

CABRAMATTA. N.S.W. 2166
18/4/85

Klaus

DEAR KLAUS,

THANK YOU FOR YOUR RECENT COMMUNICATION, WITH INCLUSIONS RELATING TO YOUR PAST AND FUTURE WORK.

I REGRET TO SAY THAT I AM NOT GOING TO BE OF ANY HELP AT ALL IN ADDING TO YOUR "DATA BASE" OF EVENTS IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE "MOUNTAINS". I STUDIED YOUR "SIGNIFICANT EVENTS/FASCINATING SNIPPETS" TIME CHART WITH INTEREST, BUT THE PERIOD DURING MY 7 YEARS AT "CURRANGO" WAS ALL NEWS TO ME. YOU SEE, I WAS OF RATHER TENDER YEARS AT THAT TIME, AND NATURALLY SELF-CENTRED IN MY OUTLOOK. I WAS THEREFORE LARGELY UNAWARE OF WHAT WAS HAPPENING BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF THE HOME PADDOCK.

I APPROCHED MY PARENTS, BOTH OF WHOM ARE NOW ELDERLY AND NOT ABLE TO REMEMBER MUCH OF THAT ERA. SO I AM SORRY TO SAY THAT I CANNOT ASSIST IN ANY SIGNIFICANT WAY TO FILLING IN THE RECORD.

WHAT I HAVE DONE THOUGH, AND IT MAY ASSIST YOU IN SOME WAY IN GAINING ADDITIONAL IMPRESSIONS OF WHAT LIFE WAS LIKE IN THE "CURRANGO" AREA, IS PROVIDE YOU WITH SOME EXTRACTS FROM A TEXT WHICH I AM PREPARING FOR MY FAMILY. IT IS A SIMPLE FAMILY "HISTORICAL" RECORD OF THE LIFE OF BOTH MY WIFE AND SELF (AND CHILDREN) WHICH COVERS OUR LIFE AND "ADVENTURES" IN AUSTRALIA AND THE PACIFIC ISLANDS. IT IS NOT MY INTENTION TO PUBLISH ANY PORTION OF IT, BUT TO SIMPLY TO COMPILE IT IN HOME-BOUND VOLUMES (ABOUT 3) AND LEAVE IT FOR THE KIDS/GRANDKIDS/GREAT-GRANDKIDS ETC... FOR A LAUGH OR CRY.

THE EXTRACTS WHICH I AM FORWARDING, RELATE TO A PERIOD WHICH BEGAN IN 1928, (I WAS TWO-AND-A-HALF YEARS OLD) WHEN MY FOLKS MOVED TO THE AREA, AND IT COVERS A PERIOD UP TO JUST AFTER THE MELBOURNE CUP OF 1935. (I REMEMBER THE MAIL-MAN PERCY RUSSELL, BRINGING THE NEWS SOME DAYS AFTER THE RACE, THAT MARIBOU HAD WON). SHORTLY AFTER THAT WE MOVED TO "THE MULLION", NEAR YASS.

THE TEXT I AM SENDING YOU HAS BEEN PICKED OUT FROM LOTS OF FAMILY-RELATED COMMENTS AND AS A RESULT COULD APPEAR A LITTLE DISJOINTED. ADDITIONALLY IT CONTAINS A FEW RATHER DUBIOUS COMMENTS ABOUT A FEW OF THE COLOURFUL PEOPLE WHO LIVED IN THE AREA AT THAT TIME. I KNOW YOU WILL EXERCISE DISCRETION IN ANY USE YOU MAY CARE TO MAKE OF ANY PART OF IT. I WOULD PREFER NOT TO BE THE FOCAL POINT OF A LIBEL SUIT.

BY WAY OF BACKGROUND, MY FATHER AND MOTHER, TO WHOM I MAKE

MANY REFERENCES, WERE THOMAS NORMAN THATCHER, AND LORNA THATCHER. DAD WAS MORE COMMONLY KNOWN AS "TIM" THATCHER, AND MUM WAS OFTEN CALLED "MRS. TIM". WE LIVED IN WHAT IS NOW CALLED "DAFFODIL COTTAGE". IT WAS SIMPLY "THE COTTAGE" IN OUR DAY.

WALTER WARE WAS THE OVERSEER LIVING IN THE MAIN HOMESTEAD IN THE EARLY 30'S. HE WAS LATER REPLACED BY BILL RUSSELL AND HIS WIFE (I THINK MARY WAS HER NAME) AND THEY WERE IN RESIDENCE THERE AT THE TIME OF OUR DEPARTURE.

MY FATHER WORKED AS A STATION-HAND FOR MOST OF EACH YEAR, BUT ALSO DID CONTRACT WORK FENCING, SCRUBBING, RINGBARKING AND CLEARING AT CERTAIN TIMES. HE SOMETIMES HAD SIX OR SEVEN PEOPLE WORKING FOR HIM (MOSTLY BROTHERS AND FRIENDS) BUILDING FENCES IN "THE GULF" AREA, BALD HILL, THE SELECTION, AND THE TRIANGLE (NAMES OF AREAS, PADDOCKS, OR FEATURES WHICH MAY STILL EXIST). DURING THE WINTER MONTHS, HE MADE QUITE AN ACCEPTABLE INCOME FROM RABBIT SKINS, FOX SKINS, AND OTHER PELTS.

I MUST APOLOGISE FOR THIS RATHER ANTIQUATED PRINTER. IT LACKS LOWER-CASE CAPABILITY AS YOU CAN SEE. I HAVE A NEW PRINTER ON ORDER, BUT IT WILL NOT ARRIVE FOR A COUPLE MORE WEEKS, SO I THOUGHT I HAD BETTER SEND THIS PRIOR TO THE END OF APRIL TO MEET YOUR REQUEST. MY TEXT IS ON MAG-TAPE FILES AND MY FINAL PRODUCTION WILL HOPEFULLY BE PRESENTED A LITTLE MORE PROFESSIONALLY THAN THIS.

THERE IS NOT ONE SINGLE PHOTOGRAPH IN MY POSSESSION WHICH DEPICTS ANY OF THE "CURRANGO" AREA AS IT WAS IN THAT PERIOD. I HAVE RETURNED ONCE (ABOUT 15 YEARS AGO) AND TAKEN SOME SLIDES, BUT THE OLD DAYS WERE NOT CAPTURED BY US. WE COULD NOT AFFORD LUXURIES LIKE CAMERAS, IN THE OLD DAYS !

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST IN MY SMALL CONTRIBUTION, KLAUS. FEEL FREE TO USE IT IN ANY FORM YOU WISH. I SEEK NO PAYMENT IN ANY WAY, AND I WILL NOT EVEN BE UPSET IF YOU HAVE NO USE FOR ANY OF IT. AFTER ALL, THERE IS NOTHING WORLD-SHATTERING ABOUT MY IMPRESSIONABLE YEARS IN THE MONARO HIGHLANDS.

WISHING YOU ALL THE BEST WITH YOUR FUTURE PRODUCTIONS.

BEST REGARDS,


(TREVOR THATCHER)

SOME OF THE PERSONAL HISTORY OF TREVOR WILLIAM THATCHER.

THIS NEXT MOVE WAS TO THE MONARO DISTRICT, SOME 60 ROAD-MILES SOUTH EAST OF TUMUT. IT SEEMS THAT DAD MANAGED TO OBTAIN A JOB ON A LARGE PROPERTY CALLED "CURRANGO". CURRANGO WAS OWNED BY THE AUSTRALIAN ESTATES AND MORTGAGE CO. I DOUBT IF THEY ARE STILL IN BUSINESS.

MY FATHER'S UNCLE TED BRASILL (MARRIED TO MY FATHER'S AUNTY NELL) WAS A MANAGER FOR THE AUSTRALIAN ESTATES AND MORTGAGE CO. HE NO DOUBT HAD SOME INFLUENCE IN GETTING THE JOB FOR DAD, AND IT WAS HERE MY DAD WORKED FOR THE NEXT 7 YEARS, KEEPING AWAY FROM THE BIG CITIES AND THEIR PROBLEMS WITH THE DEPRESSION WHICH HAD NOW SETTLED IN.

I WAS A VERY HAPPY LITTLE BOY LIVING AT "CURRANGO". ALTHOUGH NO OTHER KIDS OF MY AGE WERE LIVING THERE, I SEEMED TO LIKE THE PLACE, AND STILL HAVE VERY PLEASANT MEMORIES OF LIFE THERE.

"CURRANGO" WAS TERMED A "SNOW-LEASE" BY THE LOCALS WHO LIVED THERE. DURING THE SUMMER, AUTUMN AND SPRING, SHEEP AND CATTLE WERE "ADJUSTED" THERE, BUT DURING THE WINTER IT USUALLY SNOWED AND AS A RESULT, WAS UNSUITABLE FOR STOCK GRAZING.

THE AREA OF THE STATION WAS 35,000 ACRES, WHICH WAS PRETTY BIG BY STANDARDS FOR THAT PART OF THE STATE. IT WAS QUITE WELL SET UP AND DEVELOPED. THE HOUSING COMPLEX AROUND THE HOMESTEAD AREA WAS MADE UP OF 8 MAJOR BUILDINGS, NOT INCLUDING THE COW-SHED, FOWL-HOUSE, AND WOOD-SHED. THE HOMESTEAD, LIKE ALL OTHER BUILDINGS, WAS MADE FROM WEATHERBOARDS WITH A CORRUGATED IRON ROOF. IT CONTAINED ABOUT FIVE BEDROOMS, A LARGE DINING-ROOM, KITCHEN, OFFICE, 2 PANTRIES AND A PROPER BATH-ROOM. THERE WAS A LARGE FLY-SCREEN ENCLOSED VERANDAH ON THE EASTERN SIDE OF THE HOUSE, AND A SMALL OPEN FRONT VERANDAH AT THE NORTHERN END, WITH ANOTHER OPEN VERANDAH ON THE WESTERN SIDE.

A LARGE AREA OF LAWN STRETCHED THE FULL LENGTH OF THE WESTERN SIDE AND THE EASTERN SIDE SPORDED A LARGE GARDEN AREA RUNNING THE FULL LENGTH OF THE HOUSE, WITH A DEPTH OF ABOUT 60 FEET.

THIS GARDEN REACHED TO THE TENNIS COURT, WHICH DURING THE FIRST FEW YEARS OF OUR STAY, WAS REGULARLY USED AND WELL LOOKED AFTER. THE MAIN YARD AROUND THE HOUSE WAS FENCED WITH 6 FT. HIGH NETTING. THE POSTS, ALTHOUGH CUT FROM TREE-TRUNKS, WERE TRIMMED AT THE TOP TO GIVE A TAPERED STYLE HEAD ON THE INTERMEDIATE POSTS, WHILE THE GATE-POSTS AND CORNER POSTS WERE GIVEN A LITTLE EXTRA TREATMENT WITH SAW, ADZ, AND CHISEL TO PRODUCE A "FACETED" HEAD, NOT UNLIKE A HUMAN HEAD, WHEN VIEWED FROM A DISTANCE. ALL POSTS WERE PAINTED WHITE, WHICH CONTRASTED PLEASINGLY WITH THE DARK BRICK-RED COLOUR OF THE WEATHERBOARDS OF THE MAIN BUILDING.

THE GARAGE-CUM-STABLES WERE LOCATED ABOUT 150 YARDS AWAY FROM THE HOUSE, ON THE NORTH SIDE ON THE TOP OF A SLIGHT RISE. THE CONSTRUCTION OF THIS BUILDING WAS OF ADZED SLABS, WITH SAWN TIMBER TRIM, AND DOORS, AND AGAIN PAINTED DARK BRICK RED. THERE WAS ACCOMMODATION FOR ABOUT SIX HORSES IN STALLS, SEPARATED FROM THE GARAGE PART WITH SLAB DIVIDING WALLS. THE GARAGE PORTION HAD SLAB FLOORING BOARDS, A LARGE WORKBENCH, AND A PIT, OVER WHICH CARS OR TRUCKS COULD BE DRIVEN FOR "UNDERNEATH" SERVICE.

THERE BEING NOT MANY CARS ABOUT, AND AS A CONSEQUENCE, LITTLE USE MADE OF THE PIT FOR ITS DESIGNED PURPOSE, RESULTED IN THE PIT BEING USED AS A STORE FOR POTATOES. POTATOES, PACKED IN STRAW, IN THE DARK, KEEP EVER SO MUCH LONGER THAN IN OTHER AVAILABLE STORAGE. THIS DOES NOT STOP THEM FROM GROWING LONG SHOOTS, BUT THE TUBERS REMAIN EDIBLE.

THE REMAINDER OF THIS BUILDING WAS AVAILABLE FOR HOUSING HORSE DRAWN VEHICLES. A BUGGY, A WAGONETTE, AND A SULKY WERE KEPT IN A PARTLY OPEN SECTION. PARTLY OPEN IN THAT IT HAD NO BACK OR FRONT DOOR. NATURALLY IT WAS OFTEN USED BY THE STATION FREE-RANGE POULTRY AS A VERY SATISFACTORY ROOSTING HOUSE, AND IT WAS NOT UNCOMMON TO HAVE THE NEED TO SHOVEL OUT A HEAP OF CHOOK-DUNG FROM THE FLOOR OF THE SULKY OR WAGONETTE, BEFORE ONE TOOK IT ON A TRIP.

NEXT TO THE GARAGE WAS A GRAIN STORE. IT WAS ONLY ABOUT TEN FEET SQUARE, BUT WAS CONSTRUCTED HIGH OFF THE GROUND ON PIERS CAPPED WITH LARGE GALVANISED IRON DISCS (SOMETHING LIKE ANT-CAPS ONLY LARGER) WHICH SERVED AS A BARRIER TO MICE AND RATS. IT WAS HERE THAT THE FLOUR, CEREALS, LENTILS, AND ANY OTHER FOODSTUFF, PRONE TO ATTACK BY RHODENTS, WAS KEPT SAFE DURING THE WINTER.

CONTINUING NORTHWARDS A FURTHER 150 YARDS, A TRACK LED ONE TO THE SHEARER'S (OR WORKMAN'S, OR ITINERANT'S) HUT. IT WAS SIMILAR, BUT SIMPLER IN CONSTRUCTION TO THE MAIN HOMESTEAD BUILDING.

IT CONTAINED ABOUT SIX OR EIGHT ROOMS WHICH COULD BE USED AS BEDROOMS, PLUS A VERY LARGE KITCHEN-CUM-DININGROOM. ALL ROOMS HAD SAWN TIMBER FLOORS, BUT NO FLOOR COVERINGS. THE WALLS WERE CLAD ON THE OUTSIDE WITH WEATHER BOARDS, BUT THE INTERIOR OF THE ROOMS WERE LINED WITH VARNISHED TONGUED-AND-GROVED VEE-JOINTED PINE BOARDS, ABOUT TWO INCHES WIDE. A COUPLE OF THE BED-ROOMS HAD FIREPLACES INSTALLED. BUT THE KITCHEN HAD A VERY LARGE RANGE, A COUPLE OF FIREPLACES AND A LARGE BRICK-OVEN, SIMILAR TO THOSE ONE SEES IN OLD BAKE-HOUSES.

FURTHER DOWN THE SAME TRACK, CONTINUING NORTH, ONE WOULD COME UPON STANFIELD'S HUT. IT WAS OF SLAB CONSTRUCTION, CONSISTING OF TWO ROOMS, AND AN OPEN VERANDAH. IN KEEPING WITH ALL THE OTHER BUILDINGS,

IT WAS PAINTED BRICK-RED. IT HAD NO STOVE, BUT A VERY LARGE OPEN FIREPLACE AT THE END OF THE LIVING ROOM.

ON THE WESTERN SIDE OF THE HOMESTEAD, ABOUT 150 YARDS DISTANT, A SMALL CREEK RAN IN A SOUTH-TO-NORTH DIRECTION. IT HAD BEEN DAMMED UP, ABOUT 200 YARDS DOWN-STREAM FROM THE HOUSE TO FORM A FAIRLY LARGE, AND DEEP, DUCK-POND. WILD MINT, AND RUSHES GREW IN PROFUSION ALONG THE CREEK, AND AROUND THE EDGES OF THE POND. AT A POINT ON THE CREEK, CLOSEST TO THE HOMESTEAD, A SMALL FOOTBRIDGE HAD BEEN CONSTRUCTED. IT WAS MADE OF SAWN TIMBER, CAME COMPLETE WITH A HANDRAIL ON ONE SIDE, AND ALL PAINTED WHITE. IT WAS THE MEANS OF CROSSING THE CREEK TO COMPLETE ANOTHER HUNDRED YARDS OF WALKING TO REACH "THE COTTAGE".

"THE COTTAGE" WAS A SIX ROOMED BUILDING, WITH AN OPEN VERANDAH BACK AND FRONT. THE BATHROOM AND PANTRY, WHICH I HAVE COUNTED AS ROOMS, WERE REALLY ENCLOSED AREAS ON EITHER END OF THE BACK VERANDAH, BUT THEY SERVED THEIR PURPOSE.

IT WAS MADE OF THE UBIQUITOUS WEATHERBOARDS WHICH WERE PAINTED BRICK-RED, WITH THE CLASSIC GABLE ROOF OF CORRUGATED IRON AND NO GUTTERING. (THE SNOW WOULD SOON PUT PAID TO ANY GUTTERING WHICH MAY BE ATTACHED.) THE FOUR ROOMS WERE SET UP TO SERVE AS A KITCHEN (COMPLETE WITH BEACON-LIGHT STOVE), A DINING ROOM (COMPLETE WITH RESPECTABLE FIRE-PLACE), AND TWO BEDROOMS. LIKE THE WORKMAN'S HUT, THE INTERIOR WAS LINED WITH THE POPULAR VARNISHED, TONGUED-AND-GROOVED, VEE-JOINTED PINE BOARDS, ABOUT TWO INCHES WIDE.

IT WAS A COSY LITTLE COTTAGE AND IT WAS HERE THAT I SPENT THE NEXT SEVEN YEARS WITH MUM AND DAD (AND LATER MY SISTER PAT), WITH ONLY VERY OCCASIONAL BREAKS IN THE FORM OF SHORT VISITS TO EITHER TUMUT, YASS, RULES POINT OR KIANDRA.

LIVING IN THE COTTAGE WAS PERHAPS RATHER SPARTAN BY TODAY'S STANDARDS, BUT IN THOSE DAYS IT WAS VERY COMFORTABLE, AND FAR BETTER THAN WHAT MANY OTHER PEOPLE WERE EXPERIENCING IN THE CITIES AND EVEN IN OTHER PARTS OF THE COUNTRY, BECAUSE AS I HAVE ALREADY MENTIONED, THE BIG DEPRESSION WAS IN FULL SWING.

THE COTTAGE DID HAVE ELECTRIC LIGHT WHEN WE FIRST ARRIVED. IT WAS NOT 240V A.C. BUT 32 V D.C., SUPPLIED FROM A BATTERY LOCATED IN AN OUTBUILDING NEAR THE HOMESTEAD. THE BATTERY WAS CHARGED BY A PETROL DRIVEN, HANDLE-STARTED, SINGLE-CYLINDER, LISTER ENGINE, DRIVING SOME SORT OF A GENERATOR. THIS LUXURY DID NOT LAST TERRIBLY LONG. APPARENTLY MANAGEMENT OF THE COMPANY HAD A SET OF PRIORITIES WHICH FAVOURED ONE OF ITS MAIN STATIONS, "WAMBROOK" (NEAR COOMA), BECAUSE THE PULLED THE LIGHTING PLANT OUT OF "CURRANGO" AND RE-INTALLED IN AT "WAMBROOK" SOME TIME IN THE VERY EARLY THIRTIES.

I HAVE VERY LITTLE RECOLLECTION OF THE DAYS (AND NIGHTS) OF ELECTRIC LIGHTS, OTHER THAN THAT THERE WERE CORD-OPERATED SWITCHES, FIXED TO THE CEILING.

KEROSENE WAS PURCHASED BY THE FOUR-GALLON TIN, AND PUMPED OUT OF THE CONTAINER INTO WHATEVER APPLIANCE, BY MEANS OF A VERY INEFFICIENT METAL PUMP WITH A CLAY-MARBLE FOOT VALVE. THE KEROSENE WAS ALSO USED FOR CLEANING, STERILISING MINOR WOUNDS, STARTING THE FIRE WHEN WOOD WAS WET AND KINDLING SHORT, TREATING COUGHS BY PLACING A FEW DROPS ON A TEASPOONFULL OF SUGAR AND HOLDING IN THE MOUTH FOR A FEW MINUTES BEFORE SWALLOWING, ADDING TO THE DOG'S BATHWATER TO KILL FLEAS, PLUS A HOST OF OTHER NON-RELATED THINGS, FAR TOO NUMEROUS TO LIST HERE.

THE MAIL SERVICE TO "CURRANGO", AS IT WAS IN THOSE DAYS IS WORTH A MENTION. IT ALL CAME VIA TUMUT, ABOUT 60 ROAD-MILES AWAY. IT WAS CARRIED FROM TUMUT BY A MAIL-CONTRACTOR (USUALLY TOM DUNN) IN A MOTOR VEHICLE TO A LONELY HOTEL AT RULES POINT. THE HOTEL, AND ITS ASSOCIATED BUILDINGS FORMED RULES POINT. THERE WAS NOTHING ELSE THERE. IT WAS THEN OWNED, OR AT LEAST OPERATED BY, A KINDLY ELDERLY LADY CALLED ZILLA COOK. MORE ABOUT HER LATER.

THE MAIL WAS BROUGHT TWICE PER WEEK FROM TUMUT, SORTED AT RULES POINT, AND THEN PUT IN A PRIVATE LEATHER MAIL-BAG FOR "CURRANGO" STATION. IT WAS THEN CARRIED THE REMAINING TWELVE MILES TO "CURRANGO" ON HORSE-BACK, BY ANOTHER CONTRACTOR CALLED PERCY RUSSEL. DAD HAD A NICK-NAME FOR HIM, "PERCY PERSNOOKISS" OR "SNOOKISS" FOR SHORT. I DO NOT KNOW THE ORIGIN OF THAT NAME. "SNOOKISS" DID THE MAIL-RUN TO "CURRANGO" ONCE PER WEEK (SATURDAYS USUALLY), AND NATURALLY, MAIL-DAY WAS ONE OF THE MOST LOOKED-FORWARD-TO DAYS OF THE WEEK. I WAS ALWAYS MOST ANXIOUS TO GET MY WEEKLY COPY OF "CRACKERS" COMIC. IT WAS AN ENGLISH COMIC, SPORTING A VARIETY OF PICTURE STORIES, WORD-STORIES AND JOKES. I FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT THIS COMIC WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR MOST OF MY EARLY BELIEFS THAT ENGLAND WAS THE ONLY COUNTRY IN THE WORLD, BESIDES AUSTRALIA, WHICH HAD CIVILISED PEOPLE.

ANYWAY, "CRACKERS" CAME EVERY WEEK. WELL ALMOST EVERY WEEK. IT WAS ONLY ON THOSE ODD OCCASIONS WHEN THE NEWSAGENT IN TUMUT MISSED POSTING IT, OR HEAVY SNOW PREVENTED "SNOOKISS" FROM MAKING THE TRIP, THAT I MISSED OUT. IT WAS VERY DISAPPOINTING ON THOSE MAIL-DAYS, BUT I ALWAYS GOT A DOUBLE ISSUE IN THE FOLLOWING WEEK, WHICH SEEMED TO MAKE UP FOR IT.

WAITING FOR THE MAIL ON MAIL-DAY WAS AN EXCITING EXPERIENCE. THE ROAD (MORE OF A TRACK REALLY) FROM RULES POINT TO OUR STATION WANDERED THROUGH THE HILLS, BUT EMERGED FROM THE TIMBER ONTO THE FROST-PLAIN ("CURRANGO" PLAIN) ABOUT 5 MILES FROM OUR HOME. IT WAS

POSSIBLE TO SEE, WITH THE NAKED EYE, A HORSEMAN AS A SMALL MOVING SPECK, AS HE CLEARED THE TIMBER AND BEGAN HIS LONG TREK ACROSS THE PLAIN, PROVIDED THAT ONE HAD AN ELEVATED VANTAGE POINT OF COURSE.

ON MAIL-DAYS I WOULD COMMENCE MY VIGIL ON THE TOP OF A SMALL RISE AT THE REAR OF OUR HOUSE, AND WATCH FOR PERCY'S APPEARANCE. HE WAS USUALLY VERY REGULAR, BUT I SEEMED TO FEEL THAT IF I STARTED WATCHING FOR HIM, HE MAY APPEAR QUICKER, AND THUS I WOULD GET MY HANDS ON THOSE PRECIOUS COMICS SOONER.

PERCY WAS NOT THE ONLY MAILMAN. DURING HIS ABSENCE ON HOLIDAYS OR OTHER COMMITMENTS, (HE ALSO WORKED AS A SORT OF GROOM AT THE HOTEL) AN OLD IDENTITY NAMED JACK HANCOCK, (KNOWN AS SOLDIER JACK) WOULD FILL IN FOR PERCY.

THE COMICS DID NOT SEEM AS GOOD WHEN JACK BROUGHT THE MAIL. I WAS A BIT SCARED OF HIM. HE HAD UNFORTUNATELY BEEN WOUNDED IN WORLD WAR I, AND AS A RESULT HAD A STEEL PLATE IN HIS HEAD. HE MUST HAVE ALSO SUFFERED BRAIN DAMAGE, BECAUSE HE HAD A SHUFFLING GAIT, A PERCULIAR STARE IN HIS EYES, AND USED TO WALK IN A RATHER WIDE ARC INSTEAD OF A STRAIGHT LINE WHEN HE MADE HIS WAY TOWARDS ANY OBJECTIVE. HE WAS ALSO KNOWN FOR THROWING FITS, ALTHOUGH I NEVER EVER SAW ONE OF THESE THANK GOODNESS.

GOING BACK TO ZILLA COOK. ZILLA WAS A VERY LARGE WOMAN WITH A VERY PROMINENT BOSOM. HER AGE THEN WOULD HAVE BEEN AROUND 60. SHE WAS ALWAYS VERY FRIENDLY AND HOSPITABLE, BUT IN MY MEMORY SHE LACKED PERSONAL APPEAL. SHE ALWAYS WORE LONG DRESSES WHICH REACHED THE GROUND. IT COULD WELL HAVE ALWAYS BEEN THE SAME DRESS AS I DO NOT RECALL EVER SEEING HER IN ANYTHING ELSE DURING THE MANY VISITS WE MADE TO THE HOTEL. THE DRESS WAS ALWAYS BLACK AND SHINY AND ONE COULD ALWAYS SEE THE TOES OF HER BLACK BOOTS PROTRUDING FROM BENEATH THE DRESS AS SHE WALKED ABOUT.

IN HER FAVOURITE POSITION, OF RELAXATION, SHE WOULD ALWAYS CLAPS HER HANDS TOGETHER BENEATH HER LOW SLUNG BOSOM, LIFT THE FLESHY MASS UPWARDS, AND THEN CONTENTEDLY TWIRL HER THUMBS, ONE OVER THE OTHER IN REPETITIVE CIRCLES WHILE SHE TALKED. DURING PERIODS OF LISTENING TO ANOTHER PERSON TALKING, SHE WOULD REGULARLY MUTTER "OH FANCY!" AS A FORM OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT WITH INTEREST, AND STILL TWIRL HER THUMBS.

ALTHOUGH I DID NOT KNOW THE REASON FOR IT AT THE TIME, ZILLA ALWAYS SEEMS TO BE ACCOMPANIED BY A DISAGREEABLE SMELL. I REMEMBER COMPLAINING TO MY MOTHER ABOUT IT AT TIMES BUT I WAS ALWAYS "SHOOSHED". EVENTUALLY I SOMEHOW FOUND OUT THAT ZILLA SUFFERED FROM SOME URINARY MALFUNCTION, AND IT WAS A DRY PIDDLEY ODOUR WHICH PERMEATED HER CLOTHES AND TO A LESSER EXTENT, THE ENTIRE HOTEL.

ZILLA HAD AN ELDER SISTER, MRS. BRUCE WHO ALSO LIVED AT THE HOTEL. I THINK MRS. BRUCE ASSISTED IN THE KITCHEN WITH THE COOKING. SHE WAS A LITTLE FRAIL WOMAN WHO DRESSED THE SAME AS HER SISTER, BUT FROM MEMORY HAD NO DISTINCTIVE SMELLS. THE FOOD WHICH WAS PROVIDED FOR THE HOTEL GUESTS WAS REAL HOME-STYLE CUISINE. THEY ALWAYS SERVED A THREE-COURSE MEAL, AND THE SOUP WAS ALWAYS THE SAME. UNCHARITABLE PATRONS REFERRED TO IT AS "COOKIES DISH-CLOTH SOUP" IN ALLUSION TO ITS FLAVOUR WHICH REALLY DID RESEMBLE WHAT ONE WOULD IMAGINE BOILED MOULDY DISH-CLOTHS TO TASTE LIKE. HOWEVER IT WAS THE BEST TUCKER WITHIN A RADIUS OF AT LEAST 18 MILES. THE PUB AT KIANDRA WAS ABOUT 19 MILES AWAY.

WE OFTEN WENT TO RULES POINT. FREQUENTLY WE STAYED OVER-NIGHT. APART FROM WHEN ATTENDING THE THE ANNUAL RULES POINT SPORTS, A PRIMARILY HORSE DOMINATED FUNCTION, WE ALSO USED TO STOP-OVER AT THE HOTEL ON THE FEW OCCASIONS WE MADE THE MARATHON JOURNEY TO TUMUT.

OUR TRANSPORT FROM "CURRANGO" WAS USUALLY BY HORSE AND SULKY, ALTHOUGH THERE WERE SOME OCCASIONS WHEN WE ABLE TO TRAVEL IN A MOTOR-CAR OWNED BY EITHER UNCLE TED, OR OTHER STATION VISITORS OR EMPLOYEES. THE ANNUAL SPORTS DAY WAS REALLY BIG STUFF TO THE RESIDENTS OF THE DISTRICT. IT EVEN ATTRACTED PEOPLE FROM AS FAR AWAY AS TUMUT. THE NIGHT WAS ALWAYS DEVOTED TO A DANCE IN A SHED (OR IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN A HALL) WITH MUSIC PROVIDED BY ACCORDEONS, CONCERTINAS, VIOLINS AND I THINK THERE WAS AN OUT-OF-TUNE PIANO IN THE ROOM. PLENTY OF BOOZE DURING THE DAY USUALLY PRECIPITATED A BOUT OF FISTICUFFS DURING THE DANCE, BUT THAT WAS ABOUT AS VIOLENT AS THINGS EVER BECAME.

SOME OF THE PEOPLE WHO REGULARLY ATTENDED THE SPORTS WERE COLOURFUL IDENTITIES FROM THE MONARO DISTRICT. SOME OF THEM ARE WORTHY OF INCLUSION IN THIS SO-CALLED HISTORY.

JACK SPRING (ALTHOUGH I BELIEVE HIS TRUE NAME WAS DAVE COLLISON) WAS PERHAPS ONE OF THE BEST-KNOWN IDENTITIES AT THE TIME. HE WAS A BATCHELOR (I THINK) WHO SORT OF APPEARED OUT OF NOWHERE WHEN YOU LEAST EXPECTED HIM. HE DID ANY TYPE OF WORK THAT WAS OFFERING, BUT IN MY RECOLLECTION HE ALWAYS SEEMD TO BE FREE, TALKING TO PEOPLE, TELLING ANECDOTES, (MOSTLY GHOST STORIES) AND THEN DISAPPEARING FOR MONTHS ON END. HE DID DO SOME RABBIT TRAPPING AND FOX AND KANGAROO HUNTING. HE MADE SOME MONEY FROM THE SALE OF THEIR PELTS.

HIS GHOST STORIES, AND SNAKE STORIES WERE HORRIFIC. THEY WERE ALL FROM FIRST HAND EXPERIENCE, AND INVOLVED SOME OF THE MOST BIZARRE

CIRCUMSTANCES THAT I FREQUENTLY HAD BAD DREAMS FOR MANY NIGHTS AFTER BEING IN HIS AUDIENCE. MOST OF HIS GHOST STORIES INVOLVED THE APPARITION BLOWING ITS COLD WHISTLING BREATH ON THE BACK OF HIS NECK, WHILE ITS CLAMMY HANDS RESTED ON HIS SHOULDERS. USUALLY THIS HAPPENED WHEN HE WAS OCCUPIED SETTING A TRAP WHILST KNEELING DOWN BY A KEROSENE LANTERN LIGHT, MILES OUT IN THE SWAMPS AROUND "CURRANGO" CREEK. IN SOME CASES, THE APPARITION HAD ACTUALLY PICKED UP HIS LANTERN AND RAN AWAY WITH IT, LEAVING HIM IN THE DARK TO FUMBLE HIS WAY BACK TO HIS TENT, ONLY TO FIND THAT THE "GHOST" HAD GOT BACK TO THE TENT FIRST AND LEFT HIS LANTERN THERE FOR HIM, STILL ALIGHT. REAL SPOOKY STUFF FOR A FELLOW OF MY AGE, AND NO DOUBT COMPLETE LIES FABRICATED ON THE SPUR OF THE MOMENT.

HIS SNAKE STORIES ALSO WERE SIMILAR AND THEY MOSTLY INVOLVED LARGE TIGER SNAKES, IN HIS CAMP BED, BUT SOMEHOW HE WAS NEVER BITTEN.

BILL STANFIELD WAS A LITTLE STUMPY FELLOW, WHO LIKE JACK SPRING, WOULD APPEAR REGULARLY WITHOUT WARNING, AND TAKE UP RESIDENCE IN A SMALL HUT SOME DISTANCE FROM THE MAIN SHEARER'S HUT. IT WAS OF COURSE ALWAYS REFERRED TO AS BILL STANFIELD'S HUT, EVEN THOUGH HE HAD NO OWNERSHIP RIGHTS OF IT. HIS OCCUPATION WAS SIMILAR TO THAT OF MOST OF THE OTHER ITINERANTS WHO CAME TO THE STATION. THAT IS HE LIVED OFF THE LAND (RABBIT TRAPPING, OR THE FUR TRADE) DURING THE SUITABLE SEASON, BUT I THINK HE DREW THE DOLE DURING THE WINTER BECAUSE HE WAS ONE OF THE MANY WHO USE TO WEAR THE CLASSIC "DOLEY" CLOTHES.

BILL WAS A VERY GOOD COOK, AND A VERY KIND AND THOUGHTFUL MAN INTO THE BARGAIN. ONCE WHEN MY MOTHER WAS ILL IN BED WITH EITHER A COLD OR A SPRAINED ANKLE, HE MADE A SPECIAL DISH FROM A HARE HE HAD CAUGHT. AFTER PREPARING IT IN HIS OWN SPECIAL WAY IN A BILLY-CAN HE BROUGHT IT TO OUR HOUSE FOR OUR DINNER. IT WAS A MOST DELICIOUS BIT OF HOME-COOKED GAME I HAD EVER EATEN. BILL WAS OF DISTANT CHINESE DESCENT AND HAD NO DOUBT ACQUIRED SOME OF HIS ANCESTOR'S COOKING ABILITIES. WE RAVED OVER HIS SPECIALITY FOR MANY WEEKS. IT HAD BEEN PREPARED IN A LAYER CONFIGURATION IN THE BILLY-CAN. THE BOTTOM OF THE CAN HAD A LAYER OF CHOPPED VEGETABLES UPON WHICH WAS PLACED A LAYER OF THE HARE'S FLESH, UPON WHICH WAS PLACED A FURTHER LAYER OF CHOPPED VEGETABLES. THIS CONTINUED UNTIL THE BILLY WAS FULL. THEN THE LID WAS JAMMED ON AND THE WHOLE THING WAS THEN SIMMERED SLOWLY OVER HIS OPEN-FIRE, WITH HIS SPECIAL SAUCES ADDED AT CRITICAL TIMES THROUGHOUT THE COOKING PROCESS.

ANOTHER IDENTITY WAS TED CULGAN. HE WAS ANOTHER ELDERLY ITINERANT WHO CAME AND WENT AS THE WORK AVAILABILITY FLOWED AND EBBED. HE DID A BIT OF DROVING, RABBITING, OR ANY WORK WHICH HAPPENED TO BE OFFERING. TED'S ONLY OUTSTANDING ATTRIBUTE WAS HIS ABILITY TO SKITE. HE FANCIED HIMSELF AS A STRONG MAN, AND ALTHOUGH I NEVER SAW

ANY PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATION OF HIS STRENGTH, I MANY TIMES HEARD HIM BOASTING OF HIS TRIUMPHS OVER WEAKER PEOPLE. ONE WAS HOW HE WAS BEING GOADED BY A YOUNGER MAN WHO WAS SHOWING OFF BY LIFTING A LARGE COIL OF FENCING IN EACH HAND DURING THE LOADING OF A BULLOCK WAGGON. TED NOT WISHING TO MAKE A BIG ISSUE OF IT WAS QUIETLY LIFTING TWO SIMILAR COILS IN EACH HAND. HE CLAIMS HE COULD HAVE DONE THREE IN EACH HAND, HAD THE NEED AROSE !

BULLOCK WAGGONS WERE OFTEN USED FOR BRINGING THE SUPPLIES TO THE STATION. THE WINTER STORES FROM TUMUT AND LARGE CONSIGNMENTS OF BUILDING MATERIALS WERE THE MAIN CARGO FOR THIS MODE OF TRANSPORT.

ONE OF THE TEAM DRIVERS WAS A PART CHINESE GENT CALLED TOMMY YAN. HE WAS ONE OF A FAMILY WHO LIVED AT KIANDRA, FROM WHERE HE CONDUCTED HIS BUSINESS. WHILST HE MAY HAVE POSSESSED THE CLASSICAL VOCABULARY OF THE "BULLOCKIE" I CANNOT RECALL HIM EVER USING IT. ONE THING HE WAS PARTICULARLY GOOD AT WAS USING HIS BULLOCK WHIP. DURING THE TREK ACROSS CURRANGO PLAIN, HIS TEAM WOULD FLUSH QUAIL FROM THE LONG GRASS AS THEY HAULED THEIR LOAD. WITH A FLICK OF HIS WHIP HE COULD BRING DOWN THESE SMALL BIRDS FROM THEIR FLIGHT. HE ATE THEM OF COURSE. IT WAS NOT JUST FOR SPORT THAT HE DID IT.

THIS HISTORY WOULD NOT BE COMPLETE WITHOUT MENTION BEING MADE OF MICK CHALKER. MICK WAS A NOMADIC DINGO-TRAPPER, OR "DOG-MAN" AS THEY WERE OFTEN CALLED IN THOSE DAYS. HE MAY HAVE HAD ANOTHER SOURCE OF INCOME, BUT I WAS ONLY EVER AWARE OF HIM MAKING A LIVING FROM THE BOUNTY PAID FOR A DEAD DINGO. HE OFTEN CAME TO THE STATION AND PUT UP FOR A FEW NIGHTS, OR EVEN WEEKS, IN THE SHEARER'S HUT.

HE TRAVELLED ON HORSE-BACK, WITH A PACK-HORSE BY HIS SIDE WHICH CARRIED HIS "TOOLS" OF TRADE, HIS SWAG, AND HIS TENT. HIS TOOLS OF TRADE WERE HIS DINGO TRAPS. LARGE JAWED METAL MONSTERS THEY WERE TOO, WITH TEETH FORMED BY STEEL SPIKES, WELDED TO THE JAWS TO ENSURE THAT ANY POOR DINGO, UNLUCKY ENOUGH TO BE TRAPPED, HAD NO CHANCE OF PULLING HIS FOOT FROM THE JAWS. IF EVER THERE WAS A CASE FOR ATTENTION BY THE R.S.P.C.A. HERE WAS A READY MADE ONE WHICH THEY MUST SURELY WIN. ANYWAY, MICK WOULD TURN UP WITH HIS RIG AND SET UP CAMP IN THE HUT FOR A FEW NIGHTS, WHILE HE "WORKED OVER" THE DISTRICT FOR DINGOES.

TO ATTRACT DINGOES TO HIS BURIED TRAPS, MICK USED SOME RATHER UNIQUE METHODS, AND MATERIALS. ONE OF HIS POPULAR DECOYS WAS DOMESTIC DOG DROPPINGS. HE WOULD GATHER NICE FRESH STOOLS FROM AROUND THE DOG KENNELS, POP THEM IN A JUTE SUGAR-BAG AND CARRY THEM FOR MILES TO THE SITES OF HIS TRAPS. HERE HE WOULD PLACE THEM AT STRATEGIC POINTS AROUND THE "SET", AND ANY DINGO WHICH CAME SNIFFING AROUND, STOOD A PRETTY GOOD CHANCE OF PUTTING HIS FOOT ON THE HAIR-TRIGGERED PLATE OF THE BURIED TRAP..... CRASH!

ANOTHER MOST EFFECTIVE DECOY WAS IN-SEASON BITCH URINE. THERE WAS A SPECIAL CAGE ON THE STATION WHICH HAD BEEN CONSTRUCTED SPECIALLY FOR CATCHING THIS SPECIAL FLUID. IT WAS SOMETHING LIKE A BIRD-CAGE, CROSSED WITH A DOG-KENNEL, WHICH HAD A TIN FLOOR WITH SPECIAL PLUMBING DRAINS. ANY ESTRUOUS BITCH WHO HAPPENED ALONG COULD GET SHUT UP IN THIS FOR A COUPLE OF DAYS, AND HER URINE CAUGHT IN A BOTTLE PLACED AT THE FOCAL POINT OF ALL THE DRAINS. MICK OFTEN USED THIS FACILITY TO REPLENISH HIS SUPPLY WHICH WAS CARRIED IN A BOTTLE, IN A SLING ON EITHER HIS PACK-HORSE, OR HIS MOUNT. THIS DELIGHTFUL FLUID WAS THEN SPRINKLED, SPARINGLY AND OF COURSE, JUDICIOUSLY AROUND THE TRAP SITES, AGAIN TO ATTRACT THE POOR OLD DINGO.

I BELIEVE HE WAS A MOST SUCCESSFUL "DOG-MAN" AND WAS VERY WELL KNOWN IN THE MONARO HIGHLANDS. IT MUST SURELY GO WITHOUT SAYING, THAT THE DECOY MATERIAL WHICH MICK CARRIED, ENHANCED HIS INDIVIDUALITY. DOWNWIND OF MICK WAS NOT THE BEST PLACE TO BE AT ANY TIME LEAST OF ALL ON A WARM HUMID DAY. TO WATCH MICK KNEADING A DAMPER FOR HIS EVENING MEAL OR WITNESS HIM DEVOURING A CAN OF CORNED BEEF, WAS AN EXPERIENCE EASILY REMEMBERED. HIS HABITS WITH SOAP AND WATER WERE NOT AS WELL DEVELOPED AS OTHER PEOPLE I KNEW, AND THE FACT THAT HE DID NOT USE TONGS TO EXTRACT THE DOG STOOLS FROM THE BAG AND DID USE HIS HANDS TO WIPE THE DRIBBLES FROM THE NECK OF THE URINE BOTTLE, ALL TENDED TO COOL ANY DESIRE TO SEEK A BIGHT OF HIS BULLY-BEEF OR HOME-MADE DAMPER.

DAD WAS ACTUALLY PAID FOR HIS WORK LOOKING AFTER THE STOCK DURING THE "ADJUSTMENT" PERIOD. HE ALSO GAINED SOME INCOME ACTING AS GUIDE FOR VISITING DOCTORS (MOSTLY FROM MACQUARIE ST) WHO CAME TO "CURRANGO" TO FISH FOR TROUT DURING THE OPEN SEASON. HE USED TO TAKE THEM OUT IN FISHING PARTIES ON HORSEBACK, TO FISH IN THE SMALL STREAMS WHICH FED "CURRANGO" CREEK AND THE MURRUMBIDGEE RIVER.

THE DOCTORS WERE PROVIDED WITH LODGINGS AND MEALS AT THE STATION HOMESTEAD WHICH WAS USUALLY OCCUPIED AT THIS TIME OF THE YEAR BY MY UNCLE TED AND AUNT NELL BRASSIL. THEY ALSO EMPLOYED A SMALL SERVICE STAFF; A COOK, A MAID, AND A HOUSE-BOY OR TWO TO ASSIST IN LOOKING AFTER THE DOCTORS. IT WAS QUITE A TIME DURING THE FISHING SEASON WITH THE DOCTORS (AND OTHER VIP BUSINESSMEN) WHO MADE UP THE FISHING SEASON VISITORS.

SOME OF THE DOCTORS, WHOSE NAMES I REMEMBER, WERE DR. HOLMES-A'COURT, DR. LINDERMAN, & DR. MARTIN. THEY WERE REGULARS WHOM I GOT TO KNOW WELL, AND I REMEMBER THEM OCCASIONALLY GIVING ME THE ONCE OVER AS A SORT OF MEDICAL CHECK (A FREEBY) FOR THE "LITTLE BOY LIVING IN THE BUSH WHO HAD NEVER BEEN TO A DOCTOR BECAUSE HE DID NOT GET SICK". I THINK IT WAS MORE LIKELY THAT I WAS A LITTLE BOY WHO DID NOT GET SICK BECAUSE I HAD NEVER BEEN TO SEE A DOCTOR!

COLONEL HILMER-SMITH WAS ONE NAME WHICH STICKS PRETTY CLEARLY IN MY MIND. HE WAS A BUSINESS MAN, HOLDING DOWN A VERY SENIOR POSITION IN THE COMMONWEALTH BANK. IT WAS HIS WIFE WHO SENT ME A FOOTBALL JUMPER AFTER RETURNING TO HER HOME IN SYDNEY. IT SEEMS THAT I HAD SPECIFICALLY REQUESTED ONE OF THESE WHEN SHE ONCE ASKED ME WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE MOST OF ALL. IT WAS AN ORANGE AND BLACK STRIPED FOOTBALL JUMPER. IT SURE PLEASED THE EYE OF A THREE-YEAR-OLD. HEAVEN KNOWS WHY IT APEALED TO ME, BECAUSE I AM SURE THAT I HAD NEVER EVER SEEN A FOOTBALL GAME AT THIS TIME OF MY LIFE!

BEING THE ONLY CHILD IN THE AREA AT THAT TIME, I GUESS I WAS SOMEWHAT SPOILT BY BOTH THE VISITORS AND THE STAFF MEMBERS WHO WORKED ON THE STATION. I RECEIVED LOTS OF PRESENTS (SOME OF THEM RELATIVELY EXPENSIVE) THROUGHOUT THE YEARS. ONE OF THEM WAS A TRICYCLE WHICH I USED UNTIL I WAS 10 YEARS OLD. IT WAS GIVEN TO ME BY AN ELDERLY BOOK-KEEPER, MR. LISCOMBE. HE BROUGHT IT ALL THE WAY FROM SYDNEY BY TRAIN, AND MAIL-CAR, TO THE STATION. HE HAD A NICKNAME FOR ME..... SAMMY. I DO NOT KNOW THE ORIGIN OF IT.

THESE PRESENTS WERE MOST PROBABLY PROMPTED BY A FEELING OF SYMPATHY IN THOSE WHO PROVIDED THEM. ON THE FACE OF IT I GUESS I DID PRESENT SOMETHING OF A MISERABLE PICTURE OF A CHILD. HERE I WAS 60 MILES FROM CIVILISATION, NO CHILDREN WITH WHOM TO PLAY (OR FIGHT), ASSOCIATING WITH ADULTS ONLY, AND VERY LITTLE IN THE WAY OF TOYS OF THE TYPE TOWN OR CITY KIDS KNEW. LITTLE DID THEY KNOW THAT I WAS VERY HAPPY AND HAD NO YEARNINGS FOR THE GOODIES OF THIS WORLD THAT I HAD NEVER SEEN ANYWAY. ONE THING WHICH PROBABLY CLINCHED A DEAL AT ONE STAGE WAS A TOY WHICH DAD HAD MADE FOR ME.

I HAD A MUSICAL EAR, AND COULD SING SONGS MY PARENTS TAUGHT ME, ALONG WITH THOSE SONGS WHICH I HAD HEARD ON AN OLD 78 R.P.M. GRAMOPHONE WHICH AUNT NELL WOULD OCCASIONALLY PLAY AT THE MAIN HOMESTEAD. I WAS FASCINATED BY THIS MACHINE, OR REXONOLA AS IT WAS CALLED BY ITS MANUFACTURER. I APPARENTLY ASKED MY PARENTS IF I COULD HAVE ONE, BUT I GUESS THAT MONEY PREVENTED ANY PURCHASE AT THAT TIME. DAD DID THE NEXT BEST THING. HE MADE ME ONE.

IT WAS NOT A PROPER MACHINE OF COURSE, BUT A "MAKE-BELIEVE" ONE WHICH HE FASHIONED OUT OF A USED SHEEP DRENCH TIN, AND SOME BITS OF WOOD AND IRON. IT WAS A GOOD REPLICA OF A GRAMOPHONE, COMPLETE WITH A METAL DISC WHICH PASSED FOR A RECORD. (THIS WAS ACTUALLY THE THIN CIRCULAR TIN SEAL FROM A TOBACCO TIN, WITH A HOLE PUNCHED IN THE CENTRE). IT SAT ON A THING LIKE A WOODEN TURNTABLE, WHICH HAD A LARGE NAIL FOR A SPINDLE. THE DEVICE DID NOT MOVE IN ANY WAY, BUT IT HAD A CRANK HANDLE PROTRUDING FROM THE MAIN BODY, MADE OUT OF HEAVY GAUGE WIRE. IT WAS THIS HANDLE, WHICH BROUGHT THE THING CLOSE TO REALITY. I WOULD TURN THE HANDLE AND DO THE SINGING MYSELF. FAST TEMPO SONGS

DEMANDED A FASTER RATE OF HANDLE TURNING THAN DID A SLOW TEMPO SONG. THE WHOLE THING WAS A HIGHLY SATISFACTORY PROJECT. NOT ONLY DID IT GIVE ME LOTS OF FUN PERFORMING FOR THE VISITORS, BUT IT RESULTED IN A GROUP OF THEM DOBBING IN AND GIVING MY PARENTS A SUM OF MONEY WITH WHICH TO BUY ME MY OWN REAL TRUE LIFE "REXONOLA".

AS IT TURNED OUT, IT WAS NOT A "REXONOLA" WHICH I RECEIVED ON OUR NEXT TRIP TO TUMUT, BUT A "PERFECTOPORT". A FINE PORTABLE UNIT, IN A POLISHED WOODEN BOX. WE ALSO GOT SOME RECORDS, OF SONGS THAT I HAD NEVER HEARD BEFORE. IT OPENED UP A NEW WORLD OF MUSICAL CULTURE FOR ME. THE VOICES OF MAURICE CHEVALIER SINGING "SWEET LOUISE", AND SOME OTHER ARTIST WHOSE NAME I FORGET, SINGING A SONG WHICH HAD WORDS LIKE "I'M TELLING THE BIRDS, TELLING THE BEES, TELLING THE FLOWERS, TELLING THE TREES, THAT I LOVE YOU", WITH NO OTHER EFFORT ON MY PART BUT TO WIND IT UP OCCASIONALLY, WAS REAL BIG TIME.

AUNT NELL ACTUALLY GAVE ME HER COPIES OF "THERE 'AINT NO SENSE, SITTING ON A FENCE", AND "MOONLIGHT AND ROSES", BECAUSE THEY WERE THE TWO MAIN FEATURE SONGS WHICH I HAD PREVIOUSLY "PLAYED" ON MY HOME-MADE "REXONOLA".

RADIO, OR WIRELESS AS IT WAS CALLED IN THOSE DAYS, DID NOT PLAY A VERY GREAT PART IN OUR LIVES AT "CURRANGO". AUNT NELL HAD SOME TYPE OF A RECEIVER AT THE HOMESTEAD. IT WAS CAPABLE OF DRIVING A LOUDSPEAKER IF SIGNALS WERE STRONG, BUT USUALLY THE LISTENER WAS CONFINED TO USING "EAR-PHONES". (WE CALL THEM HEAD-PHONES NOW).

FOR SOME REASON, I ALWAYS CALLED THIS WIRELESS "BIG GINGER". I DON'T KNOW THE REASON, BUT THE NAME STUCK. I WAS ALWAYS A BIT SCARED OF THIS SET, AS I FELT UNDER SOME SORT OF A THREAT IF THE "EAR-PHONES" WERE CLAMPED ON MY HEAD. I PREFERRED TO LISTEN ON THE SPEAKER, WHICH WAS MOUNTED IN THE CLASSICAL CIRCULAR HOUSING WITH A FAN PATTERNED ACCOUSTICAL APERTURE AND GRILLE.

ONE COMMON EXPRESSION OF THAT ERA WHICH STILL REMAINS VERY CLEARLY IN MY MIND IS "WIRELESS TIME". CLOCKS AND WATCHES WERE USUALLY SET BY GUESS IF NO WIRELESS WAS AVAILABLE, BUT OFTEN WHEN SOMEBODY FROM A NEIGHBOURING DISTRICT RODE IN TO THE STATION AND BROUGHT "WIRELESS TIME" ON THEIR TIME PIECE, THEN EVERYBODY SET THEIR CLOCKS AND WATCHES TO THE FRESHLY ARRIVED "WIRELESS TIME". THIS SETTING HAD TO CARRY US THROUGH UNTIL THE NEXT ARRIVAL CAME WITH ACCURATE TIME.

THERE WERE SOME BREAKS IN MY SEGREGATION FROM OTHER KIDS BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE PHILLIPS FAMILY. THEY WERE A FAMILY OF FIVE. JIM, THE HUSBAND, VERA, THE WIFE, AND THREE CHILDREN, BILL, ROY AND MILLY. THE HUSBAND WAS A RABBITER, WHO WOULD MOVE AROUND THAT PART OF THE STATE MAKING A LIVING BY CATCHING RABBITS AND SELLING THEIR

SKINS. IT WAS NOT A LUCRATIVE LIVING, BUT AT LEAST HE OWNED A CAR WHICH WAS NOT BAD FOR THAT PERIOD. THEY WOULD OCCUPY THE SHEARER'S HUT FOR THE DURATION OF THEIR STAY (I PRESUME THEY GOT IT RENT FREE) IN THE NON-SHEARING PERIOD. THE PHILLIPS FAMILY WAS NOT WELL-KNOWN FOR PERSONAL HYGIENE.

I RECALL PLAYING WITH THE THREE PHILLIPS CHILDREN ONE DAY AND WE WENT INTO ONE OF THE PRESUMABLY UNOCCUPIED ROOMS. THE FLOOR WAS DAMP WITH URINE, AND LUMPS OF HUMAN FECAL MATTER WERE DOTTED AROUND THE ROOM. IT WAS CLEAR, EVEN TO MY THEN-INNOCENT MIND, THAT THE COLD WALK TO THE OUTSIDE DUNNY (PIT-TYPE), DURING THE CHILLY MOUNTAIN NIGHTS HAD BEEN AVOIDED BY THE FAMILY, BY SIMPLY DOING THEIR BUSINESS IN THE ROOM NEXT ALONG THE VERANDAH FROM THEIR BEDROOM.

NEEDLESS TO SAY, I TOLD MY PARENTS OF MY DISCOVERY, AND THEY WERE INCLINED TO DISBELIEVE ME, AND ASKED ME TO EXPLAIN HOW I KNEW WHAT IT WAS THAT WAS ON THE FLOOR. I WAS ABLE TO TRUTHFULLY REPORT THAT I HAD PLACED BY BARE FOOT IN ONE OF THE PUDDLES, AND WAS TOLD BY ROY, WHO HAD A SLIGHT IMPEDIMENT IN HIS SPEECH, THAT I WAS "STANDING IN MUMMY'S FEE." HE ALWAYS PRONOUNCED PEES AS EFFS !

ONE EXPERIENCE WHICH I STILL VIVIDLY REMEMBER, RELATES TO AN INCIDENT IN WHICH MY MOTHER THOUGHT I HAD BEEN BITTEN BY A SNAKE. SNAKES WERE PRETTY PREVALENT ON "CURRANGO", AND ONE PARTICULAR SPECIES, KNOWN LOCALLY AS THE COPPERHEAD (BECAUSE OF AN APPARENT COPPER COLOUR WHICH WAS VISIBLE UNDER THE SCALES OF THEIR HEADS) SEEMED TO BE THE MOST COMMON, ALONG WITH THE BROWNS AND BLACKS.

I HAD BEEN PLAYING ON MY TRICYCLE UP AT A SMALL WATER COURSE WHICH FED OUR COTTAGE "RESERVOIR" OF DOMESTIC WATER. SOME BEASTIE CRAWLING IN THE GRASS STUNG ME ON THE FINGER WHEN I HAPPEND TO FALL OFF THE TRICYCLE. I RACED OFF HOME YELLING AND SCREAMING THAT SOMETHING HAD BITTEN ME, AND OF COURSE MUM HAD TO ASSUME THE WORST... IT COULD HAVE BEEN A SNAKE!

AT THE TIME I ARRIVED HOME, TOM TAYLOR WAS PAYING A VISIT, AND DRINKING A CUP OF TEA IN THE DINING ROOM. HE IMMEDIATELY RACED TO THE SCENE OF THE CRIME, BUT COULD FIND NO SIGN OF ANY SNAKE. HE RETURNED TO THE HOUSE TO SEE IF HE COULD DO ANYTHING, AND BY THIS TIME I HAD STARTED TO GET ALL BLOTCHY WITH LARGE HIVES ALL OVER MY BODY, MY EYES WERE PUFFING UP, AND MY THROAT WAS BECOMING CONSTRICTED WITH THE HIVES. THE PANIC WAS ON. DAD WAS OUT WORKING ON THE PADDOCK SOMEWHERE, AND MY DESTINY WAS IN THE HANDS OF MUM & TOM.

APPARENTLY TOM HAD HEARD SOMEWHERE ALONG THE LINE THAT NICOTINE RUBBED INTO SITE OF A SNAKE-BITE WAS BETTER THAN NOTHING. HE SUGGESTED TO MUM, AND SHE AGREED THAT HE GIVE IT A GO. HE OUT WITH HIS TRUSTY POCKET-KNIFE AND LANCED THE AREA OF THE BITE ON MY FINGER.

IT HAD ONLY ONE PUNCTURE MARK INSTEAD OF THE TWO WHICH ONE WOULD EXPECT FROM A SNAKE..... BUT IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN AN ELDERLY SNAKE WHO HAD LOST A FANG!. THIS PROCEDURE WAS ACCOMPANIED BY MY YELLING AND SCREAMING, WHICH BY THIS TIME HAD BECOME A BIT MUFFLED AND DISTORTED DUE TO THE BLOCKAGE IN MY THROAT CAUSD BY THE HIVES. TOM THEN UNSCREWED HIS TWO SECTION CIGARETTE HOLDER, REMOVED SOME OF THE ACCUMULATED TAR/NICOTINE FROM ITS INNARDS, AND INSERTED THIS VEGEMITE-LIKE SUBSTANCE INTO THE OPEN WOUND ON MY FINGER.

THE FACT THAT I AM TELLING THE STORY, IS LIVING TESTIMONY TO TOM TAYLOR'S LIFE-SAVING ATTEMPT IN RATHER TIGHT CIRCUMSTANCES. OR IT COULD WELL BE JUST LUCK THAT WHAT HAD ACTUALLY BITTEN ME WAS A NASTY LITTLE CREATURE WHO INHABITED THE MONARO HIGHLANDS, CALLED LOCALLY A "JUMPER-ANT". THEY ARE AGRESSIVE LITTLE BLIGHTERS, ABOUT TEN TO TWELVE MILLIMETERS LONG, WITH A BLACK BODY AND LEGS, SPORTING TWO BRIGHT ORANGE ANTENNAE, AND CARRYING A POTENT STING IN THEIR ABDOMEN. ALTHOUGH WE DID NOT KNOW IT AT THE TIME, I HAPPENED TO BE VIOLENTLY ALLERGIC TO THEIR VENOM. IT WAS NOT UNTIL LATER, AND THERE WERE MANY LATER INSTANCES OF ME GETTING STUNG BY THESE ROTTERS, THAT WE REALISED WHAT IT WAS THAT HAD NOBBLED ME ON THAT DAY. THE SYMPTOMS WERE ALWAYS IDENTICAL.... AND TO ME, VERY DISTRESSING. TOM'S "CURE" PROBABLY DID NOT FIX ME, BUT IT CERTAINLY HAD NO SIDE EFFECTS. THE HIVES AND SWELLINGS ABATED AFTER A FEW HOURS, AND BY THE TIME DAD ARRIVED HOME, THE CRISIS WAS ALL OVER. I STILL HAVE A LITTLE SCAR TO REMIND ME OF THAT SCARY DAY OF 54 YEARS AGO.

COMMUNICATION WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD WAS MOSTLY AVAILABLE BY PARTY LINE TELEPHONE. THERE WAS A LINE TO THE ADAMINABY EXCHANGE AND ANOTHER TO YARRANGOBILLY. ALTHOUGH BOTH OF THESE PLACES WERE ONLY EIGHTEEN MILES AWAY (IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS OF COURSE) IT SEEMED TO ME THAT THEY COULD HAVE WELL BEEN IN ANOTHER PART OF THE GALAXY.

THE PARTY-LINE SYSTEM WAS PRETTY MUCH UNIVERSAL FOR THE COUNTRY AREAS. SEVERAL SUBSCRIBERS (IN SOME CASES, WELL OVER THE DOZEN) HAD THEIR TELEPHONES ALL CONNECTED TO A SINGLE WIRE LINE WHICH SNAKED OUT THROUGH THE BUSH, OR SPURRED OFF TO OUT OF THE WAY HOMESTEADS.

A RINGING CODE, BASED UPON THE INTERNATIONAL MORSE CODE WAS USED TO ATTRACT THE ATTENTION OF THE WANTED SUBSCRIBER. "CURRANGO'S" NUMBER ON ONE OF THE LINES WAS 7N. THIS MEANT THAT IT WAS THE 7TH LINE RUNNING OUT OF THAT PARTICULAR EXCHANGE, AND THE "N" MEANT "CURRANGO" IN PARTICULAR. A LONG AND A SHORT RING, SENT BY WINDING A MAGNETO HANDLE ON THE SIDE OF THE PHONE GENERATED THE NECESSARY VOLTAGE TO CAUSE ALL BELLS ON EVERY TELEPHONE ON THE LINE TO RING BUT ONE HAD TO KEEP ONE'S EAR OPEN AND DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT THE CALL WAS FOR "CURRANGO".

OF COURSE EVERYBODY COULD HEAR ANY CONVERSATION ON THE LINE BY SIMPLY HAVING A LISTEN IN THEIR EARPIECE. NEEDLESS TO SAY, "LISTENING IN" WAS QUITE A SATISFACTORY WAY TO GAIN INFORMATION ABOUT WHAT WAS GOING ON IN THE AREA, BUT IT WAS NONE-THE-LESS OUTWARDLY FROWNED UPON, BUT INWARDLY AND UNIVERSALLY PRACTICED.

THE RELIABILITY OF THE TELEPHONE SERVICE WAS NOT HIGH. LINE BREAKAGE FROM WIND, FALLEN TREES, FLYING BRANCHES, AND SHEER WEIGHT OF SNOW AND ICE REGULARLY BROKE THE LINES, PUTTING US OUT OF CONTACT WITH MOST, IF NOT ALL OTHER SUBSCRIBERS ON A GIVEN LINE. HAVING TWO LINES AS MENTIONED EARLIER, GAVE US A BETTER GRADE OF SERVICE TO MEET AN EMERGENCY, THAN MOST OF THE OTHER PEOPLE IN THE AREA.

BATTERIES TO ENERGISE THE MICROPHONES WERE OF THE OLD LE'CLANCHE TYPE, COMPRISING A GLASS JAR CONTAINING A ZINC ROD AS THE NEGATIVE ELECTRODE, A CARBON ROD IN A SACK FULL OF MANGANESE DIOXIDE AS THE POSITIVE ELECTRODE AND UTILISING A SOLUTION OF SALAMONIAC IN WATER AS THE ELECTROLYTE. THERE WAS A SUPPLY OF SALAMONIAC POWDER KEPT IN THE STATION STORE AND WHEN VOICES BECAME FAINT, A BIT OF FRESH POWDER WAS THROWN INTO THE GLASS JARS INSIDE THE TELEPHONES, TO "FRESHEN UP THE BATTERIES". THEY WERE MESSY, UNSIGHTLY AND BULKY BUT THE BEST THAT THE CURRENT STATE-OF-THE-ART TECHNOLOGY COULD PROVIDE.

I HAVE BEEN TOLD MANY TIMES THAT MOST ARTICLES SUCH AS THESE, WHICH TALK ABOUT THE "OLDEN" DAYS, USUALLY OMIT TO TELL THE READER SOMETHING ABOUT THE TYPE OF FOOD WHICH WAS NORMALLY EATEN DURING THE PERIOD UNDER DISCUSSION.

THE FOOD WE CONSUMED AT "CURRANGO" WAS LARGELY HOME-GROWN VEGETABLES, AND THE USUAL MEAT DISHES WHICH WE EAT THESE DAYS. THE VARIETIES OF VEGETABLES WHICH DAD GREW IN OUR COTTAGE GARDEN WAS FAIRLY COMPREHENSIVE WITHIN THE RANGE OF THINGS WHICH WOULD GROW IN THAT CLIMATE. TOMATOES OF COURSE WOULD NOT GROW THERE BECAUSE IT WAS TOO COLD, BUT THERE WAS PLENTY OF CABBAGE, LETTUCE, CAULIFLOWER, RADISHES, CARROTS, ENDIVE, PEAS, BROADBEANS, RHUBARB (YUK!), TURNIPS, PARSNIPS AND POTATOES. THINGS WHICH DID NOT GROW, BUT WE OCCASIONALLY OBTAINED FROM TUMUT, WITH THE HELP OF THE OCCASIONAL VISITORS TO THE STATION, WERE TOMATOES, CUCUMBERS, PUMPKINS, AND MELONS.

HOME COOKING DOMINATED THE TABLES OF THE MONARO HIGHLANDS. THE FAST-FOOD BUSINESS HAD NOT BEEN THOUGHT OF, AND THE USE THE EAT HOUSES IN THE TOWNS WAS DENIED TO US BECAUSE OF THE DISTANCE. THE ONLY TIME WE ATE OUT WAS ON THOSE VERY INFREQUENT TRIPS TO TUMUT, AND OF COURSE THE TRIPS TO RULES POINT, IF ONE COULD CALL THAT EATING OUT. BUT OF COURSE WE DID NOT MISS IT, BECAUSE WE HAD NEVER HAD IT. MUM DID ALL THE COOKING AND NOBODY EVER QUESTIONED THE WISDOM OF THAT. EATING OUT WAS A BIT OF A DODGY BUSINESS ANYWAY. CLEANLINESS OF

THE KITCHENS IN ALL CAFES IN THE COUNTRY TOWNS WAS ALWAYS SUSPECT TO THE BUSH PEOPLE. MOST WERE RUN BY GREEK PROPRIETORS, AND IN THOSE DAYS THE TRUE BLUE AUSSIE WAS THE ONLY CLEAN PERSON IN THE COUNTRY, SO EATING OUT WAS VERY RISKY. (THAT IS WHAT I WAS BROUGHT UP TO BELIEVE.... HONESTLY!)

THE STORY GOES THAT A GREEK COOK IN QUEANBEYAN SOLVED THE PROBLEM OF SPREADING BUTTER IN THE WINTER-TIME. (IT WAS VERY HARD, AND TENDED TO RIP HOLES IN THE TOAST OR THE BREAD AS ONE TRIED TO MAKE SANDWICHES). ANYWAY, NICK THE GREEK IN QUEANBEYAN, IT IS ALLEGED, WAS OBSERVED IN HIS KITCHEN HACKING OFF LUMPS OF BUTTER FROM THE PAT WITH A KNIFE, POPPING THEM INTO HIS MOUTH FOR A WHILE, RECOVERING THEM BACK ON THE KNIFE AND SPREADING THE THUS SOFTENED BUTTER WITH EASE. THAT STORY IS PROBABLY AS AUTHENTIC AS THE ONE ABOUT THE ONE-ARMED SHEARER'S COOK WHO MADE THE MOST DELICIOUS RISSOLES. EVERYONE ENJOYED THEM UNTIL SOMEBODY ASKED HOW A ONE-HANDED PERSON COULD FASHION A SPHERICAL RISSOLE. THE SUBSEQUENT INVESTIGATION REVEALED THAT HE GRABBED A HANDFUL OF THE PREPARED MINCE IN HIS LEFT HAND AND JAMMED THE LOT DEEP INTO HIS RIGHT ARM-PIT, AND PRESSED HIS RIGHT ARM FIRMLY TO HIS SIDE. RESULT...ONE PERFECTLY MOULDED RISSOLE!

MUM MADE LOTS OF CHERRY JAM FROM THE KENTISH CHERRIES WHICH GREW OVER AT THE "OLD HOMESTEAD". DURING THE CHERRY SEASON, A PICNIC WAS ALWAYS PLANNED FOR A CHERRY PICKING DAY AT THE OLD HOMESTEAD. WE WOULD GO IN EITHER THE BUGGY OR A SULKY AND PICK CHERRIES INTO BUCKETS MADE FROM EMPTY KEROSENE TINS. THERE WAS THEN THE LABOURIOUS TASK OF STONING THE CHERRIES. WE DIDN'T OWN A HAND-TURNED CHERRY STONER, AND WE HAD TO DO IT THE HARD WAY AND INDIVIDUALLY PICK UP EACH CHERRY, REMOVE ITS GREEN STALK, SQUEEZE IT BETWEEN THE FINGER AND THUMB, DROP THE FLESHY PART INTO A BOWL AND THE STONE INTO THE BUCKET. AND SO IT WENT UNTIL THE WHOLE HARVEST WAS "STONED" READY FOR COOKING.

WHEN COOKED, (ON THE OLD BEACON LIGHT WOOD STOVE) THE JAM WAS BOTTLED IN CUT DOWN BEER-BOTTLES, AND SEALED WITH BROWN PAPER STUCK OVER THE TOP WITH A PASTE MADE FROM BOILED FLOUR AND WATER. CRUDE BY TODAY'S STANDARD, BUT VERY EFFECTIVE AND CHEAP. THE JAM WOULD LAST WELL OVER TWELVE MONTHS IF IT WERE NOT EATEN IN THE MEANTIME.

THE CUTTING DOWN OF THE BOTTLES WAS QUITE A SNEAKY TRICK TOO. THIS WAS DAD'S JOB. HE HAD FASHIONED FROM FENCING WIRE (ABOUT NO.8 GAUGE) A HANDLE ABOUT 1 FOOT LONG WITH A RING ON THE END, THE DIAMETER OF WHICH WAS JUST SLIGHTLY LESS THAN THE DIAMETER OF THE SHOULDERS OF A BEER BOTTLE. THE RING HE USED ON ONE TOOL WAS REALLY ONE OF THOSE METAL RINGS WHICH FORMS PART OF A HORSES BRIDLE (ONE ATTACHED TO THE "BIT"). THE RING END WAS HEATED TO RED HEAT IN THE OPEN FIRE, OR THE STOVE FIRE BOX, AND THEN QUICKLY POPPED OVER THE

NECK OF THE BOTTLE AND ALLOWED TO REST FIRMLY ON THE SHOULDERS FOR ABOUT FIVE SECONDS. A SMALL AMOUNT OF WATER WAS THEN SLOSHED OVER THE BOTTLE'S SHOULDERS, COOLING THE PREHEATED GLASS VERY QUICKLY AND CAUSING A CLEAN FRACTURE AROUND THE LOCATION ON THE SHOULDERS WHERE THE HOT RING RESTED. THE NECK OF THE BOTTLE WAS THEN LIFTED OFF AND AFTER A QUICK RUB WITH AN OLD FILE TO REMOVE THE VERY SHARP-EDGE OF THE RIM, A VERY SATISFACTORY JAM (OR PICKLE) BOTTLE RESULTED. THE MANUFACTURE OF BOTTLES, THE COOKING OF THE JAM, THE BOTTLING AND SEALING ALWAYS SEEMED TO BE UNDERTAKEN AT NIGHT. I DO NOT KNOW THE REASON, BUT WOULD GUESS THAT IT WAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE NEED FOR A TEAM EFFORT TO BE EXPENDED ON THIS RATHER LABOUR-INTENSIVE TASK.

THERE WERE OTHER FRUITS GROWING AT "CURRANGO" ALL OF WHICH USUALLY FOUND THEIR WAY INTO THE JAM OR PICKLE/CHUTNEY COOKING POT. RASPBERRIES, RED-CURRENTS, BLACK-CURRENTS, GOOSEBERRIES AND STRAWBERRIES WERE IN PRETTY GOOD SUPPLY IN THEIR SEASON. THEY WERE GROWING MAINLY IN THE GROUNDS OF THE MAIN HOMESTEAD AND THE STATION "GARDEN", AN AREA BY THE CREEK, FENCED OFF AND RESERVED FOR SPECIAL CULTIVATION. IT DID NOT GET MUCH CULTIVATION DURING OUR SEVEN YEARS THERE, AND ITS PRODUCTS WERE MAINLY FROM BUSHES AND TREES WHICH HAD BEEN PLANTED THERE BY EARLIER PEOPLE.

IN ADDITION TO MAKING JAM AND PICKLES, MUM ALSO MADE ALL OF OUR "ROUGH" SOAP. I CALL IT ROUGH BECAUSE IT WAS NOT USED FOR TOILET PURPOSES, BUT RATHER FOR THE REAL HARD WORK LIKE THE LAUNDRY, FLOOR SCRUBBING, AND WASHING THE DISHES.

BECAUSE WE KILLED OUR OWN MUTTON FROM THE FLOCK OF SHEEP CALLED THE "KILLERS", THERE WAS AN ABUNDANT SUPPLY OF CAWL FAT, AND KIDNEY FAT. CAWL FAT, FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE INNOCENT, IS A LARGE FATTY MEMBRANE WHICH OCCURS IN SHEEP, AND I GUESS IN OTHER ANIMALS (MAYBE PEOPLE TOO) WHICH IS WRAPPED AROUND THE LARGE STOMACH SAC. ON A SHEEP IN GOOD CONDITION IT COULD WEIGH AS MUCH AS PERHAPS A KILOGRAMME, OR MAYBE A LITTLE LESS. THESE "CAWL FATS" AND "KIDNEY FATS" WERE SAVED, RENDERED DOWN IN A BAKING DISH IN THE FUEL-STOVE OVEN, AND THE RESULTING DRIPPING POURED OFF INTO THE UBIQUITIOUS KEROSENE BUCKET.

OVER THE MONTHS THE SUPPLY OF DRIPPING, OR "TALLOW" AS IT WAS AND STILL IS CALLED, WOULD MOUNT UP AND WHEN A BUCKET OR TWO WAS FULL, A SOAP MAKING SESSION WOULD BEGIN. MUM WOULD LIGHT UP THE FIRE UNDER THE LAUNDRY COPPER (WHICH WAS LOCATED IN THE BACK YARD, IN THE OPEN) GOUGE OUT THE SOLID TALLOW FROM THE BUCKET WITH A LARGE BUTCHER'S KNIFE, AND PLACE THE CHUNKS IN THE COPPER WHERE IT WAS MELTED DOWN INTO A CAULDRON OF BOILING OIL. INTO THIS BUBBLING (BUT NOT SMOKING) MASS, SHE WOULD TIP IN A CAN OF CAUSTIC SODA FLAKES, A COUPLE OF CUPS FULL OF RESIN LUMPS (THE RESIN OR ROSIN ONE USES ON A VIOLIN BOW), A PACKET OF LUX FLAKES AND A CUPFUL OF SALT. THE WHOLE

CABOODLE WAS THEN SIMMERED SLOWLY AND STIRRED CONSTANTLY WITH A POTSTICK FOR A LONG TIME. WELL IT SEEMED TO BE A LONG TIME TO ME, BECAUSE I OFTEN HAD TO WORK ON THE POTSTICK WHILE MUM ATTENDED TO OTHER CHORES.

THERE WERE FREQUENT TESTINGS OF THE VISCOSITY OF THE BREW. NOT VERY SCIENTIFIC PERHAPS, BUT NON-THE-LESS EFFECTIVE, THE TEST CONSISTED OF LIFTING THE POTSTICK FROM THE BREW, AND OBSERVING THE RATE AT WHICH IT RIPPED OFF THE END. OTHER SIGNIFICANT FACTS ABOUT ITS DEVELOPMENT WERE GLEANED FROM ITS COLOUR. JUST WHAT ALL THIS TESTING WAS ABOUT WAS A MYSTERY TO ME, BUT I CAN STILL VISUALISE MUM INSPECTING THE DRIP RATE, AND MUMBLING SOMETHING ABOUT ITS COLOUR.

WELL WHEN ALL TESTS WERE SATISFIED, THE BREW WAS LADLED OUT INTO SHALLOW TRAYS. WE ACTUALLY USED BAKING DISHES. IN THESE TRAYS THE BREW WAS ALLOWED TO COOL AND ULTIMATELY SET SOLID OVERNIGHT. THE FOLLOWING MORNING IT WAS REMOVED FROM THE TRAYS AS SOLID SLABS OF SOAP, AND WITH THE BUTCHER'S KNIFE, WAS CUT UP INTO STRIPS ABOUT TWO INCHES WIDE AND THEN INTO CAKES ABOUT THREE INCHES LONG. IT WAS THEN LEFT FOR A FEW DAYS TO HARDEN A BIT MORE BEFORE BEING PACKED, AS CAKES, INTO CARDBOARD OR WOODEN BOXES FOR STORAGE AND ULTIMATE USE. IT WAS A VERY EFFECTIVE AND INEXPENSIVE SOAP.

CABRAMATTA. N.S.W. 2166.

12th September, 1987.

Dear David,

Thank you for your letter of 3rd September regarding "Currango" Station. It came as a very pleasant surprise to learn that there are people out there with an interest in my old stamping ground of yesteryear.

First of all, please accept my apologies for the dot-matrix printer, but I am sure you will find it much easier to read than my long-hand (put to shame by your immaculate penmanship).

In answer to your primary request, please feel free to use anything from the material which you obtained from Klaus. I have no problem with your possible use of quotes. Out of nothing more than personal interest, I would be most gratified to receive a copy of the portion/s which relate to information which I provided. Whether before or after final draft stage does not really matter.

To put my attempt at recording the "history" into the correct perspective, one should be aware of my prime purpose for embarking on the project. It was undertaken with the objective of leaving something written for my grand-children (and those that follow) to provide them with an insight as to how their ancestors lived, from the viewpoint of an actual ancestor.

This sort of information is sadly lacking in my family (maybe they could not write!) & when I witnessed my late father's progressive loss of memory as he entered his 80's, I sensed that I would probably go down the same road. I therefore began to compile the facts while they were still alive & well in the old grey matter. So what has been done to-date, & hopefully expanded in the future, is intended for ultimate binding & presentation to one of the more responsible younger members of the family.

It occurred to me that some of them may have, perhaps, more than just a passing interest in some of the subject matter, so I attempted to make it as factual & comprehensive (short of boring) as a family member might need. I am now delighted to discover that it is of some interest to others from a professional viewpoint.

Unfortunately I cannot remember precisely the sections which I forwarded to Klaus a couple of years ago. They were copied out of the mag-tape files as they existed then, printed by an old model 15 teletype (which had no lower case). I shuffled off to Klaus when he exhibited an interest in them. Since then there has been a little refinement, possibly some additions, but alas, at this moment the tapes are in storage for a few weeks pending our shifting of residence from here to Wauchope.

I have recently retired. My wife & I have a small rural block 4 miles out of Wauchope where we have an almost completed new residence. We expect to move there in about 3 to 4 weeks, subject to completion of the residence of course. I will not have access to the tapes until then & as a consequence, my wish to send you a better copy, cannot be granted.

The information which I have committed to paper is the result of personal perception at the time, assisted by what I consider (perhaps vainly) to be a better than average memory. I did not undertake any research. Time seemed to be running out, so I simply put down what was in storage, with the hope that retirement might allow me to do some delving to complete a rather large mosaic, a small part of which was my 7 years on "Currango". Therefore the historical side of "Currango", prior to 1929, & subsequent to 1975 is, to me, a void. I cannot assist with any reliable historical data either side of that most impressionable period of my life.

I shall attempt to address some of the points which you raised in your letter. I hope the comments are of some use, & help to insert a few pieces in the big jig-saw picture.

The Shearing Shed. When it was built is a mystery to me, but it certainly was of a mature age when I began to take an interest in things around 1929-1930.

I "think" it was a 5-stand shed. It certainly was an overhead-shaft arrangement, which was driven by a single cylinder steam engine. The boiler was quite remotely located from the cylinder/piston/flywheel unit, in another room in fact. It was wood-fired, by sawn logs, each about three feet long.

Before each shearing or crutching period, the expert, Lin Brassil, would do a maintenance check on the whole boiler/engine installation. He would then fire up the whole caboodle on any wood that was available, & connect a drive belt from the engine to an outside saw-bench. Many hours would then be devoted to sawing the appropriate sized logs from dead tree trunks & limbs. This timber was hauled to the site by horse-draw, but sometimes by the old Chevrolet truck which shuffled back & forth between "Currango" & "Wambook" - near Cooka - as required.

The water supply for the boiler came from the small creek which runs North/South on the eastern side of the shed site. A

narrow drain, dug by a single furrow plough, served to divert water from the creek at a point quite some distance South/East of the shed. The water flowed along this drain into a very small pond located just outside the boiler room, from where it was scooped up by Lin, using "tercense buckets" in which he carried it to the boiler. He poured this into a large drum, situated immediately beside the boiler, from which it was pumped (or sucked) by some mechanism provided by the boiler itself, into its receptive stomach. I have no recollection of water treatment chemicals being added, but maybe they were. I do have recollections of muddy water being sucked into the beast, I certainly very occasions when the gauze filter on the end of the water intake to the pump being cleaned to get shot of the multitude of twigs & blades of grass which became embedded in it.

The sheep yards, which formed part of the shearing shed complex, also sported a very fine dip. I think that this was covered in my info to Klaus, so I will not repeat myself.

The Blacksmith Shop & Saltshed. This building, I am almost sure, does not exist now. I cannot recall seeing it when I visited "Durrango" in the 70's. Its location was about 100-200 meters west of the large shearer's hut complex. It was of slab construction generally, with a corrugated iron roof. My memory tells me that it was about 10 feet wide (because of tendency to fix dimensionals standards, my old habits die hard..... steel yourself!) & about 35 feet long. A slab wall divided it into a Blacksmith Shop at the Southern end, & a salt-shed at the Northern end.

The Salt-shed section had a slab floor, on which was usually stored lumps of rock-salt, bags of coarse salt, & sacks of blood & bone mixture (much finer powder than one sees today in fertiliser packs) all of which were fed to the stock at appropriate times. The rock-salt in those days was in fact large irregularly shaped "rocks" weighing 30 to 40 lbs. of a dirty pink colour. If one goes into a shop these days & asks for rock salt, the result is a plastic bag of coarse salt. My! how things change!

The Blacksmith shop had an earth floor, very dry, dust, and dirt, with a significant component of horse manure. It sported a charcoal forge, which with hindsight, must have been a very much up-market, state-of-the-art device. This forge was a crank-handle powered device, which, through some fairly simple gearing, drove a turbine type blower.... none of the old leather bellows varieties one sees in old pictures or museums!

This shop was quite a centre of activity. Shoeing horses, making gudgeons for gates, welding crow-bars which had snapped as a result of mistreatment when frozen, modifications to the hardware associated with bullock-team wheels, & repairs to steel-tired wheels of drays & waggon were some of the achievements I witnessed in that little hive of seasonal activity. It was a fascinating place to me. The display of sparks which would issue forth from the forge when the operator accidentally did an overkill on the heat, causing the job to "burn", were one of the highlights of my regular observations.

I was never aware of any particular person charged with the responsibility, of "running" the Blacksmith shop. Every Tom, Dick & Harry made use of it to undertake their individual tasks. I doubt if there was ever a crafterman there in my time; it seemed that everyone knew how to drive the forge, & if one could not shoe one's horse, or do-whatever to one's whatever, then one must have moved on.

The Station Store, or Shop. One building, not mentioned in my info. to Klaus, was the Store or Shop. This building actually, contained the station Office, the electrical supply equipment (engine, generator, & accumulator) & the Store. Just how the store functioned is a bit vague in my memory, but I know that it contained quite a large stock of "rationals". There were the common items like flour, sugar, tea, split peas, (all stored in large wooden bins) tinned meats, tinned fruit & on occasions, cheese.

This shop was set up with a counter, a set of balance scales complete with the usual range of weights, and to the observer it was just like a small grocer's shop of the era.

The station staff drew items from the store during certain days of the week, but whether they paid cash for the goods, ran monthl. accounts, had their salaries debited accordingly, or received the goodies gratis as part of their employment package, all escapes me. There is a vague recollection of monthl. accounts. I cannot be sure.

The Stockyards. About 1-2 Km North-east of the homestead, in a paddock then called "The Leagon", there existed a fairly large complex of stockyards. Well they seemed large to me. They were the typical northised posts & rail yards of that era. I do not remember such activity there, apart from the occasional yarding & branding on a very small scale. There was also another set of yards, always referred to as the "Cattle yards", as opposed to the foregoing "Stockyards". These "Cattle yards" were located 2-10 Km North-North-West of the homestead, near the then edge of the green timber on the hills rising from Durrango Plain. Better still, just to the south of the point where the road from "Durrango" to Rules Point begins to enter the range of hills which rise off the plain. I remember these being used for draughting & holding cattle prior to their departure from adjistment.

Closer to the homestead, & more precisely, 50-100 meters north of Bill Stanfield's hut, was a ring-yard. The remnants of it were quite visible in the 70's. It was of very sound construction, with posts in the order of 12 inches in diameter, about 7

feet tall & horizontal rails between 6-9 inches in diameter. The overall diameter of the yard would have been about 25-40 feet (I think).

The Ring-yard was designed, of course, for horsebreaking. During my period there, there was not a great deal of this activity. Although there were at least three people who I remember battling with horses in the yard, it does not stick in my memory as a frequent event. Wally Hook, Jack Sims, & Sid Crowe were three breakers I witnessed coaxing horses into submission. I am of the view that these people did not work on the station as permanent hands, but came there under contract as required. [I will talk about one of these a little later]

You mentioned the dam. There were two bodies of water, either of which may have commanded the title of dam. One we knew as "the duck-pond", & the other we called the main reservoir. The duck-pond was about 150 meters NNW of the homestead. It was formed by a tree-trunk & earth fill wall on the little creek. The dimensions of the resulting backwater would have been in the order of 50 feet across & extending up-creek for about..... maybe... 150-200 feet. From my memory of the retaining wall, I would guess the depth to be around 5 feet at the deepest point.

During my stay there, it served no other functions than to entertain the few ducks we had, & to sustain a prolific growth of mint, nettles, & a fine leafed water-weed, all of which were fighting to take over the pond. On my 70's visit, it was clear that the ducks had really lost out, & I put my money on the plant life. It looked as though mother nature had objected to it being a pond, because it was reduced to little more than a goodly sized puddle. The nettles were doing very well. If did not supply water to the station in my time, it was considered, even in those days, to be polluted. Duck residue was the toxic agent, I believe.

The main reservoir, which as that name implies, did supply water to the main homestead, & the cottage (now "Daffodil Cottage"). It was located quite some distance South of the homestead, on the same creek which fed the Duckpond. It was also a tree-trunk & earth fill wall. The water was piped to the homestead via a galvanised waterpipe (I think it was about 1inch or maybe 1-1/2inch diameter) under nothing more than gravity pressure. The pipe was buried of course, but freezing always occurred in winter where it emerged from the ground to enter the buildings. The supply to the cottage, although originating from this main reservoir, came via a narrow drain (single furrow plough job again) which was routed along the western side of the creek, gradually around the slope of the rise, & terminated in a small fenced-in sink-hole about 3 feet in diameter & about 2 feet deep. This enclosure was about 100 meters (or less) south of the cottage, & from here the water was conveyed by galvanised waterpipe (with half-hearted assistance from gravity) to the taps in the cottage. The present day term, "mains pressure", does not describe it adequately.

All this water storage & reticulation was well established prior to my threshold of recall. I am confident that they were built well before 1928. They all looked old, even ancient to my young eyes. I remember bits of superficial maintenance being done on the earth wall of the main reservoir very early in the dawning of my awareness, & that was some time before my 4th birthday. I have pretty reasonable continuity of recall from my 4th birthday.

There was an extension to the water reticulation in the very early 30's. It might have been 1930 ?. The single furrow plough was used to cut a drain from the Cottage sink-hole, running in a northerly direction to a newly fenced in enclosure called "the forestry". Its purpose was to provide irrigation to a "plantation" of pine trees. The small trees. (I don't recall their exact number.... a real guess would be about perhaps 40) were brought up from Tumut, & planted in orderly rows in this "forestry" which was located very close to the cottage in which we lived. Its South-East corner was only about ten feet from the North-West corner of our cottage yard. The trees were pinus radiata (I think) & when we left there in 1928, they had grown to about 5 feet, having been planted as little twigs about 9 inches or so. I noticed that most of them had gone when I visited, but the few which had survived were quite monsters. Purpose of the "forestry"???? Haven't a Clue!

The only "improvement" which comes to mind is the construction of a culvert across the reservoir/duck-pond creek, to replace a shallow ford which had to be negotiated by all vehicles approaching the homestead from the Western side. There was always water flowing in the creek, so I would imagine that it was considered appropriate to build this culvert to eliminate the minor disadvantage of driving through about a 6 inch depth of water on a bed of lucky-stones. I guess there was an element of "let's please the Doctors", as the visiting trout-fishing medicos from Macquarie Street constituted the major contribution to the motor traffic stream.

This culvert was built in 1930. Work began by felling a very large dead tree. A particular tree had been selected because its heart-wood was beginning to rot. This condition facilitated the removal of the core of the log after it had been split (end to end) to finally finish up as a long, "U" shaped channel, with walls a few inches thick. This channel was then located longitudinally in the middle of the stream, inverted, such that it form an arch through which the water flowed. Either side of the arch was then filled with earth, stones, and whatever, and finally all covered sufficiently to reach the road level to produce a most effective and aesthetically pleasing culvert. To add to its charm, a small wooden foot-bridge, complete with painted white hand rails was relocated from its earlier up-stream position to form an integral part of the culvert, and thus allow dry-footed pedestrian traffic between the cottage and the homestead. All most effective, economic in terms of hardware costs, but it did involve substantial labour over the few days it required for construction. It was still functioning

admirably when we left in 1935, but I believe it was a ford crossing again when I visited it in the 70's!

Now, the people after whom you asked.

Jack Leonard. Unknown to me.

Mark Thomas. Unknown to me.

Jack Thatcher. Yes. A colourful relative who is the subject of anecdotes which I shant relate here. He would have been at "Currango" in his youth, perhaps as an itinerant station-hand. Doubt if he had lengthy service at "Currango". He inherited his father's property "The Brook", near Yass (Sawyers Gully to be more precise). Family long since dispersed, except son John (lives at North Yass) - I do not know his full address.

Milton Archer. Yes. Another relative. Possibly a Jackeroo, or Station Hand. He became a Stock/Station agent in Tumut when we were at "Currango", so only guessing on his involvement with station. His daughter-in-law Pamela Archer, lives in Tumut, very keen on Genealogy. Could be of help to you.

Herb Mann. Unknown to me.

Norman Buchanan. Unknown to me

Bobby Joyce. Unknown to me

Frank Killy. Unknown to me

Walter Ware. Yes. He was Overseer, lived in the homestead. Am reasonably sure that he was there from some point prior to 1928 until 1932-33. Knew him well & remember his departure & replacement. Was very keen gardener, growing vegetables and flowers. Pansies, lupins, and hollyhocks were some of his outstanding achievements.

Bill Russell. Yes. He was Overseer who replaced Walter Ware. Arrived in 1932-33 (from Tallangatta) and was still there when I departed. Wife's name was Jean. Heard many years ago that Bill took his own life. His wife subsequently remarried to Mervyn Brassil - both now deceased. There was another Bill Russell (with an English wife -possibly defacto) who spent some time there a few years earlier, but they were trappers I believe and used the shearer's hut as accommodation on each of their two visits. (Each visit was only matter of months gathered pelts and left.)

Sid Crane. Unknown to me, but did know a Sid Crowe. Hailed from either Adaminiby or Kiandra area. Did some Horse Breaking at "Currango" but no long term involvement during my stay.

Earl Archer. Yes. Another relative. Had no long term involvement during my time. Visited the station often and could have done short stints in pre-1928 era. Owned property near Yass, "Brooklyn" (I Think) But now believed to be in Sydney (retired)

Jack Spring. Yes. Believe his correct name was Dave Collison but Jack Spring was either a nom-de-plume, alias or just a nick-name. Doubt if he worked on the station in my time, but he certainly came there to participate in the fur trade by trapping rabbits, shooting 'roos/Wallabies, Foxes. Also told horrendous ghost stories, tall stories, snake stories. Very colourful personality!

Percy Thomas. Unknown to me. There was a Percy Russell at Rules Point who carried mail by horseback to

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WAUCHOPE, NSW, 2446.

11th April, 1988.

Dear David,

It was a most pleasant surprise to receive that copy of the "Currango Homestead Conservation Study". Please accept my sincere thanks for your thoughtfulness in including me as one of the recipients.

You made mention of me perhaps "reading it during the winter"! Rest assured that I have read it already! Naturally I have not yet studied it in minute detail, as it is a particularly comprehensive effort, however I am now giving it a fine-grain scan to see what additional interesting aspects I can glean.

Please be assured that I am more than happy with the acknowledgements of my puny efforts. After all, I penned down some facts out of nothing more than a desire for my grandkids to read and laugh about. To find that it was of some substantial use in your research was a real bonus for me.

I received a great kick out of seeing some of my recollections being well and truly substantiated, e.g., the forge in the ruins of the blacksmith shop, and the anti-rodent discs associated with the "poisons shed" (our "grain store").

The enigma of the range in "The Pine Lodge" kitchen has me a little worried. Tom Taylor's continuity of residence at the homestead must surely fit him out with the knowledge of the true facts. I do remember people cooking in camp-ovens in that kitchen. Vera Phillips often cooked soda biscuits that way (they were horrid things.... her soda biscuits, I mean), so I feel my memory must have let me down once again. There is still a vague picture of a large range, close to the old brick oven. Perhaps it is a double exposure job... I must have forgotten to wind on the film in the grey matter!!!!

I did not find anything with which I would disagree. There are quite a few things which brought back memories which had never emerged before. In fact I now have some additions to make to my manuscript.... I will never get it finished!!!!

The building between the harness shed and poisons shed, which in your study is called the "rain store", is a surprise. This particular building, whilst no doubt existing during my time, did not ever appear in my recollections. I cannot ever remember it. I do not recall ever being in it. Time has completely masked its presence. Pity really, because I have been very snug about my ability to recall details of "Currango".

I can see that I am getting carried away again. This letter was to express thanks to you for the copy of your fine work, not to use as a vehicle to roar off down memory lane. I trust your work will gain full acceptance, and that your recommendations (either one) for its future use will come to fruition. Certainly let us hope that action to minimise the ravages of time, elements, vandalism etc., will be taken and to have the kiss of life given to the old place.

It has been my intention to visit there again before the Taylors move to warmer climes. It is now almost mid April, so I had better get my act together and make contact with them to see if I can arrange a visit. Whilst I could see them later at Tumut, I would prefer to see them on site for their last residential stint.

Best of luck David. Thanks again. I have enjoyed it all like a kid on Christmas morning.

Kind regards,

Irauen Shatchel

WAUCHOPE, N.S.W. 2446.

12th May, 1989.

Dear David,

I am writing to formally express my thanks to you and the members of the KHR for including Phyllis & I in your Hulfest '89 weekend. It was one of the most enjoyable weekends I have spent for a long time and I trust that it will not be the last time I visit the old station.

The last night, which was spent in Pine Lodge was particularly enjoyable and it sure put me in a better position to appreciate the changes which have occurred in living conditions since I last lived in that area. The darkness of the rooms (despite the L.F. gas lamp !!) caused us to marvel as to how the dickens we did our night time reading/writing, also in the middle of the day there appeared to be no noticeable glare from the reflection from the walls !! It must surely be the later conditioning to more modern buildings with their larger windows; or is it just failing eyesight as a consequence of the ageing process ??

We arrived back at Wauchope on Wednesday 10th May, after a pleasant trip via Cooma, Canberra, Mittagong, Sydney etc. We stopped for an hour or so at Mittagong, where I spoke with my Uncle Dudley Thatcher (my late father's brother who also served some time at "Currango") and told him of our interesting and enjoyable visit. He was able to provide a little more information in relation to the "Old Man's Grave."

Dudley spent several periods at "Currango" ranging from a few months to a couple of years, during the time-frame 1926-1934. It was during a stint in the early part of 1927 that he was acquainted with an unfortunate incident which occurred around late 1926. This incident resulted in the death of man and his subsequent burial at, or very close to, the spot over which we pondered last weekend.

Dudley assured me that the burial site which we always knew as the "old man's grave" was on the eastern bank of Woolshed Creek. From my description of the spot and its position relative to the station complex, Dudley was able to give support to my little-better-than-vague feeling that we had found the spot. Further, he was able to state that the "old man's grave" was in fact the last resting place of a gentleman who was the central figure in the following incident. (The facts, I must stress, are third hand. They were related to Dudley by his father, Thomas Thatcher who claimed a key role in the incident, but it is important to note that Thatchers have long been known for their propensity to avoid having excellent stories degraded by an overkill in the application of truth I guess some of it may have rubbed off on me but I try desperately to keep to uncoloured facts on serious issues.)

The story goes thus :-

During the shearing period in 1926 (yes, they did shear at "Currango" on occasions) there developed some distasteful situation between the shearer's Cook and the station management. The result was that the Cook left at particularly short notice, in a fit of anger and resentment.

It was necessary for a replacement to be obtained to continue feeding the crew, and this was arranged by telephone calls to some person in Tuut who organised the supply of shearer's Cooks. The replacement Cook was transported to Rules Point (by means now unknown I would suspect Mail Car) but was then required to make his own way from Rules Point to "Currango".

Whether he walked, or rode on horse-back is not now known, but in the course of the journey he drank from one of the many small streams common to the area. Shortly after drinking from the stream he became very ill, and by the time he arrived at "Currango" he was in a serious condition, exhibiting symptoms of having been poisoned. Shortly after his arrival he lapsed into unconsciousness and died in the arms of Thomas Thatcher. It was surmised by station staff that the stream from which he had taken the water had been contaminated by rabbit poison.

The police at either Adaminaby or Tuut were advised of the tragedy and somehow approval (perhaps tacit approval ?) was obtained to inter the corpse locally. This was done and a WOODEN cross, complete with name, was placed at the head of the grave.

With the exception of the bits in parentheses, that is the story as related to me by Dudley Thatcher. As mentioned earlier, he was told the story by his father upon his (Dudley's) arrival at "Currango" in early 1927.

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Now a good researcher, particularly one with an "in" with the constabulary at Tumut or Admansby, may be able to get a fix on the identity of the deceased, together with additional or supporting (perhaps even contradictory) facts about the incident. It seems a little strange to me that some form of coronial inquest or police or medico involvement received no mention. However, there seems to be enough here to probe a little deeper and perhaps uncover an interesting, albeit tragic, human interest story in relation to "Currango" and its colourful history.

That took a little more space than I thought it would, David, but I felt that you may gain some interest from it.

Once again I must express my thanks to YHA for allowing Phyllis and I to be part of a most enjoyable (and for me, nostalgic) weekend. To meet and participate with a group of interesting and interested people, with "Currango" history as the common bond, was indeed, a most unexpected pleasure. Until that weekend, I had quite wrongly assumed that I was one of very few remaining people who had any interest in what life was like in that area in bygone times.

I have forwarded a similar letter to Graeme Scuttle, together with a small article which he requested relating to my feelings and impressions after 54 years. So if you run across a familiar bit of text in the association's correspondence, you can put it down to *deja vu* a la word processor. Hi.

Kindest regards to you, David, together with all the other members of the group who made the visit that such were enjoyable.

Dudley Thatcher

MAUCHOPE, N.S.W. 2416.

15th May, 1990.

Dear Graham,

As promised during the recent weekend at "Currango", I am enclosing a few words covering the impressions and feelings which I gained and experienced on that visit. These "few words" are attached for your use in your Newsletter, or in any other way you choose - including the WFP!

We arrived back at Mauchope on Wednesday 10th May, after a pleasant trip via Cooma, Canberra, Mittagong, Sydney etc. We stopped for an hour or so at Mittagong, where I spoke with my Uncle Dudley Thatcher (my late father's brother who also served some time at "Currango") and told him of our interesting and enjoyable visit. He was able to provide a little more information in relation to the "Old Man's Grave."

Dudley spent several periods at "Currango", ranging from a few months to a couple of years, during the time-frame 1924-1934. It was during a stint in the early part of 1927 that he was acquainted with an unfortunate incident which occurred around late 1926. This incident resulted in the death of man and his subsequent burial at, or very close to, the spot over which we pondered last weekend.

Dudley assured me that the burial site which we always knew as the "old man's grave" was on the eastern bank of Woolshed Creek. From my description of the spot and its position relative to the station complex, Dudley was able to give support to my little-better-than-vague feeling that we had found the spot. Further, he was able to state that the "old man's grave" was in fact the last resting place of a gentleman who was the central figure in the following incident. (The facts, I must stress, are third hand. They were related to Dudley by his father, Thomas Thatcher who claimed a key role in the incident, but it is important to note that Thatchers have long been known for their propensity to avoid having excellent stories degraded by an overkill in the application of truth I guess some of it may have rubbed off on me but I try desperately to keep to uncoloured facts on serious issues.)

The story goes thus :-

During the shearing period in 1926 (yes, they did shear at "Currango" on occasions) there developed a distasteful situation between the shearer's Cook and the station management. The result was that the Cook left at particularly short notice, in a fit of anger and resentment.

It was necessary for a replacement to be obtained to continue feeding the crew, and this was arranged by telephone calls to some person in Tumut who organised the supply of shearer's Cooks. The replacement Cook was transported to Rules Point (by means now unknown I would suspect Mail Car) but was then required to make his own way from Rules Point to "Currango".

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That took a little more space than I thought it would, Grahame but I felt that you may gain some interest from it.

Once again I must express my thanks to KHA for allowing Phyllis and I to be part of a most enjoyable (and for us, nostalgic) weekend. To meet and participate with a group of interesting and interested people, with "Currango" history as the common bond, was indeed, a most unexpected pleasure. Until that weekend, I had quite wrongly assumed that I was one of very few remaining people who had any interest in what life was like in that area in bygone times.

Kindest regards to you, Grahame, together with all the other members of the group who made the visit that much more enjoyable.

Yvonne Shatches.

P.S. Sorry for the delays in posting this Grahame, but I did not have the Box no after all. I had sent it back on the last-of-acknowledgment slip on the "Subject By" flyer!!! I obtained it eventually from a member friend in Sydney.

Regards.



"CURRANGO" REVISITED AFTER 54 YEARS.

Joining the group of KHA members who spent the "Hutfest '89" weekend at "Currango" permitted me to wander at length down memory lane. Having spent the years 1929-1932 living with my parents in The Cottage (now called "Raffodil Cottage") the weekend had a "take up where you left off" atmosphere about it.

There have been some changes for sure. Clearly, Mother Nature has been working hard to reclaim her domain. The encroachment by Sallys and other native flora on what was once the cleared area, together with the growth of the introduced pines were certainly the most striking visible changes. My memories are of a station complex with most buildings clearly visible from the verandah of The Cottage. The hills, immediately to the south-east of the station are now well covered in green timber, having recovered from the onslaught of the axes of the ring-barkers and scrubbers of the early 1920's and prior.

The frost plain looks exactly the same as the day I left it in 1932. The timber line on the surrounding foothills is very similar to that which exists in my memory. Particularly, the timber profile at the point of emergence of the old Rules Point road is exactly as I remember it. There was one brief instant during the visit when I was almost certain that I sighted Percy Russell on horseback emerging as a small speck from the distant timber line, carrying my weekly comic book in the mailbag. This was no doubt the result of stimulation of an already over-active imagination, or perhaps approaching senility ?

Walking through The Cottage became real stuff of which lumps in the throat are made. Touching the old steel bed in which I had once slept (I am certain it was the same one), observing the visibly brighter patch on the varnished wall lining where there had once been a telephone and recognising it as still being a visibly brighter patch on the varnished wall where there had once been a telephone, were only two of the many encounters of the nostalgic kind experienced during the two day visit.

Apart from the unfortunate deterioration brought about by the ravages of time and weather, all remaining buildings are substantially as I recall them in my day. The remaining exterior paintwork is the same colour and I would strongly suspect that it is the remnants of the coats of paint which were applied by Gerald Shannon around 1932. The interior paintwork in the dwellings (with the exception of the Homestead) has changed only in relation to the thickness of the layer of smoke staining on upper walls and ceilings. This has no doubt has added to the interior gloom which is now far more apparent than I recall it. Part of this impression is no doubt the result my conditioning to brighter interiors which came with modern architecture.

Spending a night in Pine Lodge was a revealing and pleasing experience. I can now better appreciate the change in living conditions which have taken place in the past 54 years. Despite the availability of a very bright L.P. gas lamp, visibility in the large kitchen/living room is now short of ideal. I was prompted to ponder the difficulties under which we had read our books, papers and comics, performed our correspondence school lessons (yes, sometimes at night) and attended to our mail-order correspondence by the light of a kerosene lamp! Perhaps failing eyesight may have contributed to the illusion.

Occasionally, during that night, incidental sounds created by the wind could easily have been mistaken for the clinking of Jack Sims' spurs, or the squeal of Wally Hool's leather leggings, or even the rattle of Mick Chalker's dingo traps being dropped off the pack-saddle to the ground after a hard day doing his rounds.

I must go back again, just to ensure that all is going well. Like the creek between the cottage and the homestead continuing to gurgle along, the wind continuing to whistle in the pines, the galvanised iron on the roof continuing to clunk and groan as it expands and contracts in sympathy with the sun's comings and goings behind the clouds, and the shadows continuing to race across the plain on windy days. All these, and other things, seem to have been well taken care of during the past 54 years, without any help on my part. I guess they will continue for quite a while yet.