

GOOBARRAGANDRA GOLD

*Written by Harry Hill in 2003, based on his oral history interviews of local identities over the past 40 years
Harry believes that many of the Goobarragandra mine relics would have been washed away by the 2012 flood
that reached 20 feet above the normal flow level.*

THE GOOB – GOBRAGANDRA – GOOBARRAGANDRA

Take your pick. The three names all apply to the one place/locality/river. No doubt there's an Aboriginal linkage. Even current maps have the third – the longest spelling, for the river, but the people who today live there drop one syllable and say they live at 'Goobragandra'. At times it has been a popular canoeing river; even to holding State Championships on it, and those interested spoke about "Shooting The Goob". It did have another name – as a tributary to the Tumut River it was called the Little River, especially as it came closer to the Tumut River which was called the Big River.

THE HUME & HOVELL EXPEDITION OF 1824-25

Sir Thomas Brisbane, Governor of the Colony of New South Wales, became concerned that people living around Sydney were starting to move further inland and beyond his control. He had another problem – the French were investigating the southern coast of mainland Australia and might try to establish a settlement. His solution – organise an expedition that would start from near Sydney, travel overland to Bass Strait, determine what the country was like and then he could decide what needed to be done.

The outcome was that an expedition under the joint leadership of Captain William Hovell and Hamilton Hume, with six assigned convict servants came into being. The basic instruction given to the two leaders was – 'travel in a general south westerly direction, note what the country is like, aim to reach Western Port, come back to Sydney, report to me.'

Hovell kept a daily diary which is now in the Mitchell Library in Sydney. I have a photocopy of it and have used it in connection with my own investigations and writings. As the expedition was the first group of Europeans to see the Goobarragandra River a direct quotation from the diary (Journal) will add something to this story.

Sunday 31st Nov.

All the first part of the day Cloudy but very pleasant traveling. We started this morning at Sun rise and continued along on the East side of a swampey Valley, till we got to a S E branch the distance from where we started being about 2 Miles, at which place we were enabled to cross to the opposite side, here we stoped to brakefast & refresh our Cattle, and the length of time we were coming this short distance (being 2 & half hours) will shew that we had some little trouble to get clear of the Mountain Swamp, here we found some little good grass, as the Natives had burned the old grass some short time previous, the length of Swamp from North to South is about 3 or 4 miles, but how far it goes to a Westerly direction we cannot say, the width is about a quarter of a mile – about 10 oClock we set off again keeping a S.W.Course as near as circumstances would admit but the ground being so broken in places, by Springs and small creaks, and in other places by brush, and dead timber that it was with difficulty that we could travel more than one, or one & half mile per hour about 12 or 1 oClock we got to the top, of what appeared to us a small hill, but to our astonishment we found it to be an immense Mountain, from which we could see from S W to N W direction but in particular about West in that direction we saw Mountains as far, as the Eye could reach, the S.W. Course appeared more favourable for us, from this place we saw Smoke at a little distance from us, but not in the direction that we could get to the Natives about 2 p.m. we got to the end of a range, by

which we had to descend to get to what we supposed a river, to look down this Mountain was of its self sufficient to fright us, much less to attempt to get down it, and after a few minutes deliberation, between Hume myself, we thought it advisable to attempt it at all events, as there was not another place which looked more favorable and about half past 2 o'clock we began by sending down the Bullocks first & in 1 and a half hours we arrived at the bottom of the first Mountain, & passed on till we came to a second range (a part of the first, or sort of landing place) from which we saw the river, and fine pastureage on its banks, a little distance from us, to which place we arrived about half past five o'clock, close to the Side of a very strong running Stream which appear to run West from us. Its width is not much more than 3 or 4 rods, in some places not more than half as much, it appear to overflow its banks and opposite to where we are is a rapped fall of about 10 to 12 feet the most of the timber through which we passed to day is of the very best quality, such as Wooley and Black butted Gumb all equal to any I have seen in the Colony.

Before I came down the Mountain I took the bearings of some of the most particular Mountains near us, A very high Mountain formed like a Stack, or more properly speaking like a pyramid, and may be called a second Ben Loman bore S b half W dis about 5 or 6 Miles and is on the SW side of the river, A range of mountains, the end of which Come down to the river at a little distance from us, and is a part of the one by which we came down on was S 50 E. Mountains all in a NW direction – distance come 10 miles.

Monday 1 Nov

Throughout the day very warm to very good, and the cattle so much fatigued from the last 3 days Journey we made Sunday of to day, in the place of yesterday, and prepare for tomorrows journey: Killed one very large Kangaroo – and caught a Lobster out of the river. I cannot perceive any difference between it and the Lobsters in England Sewed some Clover seed and Peach stones

Tuesday 2nd Nov

All day the weather has been very hot, after breakfast we crossed the river a little below our resting place and continued along the west bank in a N.W. Direction

The NSW Department of Lands planned the construction of the Hume & Hovell Walking Track as a Bicentennial Project. (1988) The idea behind the planning was that the track should follow, as closely as possible, the route taken by the 1824 expedition. Thus, Hovell's Journal became the main source of information. The Journal entries, as quoted, provide many of the clues that helped determine the track's route. e.g. 'many small creeks' – Micalong, Pheasant, Yankee Ned, Tumorrana – all within a couple of miles, 'large swampy area – 3 to 4 miles long' – Micalong Swamp, 'trees of very best quality, such as Wooley and Black butted Gumb' – Mountain Gum, Candlebark, Manna Gum, Alpine Ash, mountain peaks seen and described – Numbananga, a second Ben Loman, views of the Goobragandra Valley, 'sort of landing place' – locality called The Hole.

However, there is one place that Hovell described as being 'we got to the top of what appeared to us as being a small hill but to our astonishment we found it to be an immense Mountain from which' he had splendid, uninterrupted views of the valley (Goobarragandra), ranges and mountain peaks. Those people determining the 1824 expedition route and hence the subsequent walking track route believed that Hovell was referring to Mt Nimbo-Trig, the highest point on Murphy's Ridge. Consequently the walking track was built to almost reach Mt Nimbo, then take a sharp turn to drop down to The Hole and then to descent further to reach the river.

To settle the matter, in my mind, I did some study of topographic maps, talked to elderly 'locals' and did some investigating on foot. Instead of continuing along Murphy's Ridge to Mt Nimbo I headed towards another peak – Jumpers Hill, which is about 2k to the NW of Mt Nimbo. I had the gentle climb as described by Hovell, then found I was at the top of an 'immense mountain' where I had the

views as described by Hovell. Such views cannot be seen from Mt Nimbo.

The last part of the Journal account describing the descent from The Hole to the river differs to what ended up as the walking track. The explorers reached the river very close to where Goobragandra Station Homestead was built. It is about 1k upstream from the point where the Thomas Boyd Trackhead was established.

An early recorded Aboriginal name for freshwater lobster is *Mungola*, and that was the name first given to the Yarrangobilly River. Hovell didn't record a name for his new discovery – The Goobarragandra River, but he did visit it again. On the return trip in 1825 he crossed the Tumut River downstream from today's town, then stayed in the hills to the north of the Goobarragandra River, through the locality of Lacmalac, climbed higher, viewed the waterfalls on Sandy Waterfall Creek, revisited Micalong Swamp, and finally collected the carts that had been left in Limestone Valley (Goodradigbee River at Wee Jasper).

Hovell also mentioned that he had planted peach and clover seeds near the river and that debris caught in trees near the river was at least 12 feet above the current water level. I've spent much of the past 20 years visiting the section of the Hume & Hovell Walking Track where it is close to the Goobarragandra River - determining the track route, involved in its construction, promotional activities and I've often seen evidence of extreme floods. I haven't seen the progeny of Hovell's peach seeds but I knew where to show visitors some 'bush tucker' – seedling figs, quinces, damson plums and Kentish cherries. A flood in the river in March 2012 was considered to be the highest one ever recorded, perhaps the highest for thousands of years.

The river which had been 15 to 25 metres wide ended up in an eroded bed 5 times that width, river flats and forest cover were washed away, long sections of road disappeared, there's no sign of my 'bush tucker', even the invasive blackberries, and the restoration bill ran into millions of dollars. I've spoken to residents living by the river; some had their houses flooded and their estimate of the peak flood level was more than 13 metres above usual summer level.

The upper reaches of the Goobarragandra River, in the mountainous country, branches into two streams which are known locally as the Right Hand Branch and the Left Hand Branch. The Right Hand Branch also takes the name 'Feints Creek' while the Left Hand Branch is still referred to as the 'Goobarragandra River'. Weather reports at the time of the flooding spoke of heavy rain over the whole area but that rainfall on the Goobarragandra branch had exceeded all records. This could mean that the site of the Goobarragandra Gold Mine has been dramatically altered – much of the machinery and the actual workings were within 20m of the river and a rise of 20m in the water level would have meant inundation of the site.

About 25 years ago a bushwalking companion, Tom Wilkinson, asked me to take some photos of a shrub he had growing in his garden – he thought it might be a new discovery. He had found it growing near the Goobarragandra River. I suggested he should pass it on to some plant authority. He did. It hadn't been previously identified, but is now known as Goobarragandra or Tumut Grevillia (*G. wilkinsonii*). Some small sections of the Grevillia, near the trackhead, were fenced off, but the recent flood has wiped them out. People involved with stock years ago have told me “there's plenty more plants to discover on Bullocks Hill and Murphy's Ridge.” That's likely to be true.

As far back as the 1930s the river, the valley, and the surrounding bush has been one of my favourite areas for fishing, camping, exploring, and discovering. In this regard I've been lucky to find 'locals' who have spent much of their life connected with the Goobragandra Valley and they have been very willing to talk to me and pass on their recollections. Chief among them have been Cecil Piper, Jack Cribb, Norman Harris, Dick Bullock, David Scott, Tom Harris, Clyde Miller, Fred

Brumby, John Learmont, Eddie Shaw, Herb Buckley, the Stokes family, the Kell family, the Lindley family, those involved with the construction of the Hume & Hovell Walking Track, Kosciusko Huts Association, National Parks and Wildlife Service, graziers, stockmen and drovers linked with High Country Snow Leases.

I've known Cecil Piper since I was a teenage boy. We both lived in Tumut about two houses apart. Cecil also had another home at Goobragandra where he lived, primarily by himself, and his 'family' home in town where he came in for weekends. His 'out of town' residence had character – built by pioneers from bush timber, without modern comforts and amenities and parked nearby was his droving wagon, that for years he had pulled behind a truck.

Cecil told me that he had been born, in 1905, at Yarrangobilly where his father, Israel, worked for Yarrangobilly Station. The family lived in two slab and bark huts on Brownley's Back Creek. The family left Yarrangobilly when Cecil was five and Israel took over the managership of Goobragandra Station. That linkage with the region had continued ever since, except for many droving trips covering much of Queensland, and the Western and Alpine Regions of NSW.

Like many oldtimers Cecil had an amazing memory for dates, facts, figures and names. Couple this to his knowledge of the river, the valley, the mountainous country of the alpine regions, summer grazing, stock routes, etc and Cecil was better than any written history or encyclopaedia.

If he told me that Goobragandra Station was running 3500 sheep and 280 head of cattle in 1921 and when they mustered they were 300 sheep and 120 head of cattle short I believed him. He'd give me the same figures a year later and was likely to tell me he was riding a small chestnut mare at the time and she had a large scar on her left ribs where she had spiked herself when jumping a fallen tree. Then he might add that his best cattle dog, at that time, was named 'Ginger'.

He had no written record of these things – they were stored in his memory bank.

I was interested in finding out what Cecil knew about an area known as 'The Hole'. It's still shown on the CMA, Blowering Topographic Map, and is about four kilometres to the east of the former Goobragandra Station, and heading into the higher elevation country of Murphy's Ridge and Mount Nimbo. It's supposed to have received its name because it was a natural hole, a patch of clear country, in a thick eucalypt forest. It was on the route of the Hume & Hovell party, an area taken up by settlers in the 1880's, and now incorporated into the Hume & Hovell Walking Track.

I'm sure that Cecil Piper was the best source of information available on The Hole and the area nearby, but he told me that I should talk to Jack Cribb and Norman Harris, both direct descendants of Jim McNamara who had moved to The Hole more than 100 years previously. He also told me that I might find it hard to get Jack to talk to me if he didn't feel like it.

Cecil Piper's father was named Israel and I believe he was something of a character. Norman Harris told me that a policeman approached Israel when he was in the yard of one of the Tumut hotels. Israel was mounted and he had his reasons for not wanting to talk to the police so he put spurs to his horse, rode it up the woodheap, cleared the fence and headed for home. The policeman had to wait another month before Israel came back into town.

Cecil also told me that his father was great mates with Banjo Patterson who at the time was part owner of Coodravale Station on the Goodradigbee River. The great debate in Australia at the time was - "Who is this man from Snowy River?"

"I was with my father at the Yass Show, I must have been about 1914, it was just before the war.

and my father said. 'There's Banjo, I've got to ask him something', so we headed over to Banjo and my father said, "Banjo, who is this bloody Man from Snowy River?"

"I can clearly remember Banjo's reply. 'Israel, your guess is as good as mine.' " That question is still being asked, and except for those who vote for Jack Riley the answer is – No one in particular, but a composite of all those who in some way fit the picture.

Following is what I've found out about The Hole; the information mainly supplied by Cecil Piper, Jack Cribb and Norman Harris.

Jack still lived on the Goobarragandra River, a bit down stream from the Triton Trout Farm, but on the opposite bank, with his neighbour being Herb Buckley and family. When I called in and introduced myself I had the distinct impression that he didn't want to talk to me until I mentioned 'koalas' and told him that my father had seen them on the Upper Brungle Creek in the late 1890s.

At that he asked, "What did you say your name was?" When I told him he said, "Was old Tom Hill your father?" I replied, "No, he was my uncle." At that my credentials were established and he said, "I used to call in and see him if I was droving sheep down Brungle Creek. Now, what was it you wanted to talk to me about?" With such a link established we talked for hours, but just in time, because Jack died soon after. Jack Cribb was Jim McNamara's grandson. Jack's mother was May (Mary Ellen) McNamara who went to live at The Hole when she was six years old. She married a Cribb.

Norman Harris was also a great source of information. He was Jim McNamara's great grandson. When I hunted him up it turned out he had played tennis with me on the school tennis court when I was the Teacher-in-Charge of Peels Creek School back in the 1950s. Hence we could trust one another.

Prior to moving to the Goobragandra region the McNamara family had lived in The Monaro region. From there Jim had moved his family to Argalong, a nearby locality, where he had contracted to fence off an area of fifteen acres for a Tumut businessman who intended to go into pig production in a big way. The pigs were supposed to be primarily a 'free range' enterprise; fending for themselves within the fenced-off area. The fence was to be a rough affair of dropped trees and branches. It was ineffective and the pigs spread far and wide and the progeny became pigs that have called the area home ever since. The area, then called 'The Pig Paddock', would now be under pine trees, part of Buccleuch State Forest.

Jim McNamara opted to move his family from Argalong to The Hole. Charles and Billy Atkinson had been living there for some time previously. They had built a slab and shingle hut several hundred yards north of the present hut site in the clump of elm trees. A search today might reveal some of the quince, damson plum, kentish cherries and gooseberries planted by the Atkinsons or the McNamaras.

Jim selected blocks of 40, 60 and 120 acres, mostly still virgin bush, and set about fencing them with a post, top wooden rail, and one or two wires. His labour force came from his family which grew to be 13. The family outgrew the original hut and a second, bigger one, of slab walls with a shingle roof was built. Something of that hut can still be found in the middle of the clump of elm trees which were planted at that time.

The first access route to The Hole was from Tumut to Argalong, along the side of Murphy's Ridge, past Mt Nimbo, then down a winding track along Waterfall Creek to The Hole. This bit of the track became known as the Zig Zag and later was incorporated into the Hume & Hovell Walking Track. There was no track from The Hole to the Goobarragandra River and hence to Tumut so Jim cut one himself, running west from The Hole and then down the mountain. It was about two and a half miles long but saved the climb up the Zig Zag then the longer way through Argalong to get to Tumut.

Jim's track was wide enough to take two bullocks pulling a slide and bits of it can still be seen, especially where it passes through open country and along the steep ridge running parallel to the river, before the main descent starts. Jack Cribb said he remembers his mother telling him that once the steep descent – (over 200m drop in elevation in less than a km) - was reached two packhorses became the transport and that a trip to Tumut was made every six weeks to get provisions.

The Hume & Hovell Walking Track which closely follows the route that the 1824 expedition took now runs from near Mt Nimbo, down through The Hole, then continues to follow Jim McNamara's track to the Goobarragandra River. I was involved in determining, then constructing, the route. Towards the bottom of this part of the track it reaches Stony Creek and everyone involved in constructing the track, or later in walking it found something that surprised us – we found a fairly long section of an old water race. Even more surprising was the fact that part of it was lined with black plastic.

Subsequent enquiries gave answers. In 1908 Arther Pether was working for Goobragandra Station and he had the race constructed. It picked up water from Stony Creek and Waterfall Creek, then following an elevation about 100m above the Goobarragandra River it took water back through the station paddocks for about 2k – as far as today's Camp Hudson. The paddocks were above the road and had little natural water but the race supplied the stock with water and a bit of green pick in summer.

In much later years (1990s) another resourceful landowner made use of the race. His surname was Fenske. He had an engineering back ground. He cleaned out the race, lined it with plastic where such was needed, then used the water to generate electricity; enough to fully supply his property needs. He had some difference of opinion with power authorities and gave up.

He also grew grapes and made his own brand of wine. To make it a little different he used different berries to give it a distinct flavour. I bought and consumed some of his Boysenberry Wine and Mixed Berry Wine and gave it an A+ ranking.

There's still plenty of wildlife in the bush around The Hole. Kangaroos, wallabies and wombats are common. There are numerous birds, especially lyrebirds and various parrots, feral pigs, feral cats and foxes and plenty of hollows in mature trees to provide home for possums and gliders.

Snakes are common, mainly copperheads – often called yellow-bellied blacks. During construction of the walking track I found that some of the workers were killing every snake they saw – they were adamant that their lives were at risk; being attacked and bitten by a highly venomous reptile. I told them otherwise, even showed the written proof and they became friends with the local copperheads.

Mattocks and shovels were being used to cut the metre wide foot track. Much of it was into ground that was totally dry but often small crawfish were being unearthed. Their underground tunnels were very obvious. Their carapace were quite colourful and one claw was much bigger than the other one. To me they were an oddity.

I found it interesting to hear Jack talk about the wildlife that previously lived in the area. His mother had told him that koalas (native bears) were common when she was a child and the last one she could remember seeing was at the bottom of a tree and it was crying like a baby. Repeating Jack's words, "It was at a spot called Shelley's Flat, at the top of the Zig Zag, a small flat just big enough to swing a cat. My mother said it was sick, they were all dying from some disease. That was before the turn of the century. They say the early settlers shot them out, but my mother says they just died out."

Jack also spoke of rock wallabies, native cats, tiger cats, kangaroo rats, potaroos, wallaroos and bandicoots. I doubt if any of these animals have been seen in, in this area, in the past sixty years.

Jack's grandfather, Jim McNamara, was a blade shearer while living at The Hole. He'd start in the western sheds, often at 'Deepwater', on the Murrumbidgee River, near Hay, in July, and follow the shearing, from shed to shed, to get back home for Christmas. The size of his family is proof that he usually made it. It ended up being thirteen.

I can't imagine what it must have been like for Jim's wife to be living at The Hole with her tribe of children – babies, toddlers, children, young adults. It was a place where she had to rely on her own resources for practically everything. The next child was probably born when her husband was away shearing again.

After about ten years at The Hole Jim did a swap with The Lands Department. He gave up his holdings at The Hole for a 30 acre block on the Goobarragandra River, upstream from Goobarragandra Station, and just before the junction of the Peak River. The place is now called 'Mack's Crossing', or to many locals "Greasy Macks". Somehow the 'k' got tacked on; it would be more accurate if the spelling was 'Mac's'. It was given that name because of one of Jim's relatives, a bachelor, who took up residence there. When I asked Jack Cribb why he was called Greasy the reply was "I guess you never saw him, he was a greasy old coot, never worried about washing, or changing his clothes, lived rough, he was just greasy looking."

Mack's Crossing, the Peak River and the Goobarragandra River thereabouts became one of the best trout fishing spots in the mountains.

I suppose I've fished every bit of water from The Junction (Little and Big Rivers) a few miles out of Tumut to Mack's Crossing. Even to one outing in 1944 when the Roddy boys and I rode bikes out to a spot where we hid our bikes and sneaked through private property to fish Stony Creek. It was hard to get through scrub to reach the water but when we did we could see six, or more, good size fish in every pool. We managed to catch some using a copper spinner but then the fish went on strike and all the action stopped – except for the 20 mile bike ride back home.

When the original McNamara family left the place at the river crossing 'Greasy Mac', the son of one of Jim's brothers moved in. Cecil Piper and Jack Cribb were able to tell me quite a deal about Greasy. He worked at any kind of job through the mountains, fencing, ringbarking, rabbiting, clearing and "as long as he had a sheet of bark to camp under he was happy. He didn't go in for washing very much, himself or his clothes, he was a bit greasy looking so he got the name "Greasy Mac."

Jack Cribb also told me that Greasy had lived between two big rocks, with a sheet of bark as a roof, a couple of miles further up the river but had to move when a landslide moved one of the rocks. He also lived in a mine entrance, a mine operated by Stokes Brothers on Bill O'Brien's property nearby.

Old Mrs McNamara, still living at Mac's Crossing by herself, died some time after WW1 and it was then that Greasy moved in, the first house he'd lived in for most of his life. It was there that he died, about 1928.

Cecil Piper told me that when his father, Israel, was manager of Goobragandra Station he considered Greasy to be a mate and regularly took some tucker to him. On one occasion he found him in his bed, delirious. Israel stayed with him until he became rational. When Greasy realised he hadn't died and that he had company he said, "I've cheated the two of them." Israel's response was, "Two of them. Who'd you cheat?" "The Devil and the undertaker," was Greasy's reply.

It was not long after that Israel made another visit and found that Greasy had died. Word was sent to Tumut Police and Sgt Joe Buck came out on the Harley Davidson motor bike and sidecar. He picked up Israel and they went on to The Crossing. Cec finished his story this way:

Joe: "I think we'll plant him here, Israel."

Israel: "No bloody way, he might have been a strange old coot, but he should be buried in a cemetery."

Joe: All right, Israel. Help me get him in the sidecar. I'll take him into town."

Last word from Cecil: "The road from Mac's Crossing, down the river and into town would have been a shocker. Old Greasy must have had the bloody roughest ride he'd ever had." Cecil didn't tell me whether he had to occupy the sidecar with Greasy.

Cecil Piper provided me with information about the collapsed hut near the edge of the large clump of elm trees at The Hole. His father was managing Goobragandra Station and in 1919 he engaged two returned servicemen from WW1, James Auckland and Billy Briggs, to put up the building. At the time The Hole was part of a 14,000 Snow Lease held by the station. It included all the country to Murphy's Ridge and Mt Nimbo. It's sheer size and the rough state of much of the country made it necessary to have out-buildings for the use of workmen checking stock. Mustering yards were also built at The Hole.

The hut built by Jim McNamara in the 1880s was nearby but it had been destroyed by fire. Everything for the 1919 hut came from the surrounding bush except for the roofing iron which was taken in on a slide pulled by a pair of bullocks.

Perhaps the timber used was not the most durable as time has seen the structure settle gracefully to the ground still in one piece with very little of the slabs and posts remaining. The rafters and roofies are stringybark and would have been cut back on the ridge towards the river. They were cut over 90 years ago and from their appearance now could have a few more years life in them, that's if the roofing iron remains to protect them.

A bushwalker, today, needing shelter might be able to crawl in under the roofing iron. A check for resident snakes or rats is suggested. Norman Harris told me that he often camped under the roof when he was mustering in the 1940s and 1950s, ,

Norman Harris was another of those oldtimers who had a remarkable memory. Quite often we'd sit on his front verandah at Bombowlee and talk for a couple of hours and I was likely to say, "Norm, how can you remember all this, or are you having me on?" His reply would be, "No fear, it's true. I'd be riding through the bush all day, looking for lost sheep, and when I got back home I'd have a feed, go to bed, then I'd think about what I'd seen and done all day – things like a rock outcrop, a

stretch of creek, a particular tree, a view of a mountain, where I pulled up to boil the billy, all the things I'd seen, then I'd go to sleep and next day I'd remember the whole lot. I suppose everything got stuck in my memory."

Here's an example of one of Norm's stories when I asked him if he knew anything about 'Otto'. The notation 'Otto's Hill' appears on the CMA Brindabella Map. "Yes, he was German I think. He had a hut upstream from Stokes' Hut, near where the two arms of the Goobarragandra meet. He was poking around the whole area looking for gold and he just disappeared. Well, some time later someone found his body, that's how Otto's Hill got his name, it was somewhere on it. They just planted him where he was, in a shallow grave, covered with stones, one was supposed to have his name on it. When I heard of it I went looking for the grave and I found it, the rock with his name was half buried, but I found it."

"Norm, do you think you could take me to the grave?"

"Sure, I could, only been there once but I could get you there. Do you ride a horse?"

"No." So I didn't put Norm's bush skills to the test.

"Norm, do you know anything about Frog Porridge Gully?"

"Yes. It's a little creek running into the river near Stokes Mine, that's Goobarragandra Mine. It's only little but there are some little still pools in it and that's where the local frogs lay their eggs. I've seen the pools covered with white frothy stuff, that's the frogs' eggs. You'd swear that someone had tipped in a saucepan of porridge."

I'm sure that when Norm was talking to me he'd switched on his memory and he could 'see' what he was talking about.

Norman was a great help to officers of the NSW Department of Lands when they were determining the route for the Hume & Hovell Walking Track which was to pass through The Hole. He was able to show them the track that Jim McNamara had cut down to the Goobarragandra River and give other valuable information. When Ray Mullins asked him, "What was the bush like when you were a young bloke, back in the 1930s?" He was able to tell him, "It was much more open, you could canter a horse everywhere, and you needed to be able to if you were looking for cattle that mightn't have seen a man or a horse for months and months. There was no wattle scrub or any of this black flannel bush." (Now called Cassinia – Smoke Bush, Cauliflower Bush or Dog Bush)

Norman was able to talk about all the peaks in the Bogong Mountains (Jounama Peaks, Big Plain, Numbananga, Michelago, etc.) He and other stockmen recognised their shapes and used them as reference points. (Hovell, in his Journal, had done the same - *A very high Mountain, formed like a Stack or more properly speaking like a pyramid, and may be called a Second Ben Loman* – and was a reference point for several days.) Today that peak is called Numbananga. It also featured on Assistant Surveyor Granville Stapylton's map as 'Ambadango' when he surveyed the Tumut River in 1833.

Today (2013), when one reaches Mack's Crossing one has the option of turning right onto the Goobarragandra Powerline Road and following it to the Snowy Mountains Highway just before Yarrangobilly, or turning left and soon being blocked by a locked gate that stops access to Kosciuszko National Park. That's a pity, as this part of the park is an interesting area to visit and to find out something about its history. Much of its story is linked with gold mining, early access to Kiandra and stock moving into the high country summer grazing.

GOOBARRAGANDRA GOLD

At this stage in its evolution the Goobragandra is a young river still confined to a deep 'V' shaped valley, with heavily timbered steep slopes, hardly any alluvial river flats, a fast flowing fairly consistent level, but subject to severe flooding with rock strewn banks and river bed.

Every stream in this part of the Great Dividing Range has been prospected for gold from 1850 to 1940 – start of WW2.

When the main rush at Kiandra subsided the miners, both European and Chinese, worked their way down the streams such as the Goobarragandra, Tumut, Murrumbidgee, Eucumbene and Goodradigbee. I've gone into the headwaters of all these rivers and I've found that progress can range from being difficult to impossible. An example – a mate and I climbed down Dubbo Falls to get into the bed of the Goobarragandra then decided we'd go upstream to see if we could get to Stokes' Mine (King's Mine, Goobarragandra Mine). We soon found ourselves in a fast flowing stream, car size waterworn boulders choking the flow, vertical precipices 20 to 30 metres high on both banks. When our rate of upstream progress dropped to about a metre a minute we used ropes and adrenalin to make our escape up the gorge side.

I was interested, but in total agreement, to read a notation on a map drawn by Surveyor Stapylton, the first surveyor to venture into the Goobarragandra River in 1837. The notation said 'Inaccessible Gorge' – if anything that was an understatement.

Much has been documented about gold mining on this part of the Goobarragandra River and this with what other people have told me and my own investigations should make for interesting reading.

The Stokes family were some of the first to move into the Goobragandra Valley, upstream from Mack's Crossing and what is now Kosciuszko National Park. They had been involved in the West Wyalong Field and decided to try somewhere else. They left with their belongings on a horse drawn cart but when the cart broke down they finished their journey using homemade wheelbarrows. Their first hut was built near to where Dinnertime Creek joins the river, but after a short time moved several miles further up the river and built another house opposite the spot where Emu Flat Creek runs into the river. Up to a few years ago a walnut tree and other fruit trees (pear?) were near what was left of the house site. They also were responsible for other buildings and improvements between the two houses they had built. One was a sulky shed because for years their road didn't extend to their main house. The sulky shed was at the base of Ugly Mountain. Any previous track finished at 'Irwin's Paddock' which is now the holding called 'Pretty Sallee', a bit of freehold land

within KNP. One of the Stokes boys put up his own log cabin hut on their leasehold land.

Although they took up land as being grazing land they had little to do with stock of their own. They were more inclined to take stock, mainly sheep, on agistment. They – the father and the sons – Bill, Charlie and Harry, were more interested in gold. Many of the local gold mining ventures thereabouts, in the early 20th Century, and not just linked with the Goobarragandra River, had a Stokes connection.

They started to wash for gold on their side of the river bank, directly opposite the mouth of Emu Flat Creek and found that payable gold extended all the way back to their new house. They had to make a decision – knock down the house or try elsewhere. They stayed put. Cecil Piper believes that had been working outwash deposits from an ancient Emu Creek. They also worked a rich deposit about a mile and a half upstream from where later Stokes Mine came into being. The three Stokes boys, each independently, told Cecil that that bit of gold mining was their most successful ever. They spoke of it returning about 2000 pounds and that was when gold was worth about three pounds an ounce.

Their main discovery led to the formation of the Goobarragandra Gold Mining Company – also known as Stokes' Mine and King's Mine.

Bill Stokes was looking for some missing sheep and was riding along a ridge above, but close, to the river. He rode across a very small creek (Simons Creek) and his horse stopped and put its head down to have a drink. Bill looked down and saw something glinting under the water. He dismounted and I'd imagine he was rather pleased to find he was looking at an exposed reef – gold contained in rock.

The brothers started to work the area using pick and shovel. They found that the gold was in a series of reefs on the ridge side just above the Goobarragandra River. The top of some reefs were exposed and others could be revealed by removed the ground and litter covering it. The reefs dropped vertically and varied in width from a few inches to a couple of feet. Stone holding obvious gold was stockpiled and it was then that the brothers started to realise they had problems to solve. They had no machinery to improve things on site, they lacked capital, there was no closeby road to use to take out their stockpile to have it treated.

Initially, they started to take the ore out on pack horses to dump it near their house. In the hope of making this job easier they set about making a track above the southern side of the river. This was a very difficult thing to do as it's extremely steep country with no real river bank or flats, but with the river at the bottom of a deep gorge, where the sides, in places, are vertical. Today's topographic map shows over 2km of the Goobarragandra River from Dubbo Creek and upstream to be one continuous stretch of cascade, rapids and waterfall.

Such terrain meant that the track had to be cut into the side of the hill, several hundred feet above the river. In places the track had to be blasted out of the rockface to form a ledge just wide enough for a horse to walk. Cecil Piper knew of a surveyor who lost his packhorse when the legs of a theodolite on the pack poked into the rockface and levered the horse over the edge. Horse, theodolite, packsaddles and gear finished in the river several hundred feet below. Cecil finished that part of his description with "I've ridden that bit of track dozens of times and I've had to hold my breath in lots of places."

As more ore was stockpiled it was taken by packhorse to Goobragandra Station and from there by bullock team to Adelong for crushing.

Cecil told me of another incident that he thought was amusing. I did, too, but the main character would have had a different opinion.

Jack Auckland had the job of packing out the ore from the mine. He used one horse with each of the packsaddles holding a hundredweight of ore. Jack walked in front and led the horse.

On one trip back into the mine Jack thought it would be easier for him to get on the horse, so he did. He didn't arrive back at Stokes house so one of the McNamara boys from Mack's Crossing was sent in to look for him. He found the packhorse quietly moving around feeding and Jack was still seated on its back and had been there for over 24 hours. There was no saddle on the horse but Jack was securely caught by the packsaddle hooks that had become stuck right through his trousers. Every movement had made his capture more secure and he'd spent the entire time 'in the saddle'.

It was decided that capital was needed so that mechanical mining could be brought into operation. A Public Company, "Goobarragandra Gold Mining Company", was floated in June, 1915. To that time, when the Stokes family reputedly sold the mine for 2000 pounds (\$4000) it had been known as Stokes' Mine. The prospectus for the syndicate reveals that 5000 pounds capital would be raised through the sale of 250 twenty pound shares and that Henry Stokes was to be mine manager.

A Mr Chas A. Mulholland, Ph.D. Metallurgist & Mining Engineer and Mining Geologist was commissioned to inspect the mine and make a report. Some ore samples assayed showed over 10 oz. per ton and the average was 6 oz. Mr Mulholland calculated that the site held 2400 tons of crushable material that would yield gold worth 213,000 pounds. Most ore samples showed silver as well.

Mr J.B. Jacquet, Chief Inspector of Mines, visited the mine and in his report of 7th March, 1916, stated, "the results so far obtained are very encouraging and I would particularly direct attention to the high grade character of the ore already exposed many other gold bearing reefs will be discovered."

Dick Bullock, one of my informants, who actually worked in the mine at one time, told me "Bill Stokes was a real flash bloke. If he had money he went through it like water. He'd go into Tumut and board at the Royal Hotel and when he was half shot he'd light his cigars with five pound notes." I've heard of the whole three Stokes boys as being the mine manager.

It's no wonder the company float was a success. A track was constructed to take in a stamper battery and a compressor tank to allow pneumatic drilling to take place. Levels were taken and a water race constructed to take water from the river about one and a half miles upstream and bring it to the mine site. These were major operations. The nearest road was several miles away and any track from it would have to be down steep slopes covered with dense virgin bush, rocky patches and crossing minor creeks. The bulk of the race would be through thick bush but when it neared the mine site it would have to be on a precipitous slope and just above the actual river. Those planning the operation decided that the last part of the race should be made wide enough to be a race but to be the road as well. A road wide enough and strong enough was essential to get a wagon, a team of bullocks and tons of equipment to the site. An exceptional bullocky would also be needed. There were two such men living in Tumut at the time; Dan French and Herb Buckley and I believe both were involved, either when the mine was being brought into being or when much of the equipment was brought out when the mine closed. It was common practice to take mining equipment to a site, use it while the mine operated, leave it sitting in the bush, then collect whatever might be useful in a new operation. 'Leftover' equipment seemed to belong to no one and be available for anyone who wanted to collect it. I know some of that at the Goobarragandra Mine, such as a Pelton Wheel, ended up at another mine near Mack's Crossing, and some went to The

Horseshoe Mine and the Waragong Timber Mill

A wagon and bullock team; perhaps up to 24 bullocks, was taken out to the Broken Cart track, the best ridge dropping down to the river selected and the team and wagon became a bulldozer/grader. It headed into the bush and started to descend by moving in a downhill path across the slope of the mountain. Scrub, fallen timber, small trees and loose stones were swept aside. If a large fallen tree was met the team was unhitched and used to pull the tree aside. The river was reached somewhere near to where Feints Mountain Fire Trail crosses the river today.

Once across the river a right turn was made to follow the river downstream. Getting closer to the mine site the track that had been constructed to be both a water race and a roadway was met and the bullock team and wagon carefully manoeuvred onto it. This had to be the roadway for several hundred yards and in places the river side of it was a rock bank, 12 to 15 feet high, almost in the water and had been purposely built.

The site for the stamper battery was reached and it was unloaded with other associated machinery, but the track continued to where it had been determined an adit would be driven into the side of the ridge. It became more difficult for the full team of bullocks to be worked so some were unhitched, then a few more, and even more with the remaining bullocks being urged to 'pull a bit harder' The final bit of track was reached, the wagon with the compressor tank, pneumatic drills, other gear and the depleted bullock team came to a halt. How were things to be unloaded, how were the wagon and the bullocks to be brought back out? I've heard a couple of descriptions of the delivery, unloading and the getting out. They seem ridiculous but once on site where the evidence can be seen they must be accepted as true. Again, bullock power (muscle) was essential for all the heavy lifting and pulling.

Things were unloaded either by building a nearby platform, or using an overhanging tree and block and tackle and ropes, the wagon stripped of as much as possible, then lifted into the air and while suspended the bullocks brought back under it. Then the elevated wagon swung around 180 degrees and lowered to the ground. Then, all that remained was to reassemble wagon and team and drive back out. Such seems improbable but from what I've heard and read and then two site inspections there can be no other conclusion. The extent and amount of material known to be at the mine site is proof that several trips by the bullock team were required.

The water race was taken through a series of diminishing diameter pipes, then to a jet which was directed to a Pelton Wheel which in turn, by a belt, operated the stamper battery.

My first visit to the Goobarragandra Mine was made in April, 1993 with Lyn Evans, NPWS Ranger and Jack Bridle, Talbingo resident with an amazing knowledge about the region. We went via Long Plain Road, Broken Cart Track and Feint's Mountain Fire Trail to reach the river, then on foot to the mine site.

A second visit was made, in 1993 with Cliff McElroy and Neville Markham, two retired geologists/mining engineers, both of whom had done a lot of research on the mine records at the NSW Mines Department (Bureau of Mineral Resources).

I also found and talked to Dick Bullock who had worked in the mine for a number of years and Fred Brumby who had visited the mine when it was operating and had been involved in a trip to the mine site in 1947 to bring out some of the mining relics.

My first trip with Lyn and Jack was one of 'search and discover'. Once to the river crossing it took us 30 minutes to find the water race, but before that we found what had been a hut site on the small

flat just across the river – there were fruit trees and an old car tyre; possibly the main camp for the mine workers and we almost trod on one of the castiron stamper battery weights that must have weighed a couple of hundred kilos. Had someone tried to carry it out as a souvenir? No. but I did come to an explanation when further information came to hand. It possibly fell off Fred Brumby's truck when he went in to salvage things years later.

Eventually, we found the stamper battery, a ten head affair, no more than 30 metres from the river which was quite turbulent and quick flowing. Nearby were several corrugated iron tanks with open tops and holding crushed stone, a galvanised iron sluice box of some kind, like an old double laundry tub, a long lined box divided into compartments, several ore skips, what was likely to have been an explosives safe and other pieces of equipment.

We believed the actual mine was further downstream so we spread out to find it. The slope of the land became much steeper with much loose rock and a dense cover of trees and undergrowth. We had to be careful of many hidden mining cuts. Jack felt we were too high up the slope so dropped down close to the river. A little later he called out to say he had found the adit, the mine entrance.

In descending to reach him I almost fell down a hole, or slit, which dropped away vertically and to of some depth. I subsequently found that the first working of the mine was on a series of vertical quartz and granite reefs across the ridge above the river. We found one such cut that was about 15 metres long, up to a metre wide and deep enough that we couldn't see the bottom, but a dropped stone stopped its noise at what I estimate to be 30 to 40 feet. The walls of each cut were smooth, but not straight and we could see pieces of timber spanning the gap. We concluded that the whole of the quartz reef had been removed and the timber spans were to prevent the neighbouring rock clefting off and falling into the cut and onto miners as they worked themselves lower.

At the mine adit, the mouth of the horizontal tunnel, we found the roadway again and sitting just few meters away was the castiron compressor tank. We were amazed at the size of the tank: it was about 5m long and 1.5m in diameter. The castiron sheets had been heavy gauge, showed little sign of rusting and the patterns of lichen and rivets brought cameras into action. We did offer a short prayer to the men and the bullocks that had brought it in. Nearby were a couple of rusted pneumatic drills still showing their year of manufacture.

On my second visit with the two geologists we were stopped by a park barrier at Broken Cart and had to walk the 6+km down the fire trail to reach the river with the last 3km dropping 350m in elevation. We knew the climb would be there waiting for us on our return. Several hours at the mine site with rocks being picked up and classified, machinery being examined, mining activities being described, photos being taken and pages of Department of Mines records being compared to what we could see were enough to give the three of us Gold Fever. We promised ourselves further visits but they did not eventuate.

When the Goobarragandra Gold Mining Company came into being a Mr King became the Mine Manager and the mine became known as King's Mine. The adit was put in to intersect the reefs but it seems expectations were never reached. Seven reefs continued to be worked and it was hoped that an eighth one would be found.

Cecil Piper continued to provide further information. He still had a clear recollection of watching Bill Stokes panning for gold in the bed of the river near the Feints Mountain Fire Trail crossing. He was using a Pelton Wheel to lift sand and gravel from the river bed and then using a gold pan. Cecil remembers Bill pointing out bits of gold up to match head size and flakes of gold half the size of a finger nail. When I asked, "When was this" the answer was "In the depression years, possibly early 1930s." Cecil also told me I should go and see Dick Bullock who lived in Tumut.

I found Dick. He was 86, had nothing much to do and was keen to talk to me. He'd worked in the mine in the late 1920s and early 1930s. It was on and off work because the mine would operate then stop. He also worked in other mines, Micalong, Argalong, Billapaloola, Lacmalac, and other places. It was rather difficult to bring him back to King's Mine if he got sidetracked to one of the other mines. But he assured me that everything he told me was true, completely true. It was certainly interesting. Here's an example:

I noticed that the top of his index finger, left hand, was missing. Dick obliged by saying "I done that at King's Mine. Lopped it off with an axe. I was workin' in the bottom of one of the shafts, one we called 'The Winze' and I was doin' some timber work and I mishit.(Winze – mining term of German origin – vertical shaft sunk in a already existing horizontal shaft.)

Dick explained that he was using a long handled axe – wrong one, it should have been short handled - to shape a wedge. He'd cut one face and changed his position to cut the oither face. In the confined space in the Winze the long handle of the axe hit the rock wall to make an unintended trajectory of the axe head and instead of hitting the wedge it hit his finger.

His workmates were a bit on the concerned side and suggested he might need to see a doctor.

"How'd you get into town?" I asked. "You didn't have a car? Anyhow I believe there was no road to the mine."

"That's right. How'd I get there? I walked."

Dick continued his story. His hand was put into a small cloth bag that still had some flour in it. The purpose of the flour was to soak up the blood and hopefully stop the bleeding. He set out to make the walk back to Tumut, alone. It would be over 30 miles (48k).

When he reached the right hand branch of the of the Goobarragandra River (Feints Creek) he found it in flood, so he stripped, tied his clothes in a bundle, found a suitable log, launched himself and floated across. On reaching Mac's Crossing he had to do the same thing again as he was on the wrong side of the river. Would his story get any better? It did.

"When I got to Lacmalac I was about done in. I'd lost a fair bit of blood by then, so I went into Stan Kell's place and knocked. His Missus come to the door and seen the bloody flourbag on me hand and I told her what I'd done."

She called out to her daughter, "Bonnie, get the car. We have to take Mr Bullock to the doctor."

We examined the finger and I asked, "Dr Mason?"

"Yes, old Jock. Done a bloody good job, didn't he?"

"Just as well, there'd be no compo in those days."

"My word there was. I got eighty quid for that."

Then I got another hour's explanation about solicitors, insurance claims, threats, counter threats, rogues, cheats, unfair laws, social class, not getting paid, etc.

Dick did provide me with his view (true memories) of life working at King's Mine and much of it is

worth recording.

He was often working with his best mate, Artie McDonald, but others at the Goobarragandra Mine were Jack Kitto, the Stokes brothers, Haywood who was manager (King had left) and Ritchie (Time Keeper). The Stokes had a hut near the mine site and the others lived in Bradley's Hut, near the river crossing, upstream.

“Haywood was the manager, but he wasn't there much, Ritchie was sort of in charge an' he brought in the tucker each week – up to Argalong, then past Big Dubbo Hill until the road ran out still about two miles short of the mine. Someone had to walk up to meet him. Trouble was he wouldn't turn up an' he'd come back with nothing. Had to live on old damper an' a bit of fat. He'd fallen for a girl at Argalong an' couldn't get past her, but after a while he married her an' things improved.”

“We could always catch fish, plenty in the river an' creeks, about half a pound. One time some of the bigwigs from Sydney turned up unexpected, an' we were out of tucker. So, I said, “Never mind, I'll just catch some fish, now where's me best fishin' shovel?” I got a shovel, nothin' else, an' left 'em. Was back in half an hour with enough fish for the lot. They couldn't work out how I done it.”

“I didn't tell 'em I'd just gone up the water race a bit an' used the shovel to block it, an' walked back along the race an' picked up the best ones that was flappin' around in the bottom of the race. Then I opened the race an' let it run again.”

The gold was processed on site in Dick's day. He told me about getting caught one day. There was a round piece of gold, about the size of a saucer, on a bench one day and the manager who had just smelted the gold said, “There you are Dick, you've always wanted a piece of gold. If you can pick that bit up you can have it, you can carry it away.”

“You havin' me on?”

“No, fair dinkum, you can have it.”

“I picked it up, well, dropped it as soon as I touched it. Nearly burnt me bloody fingers off. Just been smelted, was still red hot, I'd have liked to have got it, must have been two or three pounds.”

Dick tried to explain the method of gold processing to me but I failed to fully understand it. I got another lesson from my two geologist friends but I'm still very much in the dark. A knowledge of chemistry is required – especially the chemical reactions that occur when one substance is added to another. My would-be teachers spoke about lime, zinc shavings, mercury, sulphuric acid, cyanide. I think that everyone working at the mine knew what had to be done and when to do it. One of Dick's jobs was to load the ore into the crusher hoppers and then shovel out the contents of the settlement tanks. There was always the chance for accidents to happen.

“Doug (Harry Stokes' son) was workin' with us one time. He was a dangerous, young bugger at times. He was up the slope cuttin' green slabs an' he'd let 'em go down the side of the hill. They'd take off like blazes, dancin' and boundin' all over the place. One went straight down a shaft where Bill was workin' at the bottom. He heard it comin' an' just managed to get away from it. He got the sack straight away, got it from everyone.”

Every bit of waste from the mine found its way into the river, including cyanide, and some property owners, further downstream were ready to blame it for the loss of livestock.

Most of the work was done on the vertical reefs, one man at the bottom doing the mining of the ore

and the other at the top with the windlass pulling up the bucket. There were always loose bits of rock and soil falling down. This was the reason for installing bits of timber to span the shaft as it went down lower.

Dick related one 'close shave'. "I was in a shaft at the Goobarralong Mine, at the bottom, an' a Mine Inspector come to the mine an' pulled me up an' said, "You ain't got a penthouse, you can't work down there. A penthouse is a platform that's above the man at the bottom. He gets under it when the bucket is being pulled up. That's when things fall down – stones, dirt, even the bucket."

"They put one in, an' the very next day half the bloody shaft gave way, fell on the penthouse, then onto me. When it finished I was buried up to the waist. Then I had to dig meself out – too dangerous for anyone else to come down."

"There was another time when we all got a bloody good scare. It was '31 or '32, the year the Southern Cloud crashed. We was all in Bradley's Hut, rotten bloody day, wind, pourin' rain, thunder, the works. An' the noise, couldn't hear yourself think. We had to keep a prop against the door because it kept blowin' in. Then, there was this bloody great roar, come straight over the hut, we all thought it was the plane comin' low to have a look, the door prop gave way, the door blew in an' this bloody roar nearly took the hut off. There was an old bloke with us, he was as deaf as a post, an' he heard the whole shebang, thought his head was goin' to explode."

On that day the Southern Cloud was heard in many places in the mountains. It was lost, and remained lost for 28 years until Tom Sonter, a Snowy Mountains Scheme worker found it, and the remains of all its occupants in a very remote, and wild, region of the Snowy Mountains near Tumbarumba. The area near Black Jack Mountain was known as 'World's End' – rather fitting.

Dick seems to have had trouble getting his pay in most of the mines he has worked. When he and his mate, worked in the Billapaloola Mine, the manager "got us for our wages, you did a lot of work in them days for no pay. We was workin' in the Billapaloola Mine an' we was owed about 40 quid each, they owed money everywhere so they was took to court The solicitor bloke told the beak that everyone would get their money so they left it at that. Did we get paid? – no bloody fear."

"Then it happened at the Goobarragandra Mine. Ritchie come to us one night an' said, The company is goin' broke, you won't get your money an' me and Archie was owed 25 quid each, five weeks pay. If you keep on workin' you'll be doin' it for nothin'. Pull out now, or here's a suggestion – wait till the middle of the night then turn off the jet (they had a Pelton Wheel set up to wash into the bank an' take stuff into a sluice box.) Then get a few bags and half fill 'em with some of the fines in the sluice. Tie 'em up and plant 'em somewhere. '

"So me an' Bill done that, got sugar bags, half filled 'em, tied the top and buried 'em in a gravel bank in the river. Sure enough, the Company went bust, an' we all quit, but Bill an' me went back after a couple of weeks, got our loot, washed up an' guess how much we got. We got 10 ounces, an' it was worth five pounds an ounce. So we got fifty quid, just what we was owed. You can be lucky some times."

"I remember Herb Buckley comin' to the mine. One time he brung in some replacements for the stamper, brought 'em to the top of the range on his bullock wagon, then he cut down a forky tree an' turned it into a slide an' used two bullocks to come down to the mine."

"When the mine shut down everyone left but then someone in Tumut, business people I think, wanted some of the mine gear to go to the Horse Shoe Mine up past Broken Cart an' Herb got the job. He wanted help so he asked me an' Archie to go with him, so we did. We went in and loaded

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the gear on Herb's wagon an' when we got to Broken Cart we found the track was near to not been a track – washed away, trees down, so it took us two days to get to the Horse Shoe. An' I remember Herb was to do the cookin' an' he found he'd forgotten the bakin' soda – you need it to make the damper rise. So Herb says, don't worry I can fix that, I can make me own, he got some leaves from a tree, burnt 'em an' turned 'em into white ash. Then he mixed it with the flour to cook a damper. It didn't rise, was as flat as a piece of leather an' just as tough. Herb made up some excuse."

"Artie an' me we never got paid. Herb said it was not up to him to pay us that we had to see the business blokes in Tumut an' we didn't even know who they was, so, that's another time I missed out."

"Comin' back was a bit different. Herb said it was too steep to bring the wagon out the same way so we come down the Ugly Mountain Track. Herb was drivin' an' the brakes was runnin' hot an' pushin' the bullocks so Herb took the front wheels off an' tied a big tree behind the wagon an' we snuck down like that."

Sam Hill July 2013

Written by Harry Hill in 2003, based on his oral history interviews of local identities over the past 40 years

MURPHY'S RIDGE

Murphy's Ridge is the crest of the high country to the east, and running parallel to the Upper Goobarragandra River. Today's maps show it to be totally forested, steep to very steep, and completely lacking in any notation that it has ever been visited by white man – there are no roads, no tracks, no powerlines, no places where people live now or have ever lived. Many small streams shown as being permanent ones twist and turn to run to the west to get to the Goobarragandra river while those running to the east make their way to the Goodradigbee River.

Much of the country has an elevation of 1000m and over, while the valley of the Goobarragandra is just over 400m elevation. Mt Nimbo Trig – 1244m, Jumpers Hill – 1162m, Bullock Hill – 1000m and the valley are just a few kilometres apart.

I'd be surprised if any person has visited this bit of the Great Dividing Range in the past twenty years, even much longer. A few walkers using the Hume & Hovell Walking Track do use the northern end of Murphy's Ridge to pass below Mt Nimbo to drop down through The Hole to get to the Goobarragandra River. That still leaves hundreds of square kilometres of inhospitable bush free of humans.

Such was not always the case. In the late 1890s and the first half of the 20th Century the whole area was prospected for gold and it was found in many places, both in creek beds, on hillsides and the very tops of hills and mountains. Prospectors knew they could find alluvial gold in streams but they also looked for reefs and ancient stream deposits well away from present water courses.

Hume & Hovell Track walkers will cross Boundary Road and enter Kosciuszko National Park to start on Murphy's Ridge and are certain to see excavations, heaped up stones, spoil heaps and they will conclude such have something to do with the construction of the walking track, but they will be wrong – they all indicate where someone said, "This looks to be a likely place. Let's dig here."

The Stokes Brothers were not the only ones to work the Upper Goobarragandra River. The small streams running in from the east and north of the river were worked extensively.

One of the earliest miners was Billy McLaren who built himself a hut on Emu Flat Creek about a kilometre upstream from its junction with the river. He dug a race to take water out of Emu Flat Creek and washed the western flats and banks of the creek.

Wal Kell, Lacmalac grazier, later built a hut on the same site as Billy's hut when he was running sheep in the area. Wal even put in a suspension bridge across the river so he could walk his sheep in and out when the river was too deep. It was a narrow bridge, just wide enough for a single line of sheep and it had a run of netting on both sides to stop the sheep falling into the river. I imagine it was hard to get the first sheep started on the bridge – quite a deal of yelling, dogs barking, sheep bleating and suitable profanity.

There was another miner's hut near Emu Flat Creek. That miner had a race coming out of Myers Creek upstream from its junction with Emu Flat Creek and he used the water to wash the eastern creek flats.

The miner was not seen for some time and police were brought in to check things. Several dogs guarded the hut and prevented the police from gaining entry. The dogs had to be shot and the miner's body was found inside. In all probability the body was buried on site.

Both Myers and Emu Flat Creeks were prospected to their headwaters hoping to find the reef or the

ancient river bed that had been shedding alluvial gold for millions of years. It was never found.

The Stokes family opened up, or took over, a number of gold mines on both the Goobarragandra River and Murphy's Ridge.

The Goobarragandra River curves between Ugly Mountain and the southern end of Murphy's Ridge in a very deep 'V' shaped valley. The end of Murphy's Ridge is known as McLaren's Mountain and it rises about 500m above the river in less than a kilometre. There are known mines on the southern face of McLaren's Mountain and Murphy's Reef Mine was on the northern slopes of Mt Nimbo less than a kilometre from the summit.

It had probably been started by some unknown prospector but was being operated by the Stokes Brothers just prior to WW 1. Cecil Piper, then a young boy, and his father, Israel, were riding through from Goobarragandra Station to Yass and Cecil remembers stopping to talk to the brothers and being asked to share a meal with them. Any ore from that mine and others on the ridge was packed along the ridge and then down McLaren's Mountain to be processed.

The Stokes family established a stamper battery, on the river, close to where Ugly Creek joined the river. The spot was called 'Battery Paddock'. They also constructed a water wheel so that water could be used to power the battery. They constructed the water wheel themselves using local timber and bolts that they forged themselves. Cecil Piper told me that each bolt needed to be two feet six inches long (75cm) and that about 100 were needed to hold the frame together.

Once, when walking this part of the Hume & Hovell Walking Track, several of us took a short diversion to reach Mt Nimbo Trig, then in returning to the walking track we looked for Murphy's Mine which we believed was about a kilometre to the north. We did a considerable amount of wandering around, decided to rejoin the walking track, and accidentally stumbled onto the mine adit. It went horizontally into the mountain side, there was a large pile of spoil nearby, now revegetated and it was possible to enter the actual adit. A couple of us went in a few metres but as it was not timbered in any manner and was in clay type soil we carefully withdrew.

At a higher level, and about ten metres from the mine entrance we found a collapsed shaft. I assume that those working the mine had sunk the shaft, ahead of the face in the adit as an exploratory measure.

A little way below the mine we walked onto a pool of water; circular, 7 or 8 metres across, very clear, up to a metre deep. It appeared to be permanent, but on the side of a mountain at an elevation of over 1200m.

A couple of years ago I found out that much of the machinery from the Goobarragandra Mine had been collected to be used elsewhere. Fred Brumby had been involved in the proceedings and as he was an old mate of mine it was easy for me to approach him to find out what had happened. I had to make several trips to see Fred because we kept getting sidetracked but eventually I got his story. Here it is.

Fred made his trip in 1947, soon after he got out of the army. He and some of his mates got the job of going into the Goobarragandra Gold Mine site to collect and bring out some of the mining machinery. It was brought out to Bill O'Brien's place at Greasy Macks, further down the river, towards Tumut.

Fred's crew consisted of himself, Alf Ritchie, Harry Shooks, Les Harris, and Sonny (Charles Drummond) Stokes - later generation of the Stokes family. They were all locals and knew the area

very well. Fred is not sure who gave them the job or whether they were to be paid, but they were all eager to participate even though the job might take a week, two weeks or even longer.

They had two ex-army trucks equipped with winches and each man took his own tools – axe, shovel, crosscut saw, a swag, but not much else. In 1947 tracks through Buccleuch Forest were almost non-existent but eventually Fred and his crew reached the Broken Cart Gold Field. They believed that the original track had gone down Chinaman's Creek (later called Broken Cart Creek to be non-racist) so a search was made for it.

When it was found the 'fun' started. The track was completely hidden by new forest growth and fallen trees. Continuous axe work was needed and the front truck became a bulldozer. When the original track had crossed minor creeks a corduroy of small tree trunks had been installed. Everything had rotted so new corduroy had to be cut and put in.

It took a couple of days to cut a new track to the river where they set up camp on a small flat. A little way up the opposite slope they found the water race that would take them to the mine. The race became the road that had been used to allow the bullock team to take in the mine machinery. It was perched on the slope (often one of more than 60 degrees), within 20 to 50 feet from the river and with the rock containing wall collapsing in places. Every bit of track had to be examined on foot, and often repaired, before a truck sneaked onto it.

The mine site was reached and the trucks loaded. The track didn't allow for the trucks to be turned around so an hour's travel in reverse was required before a spot was reached and forward travel could be started. Soon after that the back wheel of one truck dropped into a hole. Fred thought the hole had been caused by an old tree stump being burnt in a fire. It might have been sensible to unload the stuck truck but that looked like too much heavy lifting so the mobile truck was linked to the stuck truck, both engines roared the tail shaft of the stuck truck torn off.

Two of the men set off down the bridle track to Stokes Hut with the tail shaft that needed some welding and other repairs. It had to go further than the hut – into Tumut. The others returned to camp to have some 'rest and relaxation'. Alf Ritchie did so with a couple of bottles of rum, became a little bit disoriented, fell in the river and had to be pulled out. The others did some fishing. Fred said they got over one hundred trout and in showing me the size indicated there was nothing under three feet. Bait was hard to find until someone suggested using the red gills of dead fish. That worked until the red colour in the gills faded.

The tailshaft was brought back, installed and the trip recommenced. There was still a section of the builtup track above the river to negotiate. This was being done, carefully, when the engine coughed and died. It couldn't be started. The problem was diagnosed. The truck was so tilted across the track that the petrol in the tank was on one side and would no longer run to the engine. Fred drew the short straw and had to walk back to camp to get a 4 gallon tin of petrol. Movement started again.

The river was crossed and the climb up Chinaman's Creek commenced. Part way up they found that a large Alpine Ash tree had fallen across the track. Fred was adamant that it was at least seven feet in diameter. No one was keen to get stuck into it with axes and crosscut saws so a bypass had to be cut through the scrub.

Towards the end of the climb they reached a steeper section and the truck with the lighter load (mainly long lengths of pipe) lost traction, dug itself in and came to a halt. A wire from one truck was taken up the slope, around a substantial tree and taken back to the other truck. Two roaring engines a noisy winch and shouting onlookers resulted in the two trucks going uphill one forwards, the other backwards.

The machinery was delivered to Bill O'Brien's place near Mack's Crossing and I believe some of it is still there hidden in the blackberries concealing a mine entrance on the very bank of the Goobarragandra River.

UGLY MOUNTAIN

The notation, 'Ugly Mountain', appears on the CMA Blowering Topographic Map. It indicates the position of a prominent peak, immediately south of the Goobarragandra River and the Stokes Hut Trail. The name fascinates me for two reasons – who, and why, was it given such a name, and that it dared me to climb it for years.

I'd seen it on several bushwalks into the Upper Goobarragandra River. Its elevation is given as being 1158m, and the northern face rises directly from the river at an elevation of 500m and from river to the peak would be about a kilometre and a half. That means that much of the slope is from 50 to 60 degrees. One of its most outstanding features is that it's a perfect cone. It can be seen to be covered with a dense eucalypt forest.

It was very obvious and four of our bushwalker group, two men and two women, accepted the challenge and decided to climb it. We were able to get our vehicle to Dinnertime Creek, then followed Stokes Hut Trail until we were at the very base of the mountain on the river.

There was a small diversion as we started. We disturbed a small mob of kangaroos and one stood out – it was an albino. The mob moved ahead of us and immediately became hidden in the bush. Cameras had been in packs so we missed out on an 'albino kangaroo' photo, but the cameras were taken out of packs and were ready for action. Within a few minutes the mob was seen again, but on the move. I took a quick picture but no one believes that a small whiteish spot in the middle of my snap is an albino kangaroo.

Photos were forgotten as we climbed, pushed through dense scrub, laboured up steep sections and looked back to see what part of the climb we had covered – we couldn't determine anything as the vegetation was too thick. We had determined that one ridge ran to the very top and we tried to stay on it. There were frequent stops to rest, debate our intentions and make decisions. After about an hour we had to make another decision – we entered fog, and then light rain. We had no idea where we were. Perhaps a compass might help. We determined a course to follow but that took us into very dense fog. We pulled up again – and found we were about five metres short of a vertical cliff face. A couple of pelted stones that took too long to hit showed us that we were lucky to have stopped.

Compasses were tried again and two compasses, a few metres apart, registered different norths. It looked like we would be spending a night on Ugly Mountain. Perhaps someone's silent prayer was answered because as we sat in silence the fog lifted and for a minute we were able to look through a clear patch in the trees and we had a view of the country across the river valley. It lasted for just enough time for me to convince the others that we were looking at McLaren's Mountain and the end of Murphy's Ridge.

An examination of the map showed us the direction we needed to take to reach Dinnertime Creek and the stock route just beyond it. Wherever we hit the stock route we would need to turn downhill and keep going until we passed Plonk's Hut near The Goobarragandra River. We did the last bit as it was becoming dark and received the news that one lady's husband had been in touch with the local police asking for a search to be organised.

I don't know how Ugly Mountain got its name, but I do know that on one occasion four visitors had more derogatory names ready to bestow on it. It's still one of my favourite peaks.

PLONK'S HUT

It was easy to recognise Plonk's Hut as we came down the Dinnertime Track – someone had painted the name on the front wall. They could just as easily used one of the other names that have been given to the hut – Plonkey's, Lindley's, Venables', Stokes'.

'Stokes' is completely wrong. The Stokes family did build their first hut on Dinnertime Creek, somewhere near 1900, but it was close to where the creek joined the Goobarragandra River. It had been a very temporary shelter used until they built their next house near Emu Flat Creek. Plonk's Hut is several hundred metres up the creek.

'Lindley's' could be correct. The Lindley family were graziers in the Gundagai district and had obtained various Snow Leases in the Long Plain and Long Flat regions during the first half of the 20th Century. The best access to their leases was by way of the Goobaragandra Valley and then a climb into the high country. Jack Lindley was one of my main informants when I was seeking information about 'Cooinbil', a lease that the family held on Long Plain. My father had shorn sheep for his father in the 1930's at 'Jackalas', the Lindley property on the Murrumbidgee River, so that almost made us cousins.

'Venables' is certainly an approved name for the hut. That name came from Jack Venables who had something to do with the erection of the hut in about 1950. He worked part time for the Lindley family in the Snow Lease grazing enterprises. Jack, according to members of the Lindley family, was a competent, honest kind of bloke but an unfortunate love affair saw him abandon society, especially those of the female kind and seek solace in isolation.

The hut in which he lived had almost achieved 'house' status. It consisted of several rooms, a front verandah and outbuildings. A race from Dinnertime Creek brought water to both the house and grounds, so that there was a garden – both flower and vegetable and water was laid onto the house. Jack's changed circumstances turned him into someone who had little purpose in life and he sought comfort in the occasional bottle of wine so he became known as 'Plonk' or 'Plonkey'.

Jack Venables continued to live in the house, did some work for the Lindley family and the Lindley family, in turn, kept an eye on Jack and insisted that he was not a drunkard.

BROKEN CART GOLD FIELD

The Broken Cart Gold Field came into being in association with the main Kiandra Field. Kiandra started in late 1859 and by 1860 there were reports in Sydney newspapers that 10,000 miners were on the field. Some reports give the population, in the area, as being as many as 15,000. Some of the miners came by way of the Broken Cart Track and Long Plain to reach Kiandra. The Broken Cart Track is known to have been used by graziers bringing stock to the high country as early as the 1840s.

While on their way to Kiandra prospectors would have camped near small creeks, washed a couple of pans of gravel and sand and the glint in their pan prompted them to keep on panning. Finds in Broken Cart Creek, Never Never Creek, Happy Go Lucky Gully, Dinnertime Creek (Horse Shoe Mine) were enough to cause minor rushes – often as many as one hundred miners. They primarily

worked stream beds, banks and nearby flat ground. A few shafts were sunk following payable leads but such workings had to be abandoned when groundwater flooded them. Occasional small nuggets were found, most were angular and this caused those finding them to believe they had been more recently shed from reefs (in geological time) and there was a good chance of finding the main reef.

Work on the Broken Cart Gold Field was a succession of starts and stops, accommodation for miners was always of a very temporary nature – tents, huts, lean-tos. There is no known evidence of hotels and only one mention of a shop, but one newspaper report of a large band of miners threatening to take by force the contents of several carts that were taking supplies to Kiandra where the teamsters had refused to sell their goods. It appears that the miners won this confrontation.

Mining, of the nature described, continued at Broken Cart, right through the 1860s and 1870s and all the miners were Europeans.

By the 1880s alluvial mining in the Kiandra Field had almost stopped. More shafts and adits were being sunk, reefs were being followed and sluicing and dredging were major activities. Large quantities of water were required and the construction of holding dams and water races became major operations.

Large numbers of Chinese had been brought to Australia during the gold rush days of the 1850s – 1860s. Many of them came as indentured labour, that is they had come to an agreement with some person of power, importance and wealth to work for him in return for a wage of some kind, often one paid to the worker's family. The labourer's passage was paid and he was usually part of a group that were under the control of a supervisor. The indentured worker was to be fed and housed but had little say in what he had to do. Many Australian Gold Fields had a separate living area for the Chinese. There were clashes between the European and Chinese communities. There was a large number of Chinese involved with the Kiandra Field.

When the Kiandra Field started to wane many miners left the field by following and working the local watercourses as they headed down stream - streams such as the Tumut, Goobarragandra, Eucumbene, Murrumbidgee and Yarrangobilly.

These miners were primarily looking for alluvial gold that was in the actual stream bed or alluvial deposits from prior stream courses. In this way they also reworked areas that had been gone over previously. In their hurry previous European miners wanted very obvious gold in their pans and a 'bit of colour' made them move on. Chinese miners were more prone to do things carefully and methodically. As a consequence Chinese moved into the Broken Cart Field and reworked every bit of ground that had received prior attention. They were so thorough that most of the evidence of early mining and foot tracks that they had cut have been obliterated

I've taken myself into several of the mountainous headwaters of streams like the Tumut and Goobarragandra and I've been amazed by what I've found. In 1950 I was with a mate trying to follow the Tumut River from Talbingo to Mt Jagungal and in a section of the river that is now under the water of Talbingo Reservoir we came across several large piles of river stones near the river's edge. Each pile would have covered an area as large as a tennis court, they were stacked to a height of over five feet – I could look across a pile, and one stack was separated from the next by a corridor. It was very obvious that man had been involved in moving and stacking them.

I enquired about them but could not get an explanation. That was until I met Bertie Bell, an over 80 year old who had been involved in searching for gold all his life, as had been his father before him. Bert's explanation: Chinese having left the Kiandra Field were working the bed of the Tumut River

and had arrived at this place where they had dug a side channel to divert the main river flow and then removed every water worn boulder in the river bed to get down to bedrock. Much of this required diving and manhandling, then carrying and stacking. Many of the stones would have been too heavy for one man to handle by himself.

Giving the explanation prompted Bert's memory. He gave me the name of the man who was with him, the year he was there – about 1916, and most vivid to him, “I lost me bloody hat, a new hat, we were using a small log to bridge the water between two boulders when the bloody thing rolled and I nearly fell in – lost me new hat.”

There was a continuous presence of Chinese at the Broken Cart Gold Field into the 20th Century. The Sydney Morning Herald of 24 March, 1909 carried a report on the deceased estate of Peter Chow Ting 'late of Broken Cart, near Tumut'. This is likely to have been an old Chinese man known locally as 'Peter the Chinaman.'

Years back I read an account written by an Englishman who made a tour of the colony in the latter part of the 19th Century. He showed his racial tendencies that were common at the time. He spent a night at the Broken Cart Diggings where a Chinese man occupied the best dwelling at the place. He had no compunction in turning the Chinaman out of his home, eating his food and occupying his bed for the night.

Another local story, said to be true: In the early part of the 20th Century a Chinese Tumut business man, a respected and successful citizen, acting on behalf of a request from China sought to have the remains of a Chinese miner dug up and returned to China. A Tumut resident with a knowledge of the Broken Cart region agreed to do the digging. The bones were assembled and it could be seen that a bone was missing – it was a femur, the main leg bone. The man employed to do the job solved any problem. He knew where the remains of a kangaroo was hanging on a fence so a kangaroo's femur became part of the skeleton that went back to China.

I've also heard that such returns allowed some smuggling to take place. A bone, like a femur, is hollow (in life held the marrow) and a small hole that later could be sealed, allowed the hollow to be filled with fine gold.

The Goobarragandra River Valley became one of the routes that graziers used to take stock into the high country for summer grazing. Once beyond Greasy Mack's progress was often difficult. Drovers knew what conditions were likely to be like – short of feed, track badly eroded, water scarce, track covered with fallen timber – bushfire, violent storm, heavy snow during winter, so might opt for one route to take stock in and a different one to come back out. A section on one track was given the name 'Zig Zag' and was often avoided. It was extremely steep, at times too steep for a horse pulling the drover's cart when both going up and descending. Cattle didn't like coming down the Zig Zag as the steepness forced them to start to hurry.

Once beyond Stokes Hut the valley of the river became too confined and too heavily timbered to be used so all stock routes were forced to climb and this was moving from an elevation of about 500m to one over 1000m.

Depending on the location of the home property the grazier and his drovers had to take a pick from several routes – Dinnertime Creek Track – soon after entering Kosciuszko Park, Emu Flat Fire Trail to Boundary Road to Broken Cart Track to Long Plain, Horse Shoe Fire Trail to Long Flat then Long Plain. Even making use of Feints Range Fire Trail or Peppercorn Trail.

I just missed out on a droving experience when I was about 14 years old. Christmas school holidays

had just started and I heard that a local drover wanted an offsider to drive his cart when he was to take a mob of sheep into the snow lease country by way of Broken Cart Stock Route. He was known as Pegleg Harris – a returned WW1 veteran. My father had also spent a couple of years with the First AIF in France and Belgium and in a letter he had sent home to his mother he had written “when on leave in London had met a Tumut boy, a Harris, who had a leg off”.

I rode my bike out to Pegleg's hut and lodged my application.

Experience on handling a horse and cart? “I've driven a pair of draught horses pulling a disc cultivator, and also with harrows.”

What are you like as a cook? “I've been in the Boy Scouts and we have to cook our own food when we go camping.”

Can you camp on the ground? “Yes, I've got a groundsheet and a blanket and blanket pins.”

Can you crutch a daggy sheep? “I could, I've helped my father treat daggy and flyblown sheep.”

Verdict: “Sorry son, I need someone with experience of the Broken Cart Track. It's bloody rough. I'd be with the mob all day, you'd be by yourself, if something broke on the cart you'd have to fix it yourself. You'd have another bloody Broken Cart to handle. Now if it was your old man I'd put him on straight away, your father, Harry Hill, he'd be a beaut. Sorry.”

WARAGONG TIMBER MILL

Waragong, Warogong, Woragong, Warrogong – over the past 60 years I've seen all versions in maps; each claiming to be the original, authentic and correct spelling – even 'The Waragongs'. The name applies to the northern end of the Bogong Mountains, from the Goobarraganda River then heading south. The Warogong Fire Trail runs down the full length of the crest to come back onto the Snowy Mountains just before Yarrangobilly Village site.

Maps of the whole area, except for a few place names, show that it is a little visited area for people today. 'Mt Hovell' 1388m (Captain William Hovell, co-leader of the 1824 Hume & Hovell Expedition that skirted the northern end of the mountains), 'Rings Creek', *Blackfellow Rings*, (indicate the location of Bora Rings – ceremonial places for pre-European Aborigines), Numbananga – Aboriginal name for a prominent peak. How many people have visited the area in the past few years? My guess – none.

But, a timber mill did operate in the northern end of the Woragong Mountains from the early 1930s and into the second world war years. During that time it was known as the Waragong Saw Mill.

My information on the mill came from John Learmont – son of Tumut business man, J J J Learmont, who revived the mill, Monty Sturt who worked on associated timber access road during the Great Depression, Eddie Shaw who worked in the mill from 1936 to 39, members of the Tottenhoffer family – associated with running the mill, those responsible for planning and constructing the Hume & Hovell Walking Track which passes the mill – 10 metres from it.

The mill was built on Sawpit Creek, a small creek running into Wall's Creek that then ran into the Goobarrandra River about 20 kilometres out from Tumut. Sawpit Creek gets its name from the mill and it shows the environmental feelings of the time. The mill was built spanning the actual creek so that sawdust and other waste fell into the creek and was taken away by running water.

The mill was water powered. A race was dug to bring water from Wall's Creek – it was about 3km long. The water was stored in a small holding dam, on the hillside, above the mill. When the mill was to operate the water was brought from the holding dam, about 100 feet away, by way of a 14 inch, then reducing in diameter pipe for the final jet to turn a waterwheel.

The waterwheel, was iron, about two metres in diameter and had been brought by Herb Buckley and his bullock team from the Goobarrandra Gold Mine. Herb had also been employed to snig in logs using his team. There was another link with the Goobarrandra Gold Mine, Charlie Stokes, one of the principals in the mine had been one of the early people involved in setting up the mill. The timber mill was actually on Herb Buckley's property.

The mill had been established to harvest Alpine Ash trees (*E. delegatensis*), a valuable hardwood growing in the mountains. It became necessary to move further and further into the mountains to reach suitable trees and during the time of the Great Depression gangs of men who had been unemployed were set to work to extend the road. The gangs consisted of men from Tumut but also men brought from Sydney. A gang would be employed for a week, but not the week following. The work was tough and so were the living conditions – camping in tents, basic food supplied, but cook your own. Most of the work was pick and shovel – not even use of horses and drays, no machinery, axe use on scrub and trees.

It had been planned for the timber road to go further into the mountains but the government broke a promise – or understanding, and the road was not continued through “lack of funds”. The mill had a start, stop, start existence for a number of years.

The heyday for the Waragong Timber Mill was when it was under the control of J J J Learmont.

Often there was insufficient water to run the mill so he installed a Lister Diesel Engine as a back-up power supply. If it was to be used enough water was saved in the holding dam, it was released via the pipe, it hit the waterwheel which was linked to the Diesel and in this way the Diesel was self started.

Learmont employed Harry and Wal Garley, and Sid More from Coolamon. They brought horse teams and a wagon. The wagon had previously been used to haul bagged wheat. It was to be used to bring logs into the mill, but the weight of the loaded wagon and the narrowness of the wheels caused it to sink into the ground so it was retired and left sitting on top of a hill not far from the mill site. The horse team would be six, eight, or even 10 horses depending on the size of the log and the type of country to be covered.

The horses started to take over from Herb Buckley's bullocks. Eddie Ward told me of the excitement Herb could cause. The men at the mill would hear Herb approaching – Herb made sure of that, with his yelling and whip cracking, and when he was within sight of those working at the mill he'd jump onto the log being dragged on the ground and add singing and dancing to his yelling and whip cracking.

Learmont also employed Reuben Tottenhoffer to manage the operations at the mill. Reuben had been involved in timber mills at Batlow. His son, Frank, was still operating one of the last Batlow mills in the 1950s.

With the mill operating at full capacity Learmont bought a Ford semi-trailer; possibly the first one to come into the Tumut district. It, too, was used to snig logs to the mill. Eddie Shaw remembers riding it down some of the steep logging tracks with all brakes squealing and the truck getting faster and faster. The main reason for getting the truck was to cart sawn timber to Tumut. This was usually on a Friday afternoon when the men went into J J J Learmont's mercery store to get paid.

I talked to Eddie Shaw when he had retired and moved into Tumut. He was married when he worked at the mill, he had built the house he lived in and had installed a small water wheel to generate his own electricity. He also told me that as well as producing sawn timber the mill produced dressed timber – DAR (dressed all round), weatherboards and tongue and grooved boards. He even showed me his kitchen cupboard doors that he had recovered with some Waragong Mill T & G dressed boards – something to do with severance pay when he left the mill.

There were seven men working at the Waragong Timber Mill when Eddie was living there. There was no point in asking, "Have you got a match? - they were all non-smokers."

Harry Hill July 2013