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NEWSLETTER

TIMBER INDUSTRY IN EAST GIPPSLAND

The information contained in this Newsletter was compiled by Mr Stan Hunt on 1st May, 2000. His reminiscences include his involvement with the Timber Industry and the Victorian Railways. Some minor editing has been undertaken but the article is basically as written by Stan.

My name is Stan Hunt, born on the 21-7-1931, at Maffra in Gippsland.

Over the years I have had quite a bit to do with the Timber Industry and the people wrapped up in it, especially the ones who worked in Gippsland in the last 50 odd years.

I started as a kid of about 15 years working for a bloke by the name of Dick Powell, who was a friend of ours and also related to some of our family. I think Dick originally came from Tasmania. He had a contract to cut pulp wood for the A.P.M. at Maryvale, between Traralgon and Morwell.

This was a bugger of a job. If you had dry



Australian Paper Manufacturers Ltd. Pulp and Paper Mill at Maryvale, between Traralgon and Morwell - 1950.

weather it wouldn't bark, and if it was too wet you couldn't get out of the gullies as you would get bogged all the time. You would then have to pull all the load off and start again, putting a heap of bark on the track and re-loading it. This was all done by hand and Dick would be up on top of the load with a pick axe. This could happen up to about three or four times a day. We were working out the back of Cowwarr, near Dawson. There was Dick Powell, Geoff Cotterill, Ernie Davis (my cousin), Lex Cotterill, Curtain LeStrange and myself, Stan Hunt.

If the weather got too wet, Dick would shift up onto the ridges where we cut the big trees with the crosscut saw, then Dick would pay me so much to split it with a ten-pound hammer. This was bloody hard work, and when the weather was alright I logged off and cut my trees with a five-pound Kelly axe, which was really hard work. The biggest time consumer was the barking. At the time I think it was thirty bob a unit we got to cut and load the stuff.

I got sick of this as you were lucky to get enough to keep you in food let alone pay your parents board, which you had to do in those days or it was out the door. These days you have chain saws and barking machines.

I knew a chap by the name of Arthur Bennett who cut factory wood for the Newry Butter Factory boilers. He wanted someone to help him so I had a go at that. We were cutting on top of Bloares Hill up near Lake Glenmaggie.

Arthur woke me to a little lurk on that one - you cut the bendiest trees you can find and when they went to measure your wood it would measure a lot more as it had big gaps in it.

I gave this away for a few years and went grocering which I used to do even before I left school. I used to weigh up what they called heavies in those days at a couple of grocers - Leslie's in Maffra, and Jackson's in Maffra.

A friend of mine Ian Sharman was working on the Victorian Railways, and he asked me he was all interested in a job. I said, "Yes", so he saw a chap by the name of Field Marshal, or as most people called him ('Dick'), and Dick saw his big boss and got me a job as what they called a bridge carpenter, working on all the big trestle bridges between Morwell and Orbost, also around the loop line between Traralgon and Stratford. We also did the big cranes and cattle pits. This was a really interesting job but very



Railway Historical Society Special Train crossing one of the many large trestle bridges on the Bairnsdale-Orbost line at Wairewa Road.

hard work. I got a transfer to Nowa Nowa as I had been camped at Bruthen, Traralgon and Stratford. Nowa Nowa had some really nice railway homes so we made the big move. This was good at the time as we were getting every second weekend overtime, and that wasn't too bad as I had three kids at the time. Then there was a recession and they cut out the overtime. This wasn't enough money for us to live on, so I



Nowa Nowa Railway Station

went and saw a bloke by the name of Bill Roselli who was the manager of the Waygara Sawmilling Company about a job. He asked me could I file saws and I said, "No way". He said, "Can you file a pocket knife?" and I said, "Yes", so he said, "You'll be right I've got a job for you at a place called Sardine Creek, up the Bonang Highway". "It is 25 miles out of Orbost, and there is a new house there", which there was, but it only had one bedroom so we had to divide that off with a curtain, then I built in wardrobes myself.

It had been built for Jack Kilby and his workers but they didn't need it. Bill Roselli had told me there was a school there, a Post Office and a shop. It was late at night when we got there so we unloaded our stuff and we didn't check on any of the bulldust he had told us. Ernie Waites from Nowa Nowa had shifted us up there. Ernie Waites was a timber man too, he carted sleepers for the sleeper cutters at Nowa Nowa. If I had known what was going on I would have got him to shift us back down the track somewhere. Well, I was stuck there so I had to make the most of what I had. The manager or foreman of the mill was Norm Houghton, and he filed the saws as well. He was supposed to teach me so I could take over from him, but he was too busy to muck around teaching me.

He conned me into going on the docker [docking saw] for No. 2 bench which was just getting set up. They had a bloke by the name of Lindsay Hocking doing the benching. They got me working the gauge when the bench was working. A chap by the name of Joe Leslie was pulling out, or tailing out as some people call it, on his own as the bench had a dead roller and it wasn't too bad once you got used to it. Joe had come from down around Drouin where he said he had pulled out for a gun benchman by the name of Jim Rochini or Rocky as they called him. I had never heard of him at the time, but I did later, and I saw him in action at Nowa Nowa. Rocky benched all over Gippsland and was a top benchman. He originally came from Italy.

After the bench was working full-time a chap by the name of Les Goldsack was benching on No. 2, and I had been elevated to leverman which was more money. Les Goldsack came from a sawmilling family down Pakenham way. Les taught me how to cut the spring out of the timber and stand a saw up, which is putting the heat into the right spots on the saw with packing boards which have leather tacked onto them in the right spots. Les was one bloke who would show you something, a lot of the others wouldn't show you anything as they were frightened you

would take their job. Les used to let me have a go on the bench when things were pretty quiet.

About a couple of months after I was there Norm wanted Les to take over the saw filing as he was on the phone half the day. Les could do anything in the mill as he was a top man. Norm was worried then who was going to do the benching on No. 2. Les said, "What about giving Stan a go as I have got him going all right?". Well, through Les, I was elevated, once again more money.

In the meantime I'd got stuck into Bill Roselli about no school. They told me they would build me one if I could get a teacher through the Government, who said they would if I could get enough children. I had a head count but there wasn't quite enough so I told them there were quite a few women pregnant and they decided to give me a teacher. Just after that a chap by the name of Eric Benson arrived there, and he had a few children, so we had no worries.

Well the Waygara Timber Company kept their word and built our school, and it was used as our community hall as well. I was put in as the first secretary and Bill Roselli was the first president. I stopped there for a couple of years.

While I was there we had a couple of No. 1 benchmen, the first was Gill Cooper, I think he was an ex-Tasmanian. Gill was a really good benchman, but he had a lot of trouble with his stomach as he had ulcers, and lived on DeWitt's powder. Gill, I think, went back to Tassie, and a bloke who had been benching at Waygara, by the name of George Byers took over. A little bloke by the name of John Gates took over at Waygara. Well, George Byers had had an accident on the bench somewhere, a piece of 4 x 1½ had come off the back of the saw and hit him in the head. He had a big dent in his forehead, the shape of a 4 x 1½. I still don't know till this day how he ever lived through it. George also had a brother in the timber industry in the Bairnsdale district who carted sawn timber in his trucks to Melbourne or wherever.

I also used to relieve on No. 1 bench if the No. 1 benchman was out of action. At the time there was a terrific leverman by the name of Alec Eiberline. I hope this is spelt pretty right, as he was a new Australian, and I can't say for sure if it is quite right.

Also at that time, myself and Des Camm used to fall of a weekend with a two-man blue streak saw. It was a big heavy thing, but wasn't too bad if the bush had been cleared, but if you had to drag it around it was pretty hard work.

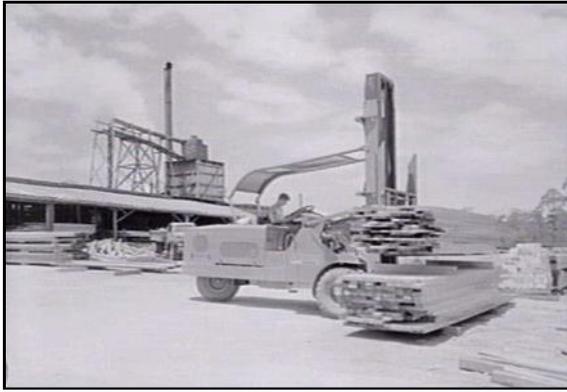
Well, the union stopped people from working



Loading Logs

in the bush of the weekend, unless they were fallers who hadn't been able to work during the week because of rain or breakdowns. We also had one of the best falling teams in Australia at the time. The Radfords had come down from Bright and Myrtleford district. They also had a young bloke with them by the name of Dougie Wright. This team was made up of old Bob Radford, world champion, his son, young Bob, in the Guinness Book of Records for one of the fastest chops either in the world or Australia, another son, Manny, who had been a top boxer until he chopped half his foot off in a competition. There also was another son, Brindle, and also Lennie. They were all choppers as well as fallers. They also had a beautiful little sister called Nellie, and the old Mum, Mrs Radford, was like my wife Margaret, she had done it hard and had no amenities like lights, fridges, even ice chests, washing machines, electric irons which the girls all expect these days as soon as they get married.

Our bush crew was run by Jack Kilby who had the dozers and trucks. He had two of his sons, Kevin and Bob, also a bloke by the name of Mick Harman, who they had reared. Mick and Marge left, and a bloke by the name of Bob Heather took over his job. At the same time there was a bloke by the name of Bill Austin, who used to cart the sawn timber from Sardine to Waygara where it was loaded at their own railway siding. At the same time I must tell you our first teacher for Sardine had arrived and was living in the single men's huts, and eating at Benson's boarding house. His name was Roy Walters and what a bloke, but actually Roy hasn't got that much to do with the timber industry, but I suppose when it's all worked out we got a job for Roy and kept him in it, but he has been gone now for quite a while and I hope his family is coping all right, as Roy's wife, Eila, was carrying a baby when Roy died of cancer. I only hope everything has worked out alright for



Stacking Timber at East Gippsland Timber Co Pty Ltd Mill at Cabbage Tree Creek.

them. Also we had Alan Bills carting sawn timber from Sardine to Melbourne. He was only one of a family of brothers who carted from East Gippsland. They were a Bairnsdale family originally. There was Alan, Pat, Lance, Leo and some others I can't quite remember their names at present, but they had a lot of trouble trying to dodge the Road Transport mob, who were hitting them to leg with cartage permits.

After leaving Sardine Creek I went to work at Broon's Mill at Cabbage Tree where I started as No. 2 benchman. This was quite alright for a while then we had a recession. I had, at that time, one of the best bench crews you could get, they were all Italian and single, but a top lot of blokes. Well, the boss's name was Talbot Watson. He was built like a grisly bear, so we called him that if he wasn't around or if he was around we called him Tolly. He was a good bloke actually.

Before he came to Cabbage Tree he had managed a mill up at Gelantipy for Broons. During World War II Tolly had been a Captain or Colonel in the army, or something like that. They called them the Foresters. They cut up some of those beautiful old oak trees and others too for ammunition boxes. Tolly was the boss cocky at the time. He was also a ju jitsu bloke, he held so many belts.

When I knew him he was not too fast on his feet, but if he had ever got a hold on you he could just about snap your back. He had his son-in-law, Mick Johnson, and his son, Neil, working in the mill. Neil later, after we left there, took on a mill of his own where he got clobbered by a piece of timber and killed. He was working the mill with his wife.

The number one benchman at the time was the little bloke called John Gates who had taken over from George Byers at Waygara. He was one of the best workers I have ever seen but there wasn't much of him, but he was still a bit of

a kid like I was when I got married. I was 17 when I got married, and I have been married 51 years today [30-4-2000]. Well, Gatesy filled out, in the finish he was a solid bloke and as strong as a lion. After Tolly closed down No. 2 bench I had to go levering for Gatesy which I did for quite a while, then Gatesy got a job working at Newmerella, working for Henry Silverberg and Les Grace. Gatesy had a little farm at Newmerella so this suited him.

Tolly brought a benchman from Bruthen by the name of Ron Robinson, who had worked for him at Gelantipy, so I still had to stop on the lever but I was the highest-paid leverman in the district. It was a good bench to lever on as it was hydraulic with a Kendall double-sided



Timber Mill at Brodribb River, east of Orbost

gauge. I have used a Trewella single-sided with a pin and also a double-sided Trewella, but I reckon the Kendall was the best I used. The same with the hydraulic feed it was a lot better than the leather and paper friction, as it was a lot more sudden so you had to be careful or you would knock the sawyer about.

While I was at Broons I worked with quite a few Kooris who were real good blokes. I had worked with another good one by the name of Mick Murray at Sardine Creek. When I was there he was a top breaker-down. The ones at Broons were the Rose family. There was the father, Johnny, called (Hookey, who had been a jockey till he had an accident). He worked in the log yard.

Lionel, the original Lionel Rose who Lionel the boxer was called after, they were cousins, he worked in the breaking down, and Stevie who worked the lever for me until they closed down No. 2. They had worked for Tolly up at Gelantipy too. Lionel and Stevie had both fought for Jimmy Sharman in his boxing troupe. Lionel was also a good guitar player and country and western singer.

[To be continued in July Newsletter]