.

KH: You could not throw a rope across and pull a wire over or something? You just had to - - -

TS: I had to go through the river to start with, because I was in the middle of the river, and the current was very strong.

KH: Right. So did you lose that vehicle?

TS: No, no, no. The vehicle was there, but stuck on rocks in a very high current. And there was no way for me to get out. So I had to go into the water.

KH: Of course, that is right, you were stalled, yes.

TS: Not stalled, it was bogged. It was bogged on the rocks. It got hung on rocks, and it was a very heavy vehicle, those power wagons - they are a Dodge. And the only way for me was to bring the winch...to the other side and then the fellows were able to help me. They had their own Land Rovers mobile, and

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they winched me out then.

KH: And who got the award for going through the highest water?

TS: Oh, we were leading. After that, I lost track. But we definitely led for that one.

KH: Did you do much overtime? Did you work much overtime?

TS: I did not want to, because I liked my free time. I was working at that stage all the time already on Thredbo, and I needed all the free time - I needed all the weekends. My family, wife and child were living here, in what was called New Jindabyne, the Fitness Camp. So I wanted every weekend for myself. We were offered. Sometimes we had to when there were floods, because we had to measure floods. But I did not want any overtime.

KH: Oh, I see. When there was a lot of rain, there was more work.

TS: Oh yes, yes.

KH: Everybody out and measure the stream flow.

TS: Yes. Because the floods are very important to register, to get the curve..... you know. Hydrography depends on establishing curve... of the flow, and with a certain amount of the height of the river, they want to get the curve..... right, so that in future reference they know when there is so much rain, with so much snow, how much power generation, how much irrigation water will be available. And we had to establish that.

KH: There were^{no} automatic recording devices?

TS: There were. There were recording devices for the height of the water, but not recording the flow of the water.

KH: The speed?

TS: Yes. Not the flow, not the amount of the water. There were recording devices to record the height in the pool. But, assuming it was very high reading, say two metres reading, two metres height in the reading, and it was very high, we still had to go into the water with our instruments and measure the actual cubic feet per second, it was in those days. How many cubic feet

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per second. We still had to do that. With big rivers like Snowy, and Tumut, lower down we had flying foxes across them. And we did it from the flying foxes with big weights. That is why our teamⁱⁿ Geehi - they had to go to Murray River at Tom Groggin, they had to have the vehicles because these weights were very heavy. And it took up to 16 hours to get from Geehi to Tom Groggin, winching when it was wet and very bad track. But the instruments were pretty heavy.

KH: Oh, I see. So that the best times for the gauging were also the worst times for getting around, because it was the wet time.

TS: Yes, yes. We had plenty of gaugings, to finish, to have the lower part of the curve... because it was the easiest one. So it was only confirmation of what we knew already anyhow. But for the higher ones it had to be done. My first year at Spencer's Creek, I was the only one there. But it was a funny winter, '54, and there was plenty of snow. It started to rain like hell in August. And we had to go out and do the gaugings. The Snowy broke out completely, and started to run over the top of the snow, and then take the snow with that, and we had to try somehow to measure that, which is not easy. We did not know how much water flows under and how much over the snow. Of course, quite often in winter we fell in the water. We had to dig out the creeks with shovels, and then start to measure it. We had waders with us. But every now and then we had ledges to support us, and the ledge would fall down and we would fall in the water, and then from Wilkinson's Valley we had to go in the wet gear back to Spencer's Creek to warm up. But it was interesting.

KH: Yes. But a lot of that was on skis, wasn't it?

TS: Oh, that was on skis.

KH: But you had your waders in the pack with you?

TS: Wait a minute, we did not have waders. No, no, we did not have waders. No, we did not have waders because they would have been too heavy. No, we did not. We tried to get first a

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section across the creek free of ice, and then dig a kind of ramp alongside the section on which we could stand. One has to measure every one and a half feet or so, the flow of the water. And that is what would have happened. These ramps which we built ~~they~~ *would collapse.*

KH: Out of snow? You built ramps out of snow.

TS: Yes, out of snow. They would collapse.

KH: Yes, like an artificial weir.

TS: Yes.

KH: A weir built out of snow.

TS: It was only to support the body, only to support us, because the depth of the snow was too much; we could not reach with our instruments. We had to be close to the water to measure it. Our instruments were not built that way that you could stand - and of course, you would be digging for three hours, snow, and then measure the water and fall in the water.

KH: Oh, dear oh dear!

TS: And go back to Spencer's Creek to warm up.

KH: You did not have a change of clothes.

TS: Sometimes we had. But we did not count much on this.

KH: Were you issued with special gear by the SMA?

TS: We were, yes. We had gear, we had quite good gear. The skis were reasonable. They were sort of touring skis. I remember that *funny* pairs of skis I got, it had hollows in it, and the hollows filled with water. And every step it was, chunk, chunk, chunk! But the boots were all right, because we did a lot of walking. I have somewhere a picture here. That would have ^{been} a typical trip. We had the instruments for measuring snow, and inside the rucksacks we would have the instruments for measuring the flow. And this was a trip at Kunama Hut - some friends were there and we were passing by on the way to work - it might have been Club Lake *gaging t. snow course.* This fellow became then Australian champion cross country, because he had plenty of training.

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KH: Who was that?

TS: Jake Rosedale. He still works for the Snowy.

KH: Jake?

TS: Rosedale.

KH: Rosedale. I have not heard of him. And that is you in the front.

TS: Yes. That was ~~issued gear~~ *issued gear*.....all this.

KH: So, did you keep any pets at all, like a cat or a dog? Any at that time?

TS: I had - when I was with the hydrology, I had a cocker spaniel. And he went with me everywhere, on those Thredbo investigation trips, over the Main Range, and as much as possible he always - he seemed to enjoy it very much, but always got cut feet from the ice and snow, always bled.

KH: He always ran behind you?

TS: Yes. You did not put him in your pack?

TS: No, no.

KH: I see. That was a very hardy dog.

TS: Yes. And then somebody poisoned him here in Jindabyne.

KH: What, some years later?

TS: During those days. Some farmers did a lot of baiting here.

KH: Were there many cats or dogs in the camps? Did many people have pets?

TS: I do not remember. This dog stayed in Jindabyne here, because that was where we lived. And I do not remember whether I have seen any.

KH: At Cabramurra?

TS: There must have been, but I do not remember.

KH: You do not remember many cats and dogs?

TS: No, I don't.

KH: Did you have a garden anywhere at all?

TS: We had a little patch here in Jindabyne. But again, I visited only over the weekends, and always very busy with Thredbo

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at that stage.

KH: So you had two jobs for a while, in a way, didn't you?

TS: Well, yes.

KH: Two major interests.

TS: Yes, yes.

KH: What were the mountains like when you first came to the hotel in the early 50s? Like, I am trying to get some idea of whether the mountains were eroding; whether they had been burning; how the mountains compared then in the early 50s to now, 35 years later.

TS: I did not take any notice, because it was not my training, not my interest. What struck me quite a lot, the amount of fences, right on the top of the mountains, which by now I think they have just rotted away. There is plenty of them still around, I know that, but that struck me. How come that there was so much fencing done in the mountains?

KH: Did you see much stock?

TS: Interesting - very, very little. But one thing which lies very much in my mind is, we had gauging station at Cootapatamba Creek - you know where it is, Cootapatamba?

KH: Yes, yes.

TS: And that one was much lower down than the lake is, much lower down, about another 5 kilometres below Cootapatamba Lake, downstream.

KH: Where the hut is?

TS: No, still more.

KH: Further down, yes, that is right. OK.

TS: Further down. And there was a herd of cattle right through the winter. And every time we went - we went, I think, every two weeks to do a gauging. Every time we went, the herd was still there, and obviously none the worse for the experience.

KH: They were still getting feed under the snow?

TS: They were shifting slowly. They must have been getting feed under the snow. Sort of, you could see how they were shift-

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ing, but through that valley you could see down to Thredbo, all the green at Thredbo Valley. It struck me they must be bloody stupid that it has not occurred to them to shift to the lower slopes. But they survived. They definitely survived.

KH: How many were there?

KH: About 15, I would say. And even before that - my first year at Kosciusko Chalet, there was a stranded horse at what we called Foreman's Hut, I think.

KH: Oh yes, where the chimney still is, yes.

TS: Yes. And that horse survived the whole winter there, as high up as that.

KH: Really? A horse by itself, at Foreman's Hut.

TS: Yes.

KH: Good heavens.

TS: And then in springtime, we made a track for him, by feet, and put hay, and he followed and we got him to Kosciusko Chalet. And he grew through the winter amazingly long hair. I never seen a horse like that. And then in summer, the staff tried to ride it. We had quite a few horses at the Chalet at that time, but nobody was able to ride that horse.

KH: Do you think it was a brumby? I mean, do you think it was a wild one?

TS: I don't know. I don't think so. Wild ones - the highest I saw a wild one was at Island Bend. I never seen any brumbies any higher. Of course, there were plenty at Tin Mines.

KH: Yes, I was going to say, yes, that is right. It is also unusual that it was just one horse. The brumbies usually roam in groups, I think.

TS: I did not know - - -

KH: Did you see any cattle and sheep out Tin Mines way?

TS: No. Brumbies, kangaroos.

KH: No cattle and sheep by then.

TS: No.

KH: That is interesting. Did you meet any stockmen?

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TS: Not on the - I am trying to think how many trips I made to Tin Mines. It would not have been more than half a dozen, and I have never seen any stock there, no.

KH: Did you see much evidence of fire, of burning?

TS: I don't remember that, no.

KH: It is all right, it does not matter. You don't have to remember.

TS: Yes, yes.

KH: What about up Cabramurra way? Did you see much sign of fire?

TS: Unless one takes more notice of things - I was not asked to take any notice - but as one - all of a sudden it occurs to me that - why, for instance, there are these big trees in the gulleys, and all the trees seem to be the same age on the ridges. And then one learns that it was before there were fires. And then also the original investigation of Thredbo, that I remember very well, you know, just walking through the bush, very thick undergrowth, you all the time kick into long old burnt logs. That must have been the bush fires. But at that stage, already all the slopes seemed to have a growth of trees which were about the same age. Except in the gulleys where there were stands of mountain ash, beautiful, which were obviously preserved against the bush fires.

KH: Was there much soil erosion? I mean, was there much bare ground?

TS: I don't remember that. But at the stage when the Park banned grazing, naturally I was all over the mountains all the time, I noticed that there was soil erosion. I don't know which year it was.

KH: That was '57, that is right. Towards the end of your time with the SMA. That is right, that is when a lot of the grazing leases were phased out.

TS: That is when I started to take notice, because it got publicity.

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KH: Yes. Do you think the Snowy Mountain Scheme caused much erosion in its construction?

TS: I have not noticed any. I have not noticed any, and I often think about it. I think that - the way I see it, it is a better place than it was before. Although I regret a few stretches for fishing ...it used to be very interesting. A few stretches of river here, the Snowy, which was lost through this. I think the positive is much, much, much, surpasses the negative, whatever happens.

KH: There are more positives than negatives?

TS: Yes, oh yes, definitely.

KH: Do you remember some of the rivers and creeks running brown because of silt and mud, and so on?

TS: Well, it was our job as well. We measured the silt as well. And naturally, there would be more silt after a flood than there would be at other times. But we never learned the results, because we sent the bottles to scientific services, and they analysed the results.

KH: And what do you feel about - the SMA, stabilising road batters and disturbed areas, used a lot of introduced species, so-called exotics. Do you think they could have used more natives? I mean, this is - - -

TS: It never occurred to anybody. We were Europeans and we very much liked the look of European trees, seeing them. So it was pleasing for us. Like Island Bend, well, it is all exotics there. And it obviously has done the job very well, stabilising the road. And it definitely does not offend European eyes.

KH: I mean, it is just today, now, that it is - well, it became a National Park many years ago, but today, you know, national parks are seen to be more a place where you have natives species, and you get rid of introduced species. But I suppose, well, there was very little knowledge about propagating native species, back in the 50s. So I guess poplars and willows were very logical.

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TS: I don't know what was the views of the boss of the Snowy at that stage. But he would have used anything which did the job, and he would have tried to please people who had some ideas and knew something about it, and that must have been the case. There are still some places where nobody knows - I guess - and I am almost sure, I know pockets of introduced species which I like very much. Like little pine growth near Dainer's Gap, that nobody knows about it.

KH: Yes, I saw them. I came - on the left of Dainer's Gap, going up, is it? On the left side.

TS: No, there is not any on the side, going down. You saw one which I have not seen!

KH: And Dainer's Gap is after the hotel?

TS: Yes.

KH: Yes, the one after the hotel.

TS: No, I am not aware of that one. There is a track down off to the reservoir, to Rainbow Lake. You know where that one is?

KH: Yes.

TS: Yes, somewhere there?

KH: No, just a little bit past, on the pass. You go up to the left and looking back towards the Main Range, but up on the left, there are - I saw five or six small pine trees.

TS: Did you?

KH: Some had been cut down some years ago. But they have come up again. I was so surprised.

TS: You know Dane Wimbush?

KH: Yes, I know Dane Wimbush.

TS: He used to have an experimental place there. Whether he did it, I don't know.

KH: I saw the steel pegs where the plots were.

TS: Yes, that was it.

KH: Yes, I saw those, yes. But I was so surprised. Suddenly I saw these pine trees.

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TS: Well, I am not aware of that one. And I know of another one.

KH: Oh, do you, all right.

TS: This one is much older. I use it for Christmas tree. I just take the top off and the next few years it has got two tops. So one can tell that I was there.

KH: I see. Is that in that area too?

TS: Generally, yes. 1200 feet this one is.

KH: Were they planted by the SMA, as trials?

TS: Yes, they were. I don't think it was trials. I think - it might have been trials, because this particular spot, which is my secret spot, is all kinds of trees. And I believe it was the first Snowy camp to build the road down to Island Bend.

KH: Right. Yes, there is certainly a lot of exotics around the place.

TS: But, of course, you notice exotics when you drive along the road, because the roads were built, stabilised by exotics.

KH: That is right. And so, what would you say was the biggest change in the bush over the 35 years? Like, if you were to say anything about comparing the amount of tree cover, shrubs, grasses, the state of the country today, compared to when you first saw it, or what you remember of it?

TS: Well, if it is the high country, I think the high country is better off, because it is definitely stabilised. I mean, above the tree line. And I would have to think about the medium country, because I don't really see much difference.

KH: No.

TS: The smell is still there, yes, of the bush. And there are still dead trees lying around, dying naturally, and branches broken off, and still feels well under foot. I do not see much difference.

KH: You are a keen stream fisherman, are you?

TS: Yes.

KH: You must have regretted the damming of some of the

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rivers like the Snowy?

TS: Some of it, yes. As I mentioned, these stretches here around Jindabyne, they disappeared. But again, I have these problems personally with my ^{hip}.... I am not as mobile as I used to be, and started to be more ^a Lake fisherman, of course.

KH: You just sit in a boat. Would you say that the overall, the total fish population is now much greater, or less?

TS: Oh, of course it is.

KH: Because of the lakes?

TS: Of course, there is no doubt about it. Absolutely no doubt. Graham Chalker and I, when we went first time to Thredbo, fishing, and he was already a good fisherman. I was just learning only about fishing. We fished from the horse. And we, in all that expedition, we caught three trout. Now, if you go fishing to Thredbo, Thredbo River, you have 10 trout in no time.

KH: Really?

TS: Yes. And better size. No doubt about it.

KH: And that is because of the lake acting as a feeding body, they move out from the lake.

TS: Yes. And sizes, oh, I used to catch some very good sizes. I must open this box which I have not opened for six years. Just at Bullock's Hut a year ago, an eight pounder on a fly, which is quite a fish. So they are here and - - -

KH: I suppose the sewage from Thredbo might be helping a little bit.

TS: It is possible. That is quite possible.

KH: More food, more feed, more insects. ^{TS} There were trout heads on this.

KH: Oh, I see. It has all come apart, has it, they have rotted away.

TS: It is funny that they lasted so long. Then there was a wall at Sponar's - this one was ^{caught} at Thredbo in 55, four pound four ounces. They lasted so well.

KH: And now they have had it. There is very little smell.

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Just a bit fishy.

TS: Maybe it has never had access to air Yes, there is no doubt about it. There are stories of expeditions to Geehi from Kosciusko Chalet on horses. I walked with this fellow, one summer from the Tops along the Lady Northcote's Canyon into Geehi, which was a bloody horrible trip. There are waterfalls, and it was terrible, because we could not find ^{Mannell's Spur} and so we slept at Geehi, and tried to fish. We did not catch anything. And the next morning, we thought it would be much better if we follow the Townsend West Spur, get on the ^{West Spur} first place, and then follow the spur. Which was not a bad idea once you are on the spur. But to get to the spur through these saplings, which are so close, with a rucksack on the back, steep like that, and every step you slid down and bush close against you. I became ill several times. I had tuberculosis, and this was one of those trips which caused an outbreak again.

KH: On the trip?

TS: No, no, later.

KH: Right.

TS: At that stage, and I had to go hospital for five months. No, nine months.

KH: I see. Gee, that is pretty bad.

TS: Yes, nine months it was. More or less ^{most} of the winter 1952, I was in Bonegilla Hospital for nine months.

KH: Oh really, at the ^{Hospital} there?

TS: Yes.

KH: I see. That is a pretty major illness, to be in hospital for nine months.

TS: It was. But it was incurable at that stage. And then I had another spell in '63. Again, I worked too hard, got another spell.

KH: You are lucky to be alive, in a way. It used to kill people, didn't it?

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TS Oh, very much, very much. I was lucky that when I got it first time, there ^{were} already antibiotics which they used at that stage. And then they found much better things to cure it. But even in '63, the last time I got it, they advised to have operation, remove by surgery, because I was too active, they said, and you will always get it again.

KH: And did you have an operation?

TS: I had it operated. Yes, they removed some of my lungs.

KH: So you had some of your lung removed?

TS: Yes. That was in '63. So I had all these stop and goes all the time.

KH: Yes, right. Sometimes the green light and sometimes the red light. Well, you would not have had much more time to do anything else, I suppose, if you were interested in Thredbo, and you were working on the SMA. And you also did fishing. Were there any other hobbies you had?

TS: Well, after - that film making was a hobby. No doubt about that. After that, and I thought it was a nice time to finish it, after I won the Australian Film Award, I started seriously sailing, seriously. I first got a smaller boat. Still have got in Jindabyne, and took it to sea, and tried to dare myself to go out to islands and things like that. It worked, so I bought a bigger one, and then I made some major trips, to Tasmania, New Zealand, Tahiti, Tonga, ^{New Caledonia}.....and things like that.

KH: Were they by yourself or with a crew?

TS: Half of it alone, and half of it with a crew.

KH: So you don't mind being alone at sea?

TS: No.

KH: So you did not mind being alone in the mountains either, I suppose, from time to time?

TS: Not at all. I remember the day when Kunama Lodge was destroyed by an avalanche. It was '56, and I travelled from Kosciusko Chalet over the Main Range, to what is now Thredbo, there was nothing yet. And I was alone, and the blizzard was coming

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from the east, which was most unusual. I had a compass and I saw that something was wrong. It was blizzard, a good one no visibility at all and the next day I was in Jindabyne next day and heard about the disaster. It was an easterly blizzard which accumulated - the cornice above Kunama and which broke off and - - -

KH: A very unusual direction for a blizzard. Very unusual.

TS: Yes. I thought I got lost, you know, because I thought there was something wrong with my compass/

KH: It always comes from the west or the southwest.

TS: Yes. And I did all these trips alone, the investigation trips to Thredbo.

KH: Did you have many parties when you were working with the SMA? Like social entertainment?

TS: Oh yes, yes.

KH: That went on.

TS: Oh yes, every now and then somebody was leaving, so there was a big party, and Christmas party. And when we started at Sponar's, Island Bend was very well going, very well going. And they had a very nice community hall cum picture theatre. And the fellow in charge of public relations organised it - was doing a very good job, and we had fantastic parties there. And always the boss would arrive and talk to everybody, and everybody would have great fun. And not only parties, but there were twice a week, pictures, movies. And of course, there was no television, and very good movies they always had, up to date. And that was very good social experience. And those movies had to go through. When there was Bundilla Camp - it was not very far from Bullock's Flat

(end of tape)

KH: Sorry, what was that? To get the picture through.

TS: Pictures - that was the rule, the pictures must get through. And one day the Land Rover got bogged. It could not move, so they called the bulldozer and took half of the Land rover away.....pictures.

KH: The Land Rover was so badly bogged, that it came in half, it tore in half?

TS: Yes, a lot of stories - I don't know whether any of them - whether all or any were true. But I was led to believe that at Munyang they had to leave the bulldozer which they could not get out of the bog. So they left it there and built over it.

KH: Really?

TS: That 's the story. There were very good stories all the time.

KH: Frank Rodwell told me of two bulldozers getting bogged near that camp at Bondilla, and they had to bring a third one. That was the last one they had, in order to get the other two out. Do you remember any gambling in the camps, or - - -

TS: There was gambling at Island Bend. There was organised gambling, and prostitution for a little while. But it was always bust up pretty soon.

KH: Oh, was it?

TS: Yes. They would arrive from Sydney and have a nice time for a little while. But it would have been - Island Bend had quite a bit of gambling - it flourished quite a lot. I am not the type, so I don't know, but I knew the organisers. It was organised.

KH: Did you go rabbit shooting?

TS: Yes.

KH: Were there many rabbits around?

TS: I started rabbit shooting and got sick of it very soon because it was - mxyomatosis was very bad. And once you killed one sick one, then you don't want to eat any more rabbits. I shot rabbits and I shot kangaroos, but the same story, I did not want to do it - so. There were many rabbits. You know Snowy Plains?

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KH: Yes.

TS: Jesus, were there rabbits! It was bad. Now that we talk about it, yes, there was a lot erosion due to rabbits.

KH: In the Snowy Plains area.

TS: Snowy Plains, and other - it was pieces of land which were bare, completely bare.

KH: Kiandra had it bad, too, didn't it, I think?

TS: And we at Sponar's, unbelievable it was, at one stage.

KH: With rabbits?

TS: Unbelievable. I used to joke, "If I throw a brick out of the window I am bound to kill ten rabbits." I used to make this joke. But then they disappeared.

KH: Really?

TS: Yes. They ate everything; it was bare; I tried to have nice playgrounds with flowers and everything was eaten away.

KH: Are there any photos of these rabbits?

TS: No. I never seen any.

KH: I have never seen any.

TS: No, I have never seen any.

KH: It is so hard to believe. That is quite cold there.

TS: Yes. I may have forgotten about the rabbits if I did not remember this joke which I created. It was a slight exaggeration, but - - -

KH: Well, even if it was only half true, it is still a lot of rabbits. You would hit five rabbits with one brick instead of ten. That is pretty good.

TS: Animals never came as high as Sponar's. Once a kangaroo was killed down off Guthega, but that is the only one I remember, as I said. And once there was a emu right on Dainer's Gap.

KH: Oh, was there? An emu on Dainer's Gap? Well, come up from the Snowy, I suppose, down from the gorge.

TS: On Rennex Gap, not Dainer's - Rennex Gap.

KH: Oh, Rennex Gap.

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TS: Rennex - - -

KH: Rennex Gap - I am with you, oh yes. What about wild horses, did they come up Digger's Creek?

TS: Well, I saw one wild horse. I was fishing at Island Bend and I saw it on the other bank, on the left bank.

KH: Only down at Island Bend. They never came up - only one you saw down there.

TS: Only one.

KH: Ever?

TS: Ever, yes. It never had a reputation that says there should be wild horses on that side of the Snowy there. Plenty ofcame when we had our camp, and wild pigs. That was between Cabramurra and Tumbarumba.....camp on the left bank of the Tumut.

KH: Did anyone else go pig shooting, or - - -

TS: I don't remember. I don't remember. I would have liked to, but at that stage - and it was already when I was on the Snowy, I have given up shooting, and I was in the country. It was a fairly big pig country there.

KH: Do you remember any fights between people at the camps?

TS: I don't remember, no. I think they were generally very harmonious.

KH: And you got on with your workmates all right?

TS: Oh yes, yes.

KH: I think the only main group that seemed to have squabbles was the Slovans - was the two groups of Yugoslavs.

TS: That is possible.

KH: Apparently, people have told me they used to be at each other at times.

TS: But I never witnessed anything like that. When I was on the wages bracket with Snowy, I had to eat in the so-called wages barracks and sleep in the so-called wages barracks. When you become what was called staff, then you have staff accommodation and staff eating facilities, and staff bar, and everything.

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So I moved out - with all these people on the wages. you know, the labourers and all that. I never noticed any disagreement anywhere.

KH: Was there a big difference between what the wages people got for - - -

TS: Money?

KH: No, no. In terms of accommodation and food.

TS: It was rougher. It was simpler. But again - even when I was on staff, and had to go in the field at two camps - well, there was no staff accommodation, so I had exactly the same as the wages.

KH: Did you ever meet Major Clews?

TS: Oh yes, oh yes.

KH: What do you remember about him?

TS: Jolly fellow. He went out of his way always to have fun - typical - I would say typical - I think I know the type of these loners, and I am one of them. I canwhat is the expression - sociable and extrovert and all that. And he was like that.

KH: But at other times, very solitary.

TS: He was alone.

KH: He was a bachelor, I think.

TS: Yes. Most of the time he was living there alone. but you visited him and he would do anything. And stories! How kangaroos eat his towels - - -

KH: Kangaroos eat his towels?

TS: Yes, carried them away and eat his soap - never stopped talking. And of course, he was probably two weeks without any human contact at all.

KH: Apparently he had false teeth, or something. They used to pop out every so often.

TS: I don't know. That is quite possible.

KH: With all his talking.

TS: Yes.

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KH: Were there any practical jokers?
 TS: I was.
 KH: What was your biggest practical joke?
 TS: That one which I remember best is - we Czechs, we love all these very ripe, smelly cheeses, very stinky cheese. Impossible stinky cheeses. And once I got a wrapper of - we always used to tease each other, the drillers, hydrographers and surveyors. And once I noticed that nobody was in the drillers' office, so I got a wrapper of this stinky cheese and stuck it under the table in their office. About two days later they started to dig under the floor! Because we Czechs, we knew what it was there! Oh, I did all the time something crazy.
 KH: What else did you do?
 TS: I can't remember. But this one I can remember. I always pulled somebody else's leg, yes. Plenty of them.
 KH: Did anyone ever pull your leg? And get away with it.
 TS: I don't remember. I seem to have spent a lot of time thinking about these practical jokes.Oh, there were a lot of occasions, but I would have to think hard about it.
 KH: Apparently in one of the tunnels, when they made the last blast to break through, they put an extra load of dynamite in, and all the dignitaries were there waiting for this big occasion, and it blew all their hard hats off, and blew them all backwards a few feet. That was one of the biggest practical jokes I have heard of, I don't know whether it was true.
 TS: There was not much contact, as I remember, between us outdoor people and those who were in the tunnels, for some reason. They had different camps, the tunnel people.
 KH: Oh, I see, yes, because they were contractors. They did not work for the SMA, did they?
 TS: Some of them - some of the tunnels, I think, were done by SMA. I am almost certain they were. Because SMA always used to boast when there was another world record in tunnelling, and all that. And SMA used to get the credit for that.

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KH: Oh, I thought most of the tunnels were overseas contractors - - -
 TS: I may be wrong, but I know definitely the buildings, the dams were contract.
 KH: Oh, I see.
 TS: The tunnels - you had better check on that one. I think many were done by Snowy *itself*.
 KH: Did the SMA look after you?
 TS: In what way?
 KH: In terms of your work conditions; in terms of - - -
 TS: There was no complaint.
 KH: Everyone seem to accept what was presented at that period in our history.
 TS: Yes, yes. About two or three years ago, a fellow called Oliver visited Cooma, he is old already, but still a high official in the Australian Workers Union. And he got for some reason big publicity from Cooma-Menarc Express, and all interviews. And he was saying how he used to have - how the Australian workers Union in the earlys 50s was so well organised in the Snowy - bloody bullshit! I never heard of one member of Australian Workers - or for that matter, any mischief at all done by the unions. I don't know why they published this, because it was not true, simply not true. And I started right on the bottom. I would have heard something, in the four years. And as far as I know there was no trouble ever.
 KH: There was some resentment, I think, about paying dues to the unions, wasn't there? Because then no-one ever saw them.
 TS: Nobody ever was asked.
 KH: Oh, you did not have to pay?
 TS: Not at all.
 KH: Oh, I see.
 TS: Not at all, nobody asked.
 KH: So the unions were not active at all.
 TS: Absolutely not. That is what I am saying. This man

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Oliver, he claimed that everybody was a member of a union and how well organised they were. And it was not true. I never heard of any union member. And that is why I say I know nobody - you can ask Danny Kollman, for instance. He has been all the time with the Snowy, whether he ever heard anything about it. I was with them only four years, but Danny has been all the time.

KH: Yes, that is right. Were you able to - if you had suggestions for improving conditions, or doing things in a different way, or in a better way, were you able to - were they receptive? I mean, the bosses, were they receptive to new ideas?

TS: You would not have any idea where to go.

KH: You would not?

TS: No. Absolutely none. We had no complaints and I think people like me - I burned my bridges. I was a political refugee and I could not go back there. And I was - that time when I was accepted by Austria (?) I had already my first bout of tuberculosis, and they took me despite that. They knew that.

KH: Oh, they knew that? That you had already had tuberculosis back in Austria.^{TS:} And I was grateful that I had somewhere to go, that is talking for myself.

KH: What sort of condition - I mean, how did people get TB? Was it because of lack of proper food, or is it because of cold conditions, or - - -

TS: I don't know. It must be inclination - inheritance and inclination. I went into military service in 1947 and there was a ^{viewing check up} of the lungs, not pictures taken. And I remember that the doctor, who was viewing, asked me whether I had any trouble ever. That is all what I remember. And when I applied for Australia in 48, in Innsbruck, they discovered already a big hole in my lungs. I went for 5 months to hospital, and it all closed, and I was, with a little ^{bit} of pushing from the Australian Commission, I was free to go.

KH: So you were lucky in a way.

TS: Oh yes.

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KH: You could have - then you would have had to stay in Austria, I suppose.

TS: Well, there were countries already - were accepting these people.

KH: You could have gone to Canada or - - -

TS: Sweden accepted people, yes. Sweden was accepting people. Otherwise, nobody in the world.

KH: No.

TS: Because it ^{was} incurable at that stage, and contagious.

KH: Contagious?

TS: Oh yes.

KH: I see.

TS: Contagious among people - that is why they were so concerned in Australia here, when it renewed, because in Australia there was very little known, tuberculosis. Consequently, people did not have natural defences. And it was very, very catching. Whereas in Europe there were a lot natural defences ^{and} immunities. And I read somewhere that some nations - I think it is Israelis - do not get it at all, because they have so much immunity in their bodies.

KH: Did you smoke?

TS: Yes, yes. I smoked.

KH: I suppose you had to give that up?

TS: I don't think that that much to do - I gave it up with the last bout in '63 - 23 years ago. I gave it up, but I don't think they objected to it that much. Never asked in the hospitals ^{and I spent a lot of time} to stop smoking.

KH: Yes, my mother, when we came to Australia - I remember my mother had to have her varicose veins removed, or partly removed, before we could come.

TS: Before?

KH: Before we could come to Australia, yes, back in 1953, when she had - - -

TS: '53, you came?

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KH: Yes. Well, we came in '54, but she had to have some operations before. So they had reservations about that.

TS: That is interesting. How old was she then?

KH: She was 43.

TS: 43. Well, that is a stage where they still expect people to work, and I suppose varicose veins is a bit of a handicap.

KH: Although it has never handicapped my mother. She still walked to the top of Kosciusko last year.

TS: Did she?

KH: How old is-she was 75 then.

TS: 75, that is very good.

KH: So you had no problems with the SMA as your employer?

TS: Absolutely none. They had a bit of a problem with me.

KH: Sounds like they liked you, too. I mean, they liked the idea of someone getting on with the job and showing some enterprise, and you showed that, so that seemed to be all right. I read on the memorial in Cooma that 120 died during the building of the Scheme.

TS: Yes.

KH: Did you know any of the people who died?

TS: No. They were usually accidents on the construction site and the tunnels, and as I mentioned, we did not have contact for some reason with those. They were living somewhere else. Also we had little contact with field construction, which was a division. And we more or less kept to our investigation division, which was a very interesting division. Our ex divisional head, he died recently.....

KH: Oh yes.

TS: Incidentally, he was in the Hotel Kosciusko fire. And was on the first floor and surrounded by fires, and jumped into a courtyard and broke both his ankles. Completely surrounded by fire. If there was a victim of that fire, it should have been *Howard Dann*...but somehow, he got out. I don't know whether they carried

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or something.

KH: And he jumped into the courtyard and the fire was all around him.

TS: Fire all around, yes, and he broke both his ankles. This is true because I asked him later about that, and he said it. I had heard about it at that stage. It was April, and pretty cold. People always ask what people did - "It must have been cold outside." I said, "You either went closer to the fire or further away from the fire."

KH: I suppose it burned the whole night. It was hot the whole night.

TS, Yes. it was hot all right.

KH: And what do you think of the Snowy Scheme? Do you think it was a good idea?

TS: Oh yes.

KH: They have put the dams in and - - -

TS: Yes, it is progress, yes. No doubt. I often think about that, and in my mind there is absolutely no doubt.

KH: Even though it stopped the flow of some of the rivers. It has flooded large areas which were farming land, and now it has caused some salt problems. The irrigation has caused salt problems out west in the irrigation areas.

TS: That is unfortunate, yes, I realise that, yes, in the Murray, yes.

KH: In the Riverina.

TS: I know that. Last year I purposely followed the Murray from the mouth right up - I always follow that.

KH: By car?

TS: By car. I planned to ~~slow~~ slow down, but I was in - something went wrong. I went ^{to} Tibet, and from Tibet I had to rush to the Grand Prix in Adelaide.

KH: Were you trekking in Tibet? Were you walking?

TS: A little bit, yes. I was not very good, but the *Papers* were very bad already.

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KH: And so when you drove down the Riverina, did you see much evidence of - - -

TS: No, I have not noticed it. But I have, of course, followed the story and followed the pictures, and it must be pretty bad, the salt. Nothing can be done about that. Well, it is not the Snowy Mountain Scheme's fault. Nobody was aware of it at that stage, it is like AIDS.

KH: You see, most of the power now comes from coal fired power stations in Sydney and Newcastle, and the Snowy only supplies the peak, I think.

TS: Yes, yes, that is right. But even at those stages, it was always said, and we knew that right from the beginning that this is not a basic load, this ^{is} for the peak load. And Sir William Hudson always used to - in his speeches, he said, "The power, although it is, by legislation, the main thing of the Scheme, it is not the most important thing. The most important thing is the water which will flow inland." But of course he did not know that it would cause damage as well. Nobody knew that.

KH: Do you think the Scheme could be built today, if someone proposed it today?

TS: No *chance..!*

KH: Why wouldn't it?

TS: Because the Greenies would be against it.

KH: Oh, I see. Do you think the Greenies are strong enough, do you? Do you think the Greenies have got enough numbers to stop it?

TS: I don't know. They manage in other parts of the country sometime. This is too big. If it was rainforest, well maybe. They can be shouted down. But not a big scheme like this. I don't think they would have any chance. But I am glad, what a nice lake we have got here.

KH: Yes, you have certainly got a nice view from here.

TS: I have built a beautiful pontoon on it, which I built in 71, '15 years - and go floating on the pontoon, and parties, 30

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people on the pontoon. That would not be possible if it was not here. And of course, I would not be living in Jindabyne, I don't think, if the lake was not here. I possibly would, because of the snow.

KH: In some ways it is a paradox that the Snowy - I mean, before the Snowy came, this was rural; it was horse and buggy days, and you still had the grazing in the high country. And to some extent the grazing, combined with burning, was causing some damage. And the Snowy, in a sense, became the lever for pushing out the grazing in order to improve the catchment. So in some ways the Greenies have the SMA to thank to get rid of grazing which has improved the rest of the Park, 90% of the Park, or more, because the Snowy Scheme has only affected a small part of it. And in turn, of course, the Snowy Scheme has enabled things like Thredbo and other resorts to develop. How far, do you think, should this be allowed to go? On the one hand, you have got a very small part of Australia, which is pretty rare in Australia - mountains covered with snow. It has got a high ecological, wildlife habitat value. But it does also have the snow which attracts people by the thousands. How far do you think - where, at what point should development of that kind stop? Have we reached the balance? Can we have many more resorts?

TS: Yes.

KH: I mean, should even more of Main Range be developed for downhill skiing, for instance?

TS: Yes, I believe that. It does not do any damage. It is only - the way it goes, there is absolutely no damage. And I don't believe in this, what they call "visual pollution." I don't believe at all in that.

KH: It does not affect you?

TS: I don't believe that. Look, I am very much influenced too by what happens in the rest of the world. And if you look at beautiful Swiss photographs of the mountains, the photograph is

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no good if there is not some human element in there. If there is not a church, and a little house, *I hate* ... power lines, *I do that.* But chairlifts do not - absolutely do not - offend me. To the contrary, I think it belongs to the mountains, to the snow.

KH: So you would not mind a chairlift going up - - -

TS: Leave Kosciusko for the walkers.

KH: All right.

TS: Leave Kosciusko to walkers, but there are other mountains which - you will never see anybody there. Why should they be protected if nobody wants to see them anyhow?

KH: What about - like, for instance, up the Guthega River towards Mount Tate, would you - - -

TS: Mount Tate was - at one stage - was already permitted for development. I don't think it would be wise because the weather is bad there. I don't think it - often very bad visibility, because it has not got trees; it has not got rocks, and all that. And you need all that to be able to ski. It would not be wise, but I would be in favour. At one stage it was already permitted, and only because the man who got the rights, got broke, he did not go ahead.

KH: Where else would you like to - I mean - - -

TS: Well, no doubt - and it is almost permitted - suggested by the Park that *the Paralyzer will be opened* and access will be by the extension of the Skitube, I think the Park will insist upon that. But it is a nice little neat area.

KH: So it would be another branch that would go off under Mount Perisher and come out - - -

TS: If they don't change their minds, or if the Tube does not get broke, and all that goes along with that. That would be it. But even without that, it is a neat little area. And, of course, through the years I have got wiser and as I am not as able to ski as I used to, I feel much more with the average skier. An average skier is the beginner, and the novice and the intermediate, and they need facilities. They need facilities for

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them, and this *Paralyzer* would be a neat little one to open up. Of course, I don't believe those figures which the *tube* people are producing. That is not true - 40,000 skiers in the Perisher Range. It is not possible, it is too many. At the moment the capacity is 16,000, and they are talking about 40,000 there. But these people *should* still be allowed to go ahead. It is not a very good area, those *twin* .. valleys, but if anybody wants to invest, it is not damaging. And Thredbo should be allowed to extend if they wish to. There is no damage done there.

KH: How do you feel about accommodation, which seems to cause a lot more problems? Accommodation in the alpine areas where the snow actually falls? Particularly the sewage problem; the transport problems, the garbage problems and so on.

TS: Well, you are talking, apparently, about Perisher. Well, Perisher was bloody badly designed - designed by the Park. The Park has done all the damage there, because they insisted - instead of European-style village like Thredbo, where the services are all concentrated in one spot, they put a bit up there, a bit out there, long *access* route everywhere, long sewage lines, long water lines. It is just the Park's fault. And if anything happens - well, everybody *got reconciled* with that now - that the accommodation is out of *the mountains*.

KH: Yes, it seems to be.

TS: Yes, so all right, but it will be very bad if all of a sudden the Park changes its mind again, and said, "OK, back to the mountains." Because Jindabyne and all this is growing because they were expelled from there, so by now, it is the right thing to do.

KH: But would you say that the development of the mountains is unlimited? I mean, where would you put the limits?

TS: I would put quite a bit more. At the moment, I think it is one per cent of the Park, isn't it? One per cent of the Park is developed.

KH: I don't know.

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TS: I think it is one per cent. I would go to three per cent, easy, because it does not do any damage. Lower down, it does not. And this visual impact, what they have done with Blue Cow, that is so fantastic - stupid. They hid the main building, yet the big, ugly water tower is visible from everywhere.

KH: Is that what it is, the big white thing?

TS: Yes - Jesus Christ! Building which could be beautiful, this must be hidden, but that water tower that must be there.

KH: I see.

TS: But they destroyed the concept of Blue Cow. I was very closely associated with Blue Cow. It is my baby too. I was the first one to suggest it in 1968, ^{I was hired} for a study for the Park. But where the Park insisted they put the centre, the building, it is out of snow, it is out of everywhere. And before you start skiing you have to start walking.

KH: I see.

TS: With heavy boots and all what you have now, and try to get back in - to start walking uphill.

KH: Is it too windy there, or - - -

TS: It is exposed to sun, the snow disappears very early. And the best runs for novices, intermediate, you cannot reach skiing down. You have to start walking. It is short walk, but still, people don't ^{want} to walk. After all, it is business which tries to attract customers, and customers who find out that going to Perisher is much easier because you do not need to walk, they will go to Perisher. They will not go to Blue Cow.

KH: I think I have just about asked you every question that I can think of. I wouldn't mind looking through some of your photos, if that is possible.

TS: I don't know what I have. It is extremely disorganised.

KH: Have you got - the ones that were in here - of early Thredbo. There is one of the Crackenback River, across the bridge there. Can I borrow some photos to make copies -do you

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mind that?

TS: Yes, that is all right. If it is 100 per cent certain that I get it back.

KH: Yes.

TS: You see this. for instance, this is the original chairlift line to the golf links at Thredbo. And they simply abandoned it. And this is just superimposed - I made other runs, you know, wiped it, it was before any clearing was done already. And I already wanted an Olympic course to have started here. And that one is going ahead. I have government money for that one. So that one is a good one.

KH: Oh, so you would have taken it up that gully there?

TS: Yes, that is right. Danny Collman's helped to survey it.

KH: Oh, did he?

TS: He ~~held~~ the staff - I have picture somewhere of him. And that it should have been instead of being here, that one. Central Valley is now here, behind this.

KH: Like down here, somewhere.

TS: I used to have a lot of Samoyeds.

KH: Oh, did you?

TS: This is just outside Sponar's.

KH: Were they used to tow the dog sleds?

TS: No, just for decoration. I tried at one stage to ~~build~~ a bigger lift. This is the poma we used to have. At one stage I thought ofhaving a chairlift right to the top. There is not enough snow. This is at the Rainbow Lake, the reservoir on the top.

KH: The top dam?

TS: Yes.

KH: Right. I have never been there. There is a track into there, isn't there?

TS: There is a track and it is a very attractive place.

KH: Yes, so I have heard. I must go there.

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TS: Smiggin Holes used to have a swimming pool. And I once launched my sailing boat on the swimming pool. My boat used to be moored on our lake at Sponar's.

KH: I am interested in that photo of the burnt out hotel, too, or any of you skiing, or any of you working on the Snowy Scheme. You lent me those three that you sent of your crossing trip, and I have included two of those in the book. That should come out about April next year.

TS: That was the first stage. That would have been the second year in operation, after I repaired a little bit outside of Sponar's. The ablution^{black} is still standing here, the old one which I pulled down later. It would have been the second year of operation.

KH: I would not mind borrowing that to make a copy.

TS: And this is how I imagined Thredbo should look like. There was nothing there yet.

KH: I see. Have you got any photos without the black on them?

TS: I should have somewhere, yes.

KH: I would be interested to see any photos of Thredbo, before and after.

TS: That one.

KH: That is right, that is the one you sent me.

TS: That was the Sydney Morning Herald front page. I had several ones.

KH: Which one is you?

TS: This one here.

KH: I would not have recognised you.

TS: The first year up there, '51.

KH: Can I get a copy of that? I would not mind getting a copy of that one.

TS: This was the first ever sail on Lake Jindabyne. The day they closed the gate on Lake Jindabyne, I had my sailing boat already.

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KH: That is near the old bridge, is it?

TS: That is the low bridge. They had two bridges. One was low - this one is the low one.

KH: I see. You like having firsts, don't you?

TS: Oh yes.

KH: Apparently a lot of the dams filled much more quickly -
- -

TS: This is the picture - - -

KH: That is right, I was interested in - that is the one that is blown up. You haven't got any negatives of these?

TS: No.

KH: They are all gone, are they?

TS: Yes, I never had it, I don't think. I blow it up by photographic image. I do my ^{own} processing.

KH: That was taken - it is a square format.

TS: That is Rollei. a 4 x 4 Rollei.

KH: A small Rollei.

TS: The grey one over there.

KH: Good heavens! a 4 x 4 Rollei.

TS: Ever heard of Douglass Baglin?

KH: Yes, I know Douglass, I bought some photos from him.

TS: Well, Douglass Baglin - my first year at Thredbo, I made a very nice low coffee table. And he fell in love with this coffee table and he changed the coffee table for this camera.

KH: Really? Gee! That would be quite rare now, I would think.

TS: That was the beginning of March one year, that was the only snowfall I remember at the beginning of March. Soon after I started - it must have been already '51, they built this building there to transfer the temporary bar which I helped to build in 1951. The temporary bar was ^m these barracks in the ^{back}...And soon - it might have been even before I took over - this was already as a bar, a roadside bar. And then one day it exploded, the gas exploded and demolished it completely. So it is no more there.

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And instead of burying it - remember Neville Gare, who used to be the superintendent?

KH: Yes, I know Neville.

TS: Instead of burying it, the bulldozer arrived and made a big heap out of that, and we called it Mount Gare. That is Paul Marriott, and that was my wife. Douglass Baglin, he took these pictures.

KH: Oh, I see. She must have been chilly, these people are all rugged up. That was one for the cameras.

TS: That is one of our employees and our chef.

KH: Is this your wife?

TS: Yes.

KH: And who is this?

TS: One of the staff.

KH: And this is the cook at - - -

TS: That would have been 64.

KH: Oh, 50, Douglas Baglin. I would not mind a photo of that one, that is a rare one. I wonder if he would let me borrow that? I might have to get a copy from him of that. I would not mind making a copy for the record. And then if I ever use it in a publication, I would get the rights from Douglas Baglin if that is all right with you.

TS: But please 100 per cent to be returned.

KH: Yes, all right.

TS: The other day there were some film crowd and 100 per cent they promised to return within a few days. And it took three months to get in out of them.

KH: Oh, I see.

TS: This is the original line which I wanted, you see that? Just faintly, and this was the final line, where it is now. You see the ^{middle} slopes.....were not cleared yet?

KH: No.

TS: I cleared this one here. You see that? Just thinning out the trees, because it was pretty thick. So what I was par-

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ticularly doing, just connecting one thinner patch of trees with another thinner patch of trees.

KH: You did not have chain saw, either, did you? *Adam Zapenski worked with that.*

TS: We had already - second year. *^* but not the first year. That was my cocker spaniel. And you know that one, don't you?

KH: That is the one that appeared in - that is the first bridge across the Crackenback.

TS: Yes. I built that one.

KH: Did you? Danny Collman had this too. Not the same photo. With his family standing on the bridge.

TS: Is that right?

KH: Yes. I was quite surprised.

TS: Here he is, Danny Collman. This is when I had my sailing boat on the lake.

KH: Is that you and your wife?

TS: No, a girl friend.

KH: That must be someone else, then.

TS: One of the girl friends.

KH: I see.

TS: That is much as I have for the time being. I cannot think of any - there is plenty of them around.

KH: What about this one here of you as a younger man?

TS: That one was returned to me very recently, and I did not know where I put it.

KH: And the one of the burnt out hotel, it is a big poster downstairs.....The Eagle Run - up from Kunama?

TS: Up from the top from the bridge above Kunama down to Kunama - - -

KH: Oh, you originated that, did you?

TS: Yes.

KH: Did you hold the best time for that for some period of time?

TS: This is the particular run.

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KH: This is you doing the run?

TS: Yes. This was the particular run. I have done it only once.

KH: Only once, oh, right.

TS: It is just after jumping off the cornice.

KH: What speed did you reach?

TS: I don't know. It was a little bit of a joke because the track was not prepared and was changeable. And one could have easily had pretty rotten falls. This would have been '53, yes 1953.

KH: That is Eagle Run. They inaugurated an Eagle badge or something, wasn't it?

TS: Yes, yes, there was. I sort of put the idea into Charles Anton's mind, and then he was organiser, because he practically owned Kunama, this was Kunama, I am waxing skis and Charles Anton is hammering something.

KH: You drove in there with a - - -

TS: There was already one of those old weasels, *Chalet* weasels.

KH: With tracks?

TS: Yes. That is what they used for the first ^{few} years up to about 1951.

KH: So this is you and Charles Anton. I will just write this down. Charles Anton and Tony Sponar at Kunama in 1954.

concluded.