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NEWSLETTER

TIMBER INDUSTRY IN EAST GIPPSLAND

PART 2

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.

[Continued from June Newsletter]

I was just plodding along and collecting a couple more children when I heard a friend of mine was going to go up to Bonang benching for McDonald's Mill. He had been benching for Pows at Cabbage Tree. I went and saw Hec Pow, who was half Chinese, and was a really good bloke. I got the job and shifted up there. His old Dad was still their filing saws. He was a full Chinese and in his 80s, but his saw filing days were past. They cut timber for the Melbourne Harbour Trust. Some of the beams I cut for the jetties were 30 feet long, and 12 inch x 12 inch with the heart in.

When I first started there Bill Harris was the breaker-down. He was Hec Pow's brother-in-law. He had married Mary Pow. Ted Catlin was my leverman. I christened him Havelock as every time I was looking for him to lift a flitch onto the trolley and bench he was rolling a smoke, and the poor old puller-outs had to do it. He shifted down to Bairnsdale not long after that, and I had a good little leverman by the name of Bill Peachy levering for me. Actually he had been at Broons on No. 2 at one time. Also my old mate Joe Leslie was pulling-out for me once again. He had also pulled-out on the same bench at Broons when Gatesy was benching.

Joe was one of the best puller-outs I have ever seen but he used to break out on the grog and

would be on it for a few weeks. I would have to send him home and then he would go for me with bits of wood, but he was too dangerous to have around the bench. He would get that crook he couldn't feed himself, so I would have to go down to his hut and feed him by hand. I used to do the same for him when I was out at Sardine Creek. It was a shame as he was a top bloke. He had about 30 cats and he used to get Marg to cook chickens for the cats after he had been to town and bought six boxes of beer. Don't get me wrong, I used to have a beer with him now and then too, as I could drink as much beer as anyone until I got diabetes, now I drink plenty of whisky which the doctors say won't hurt



Sardine Creek Mill — Safety Record

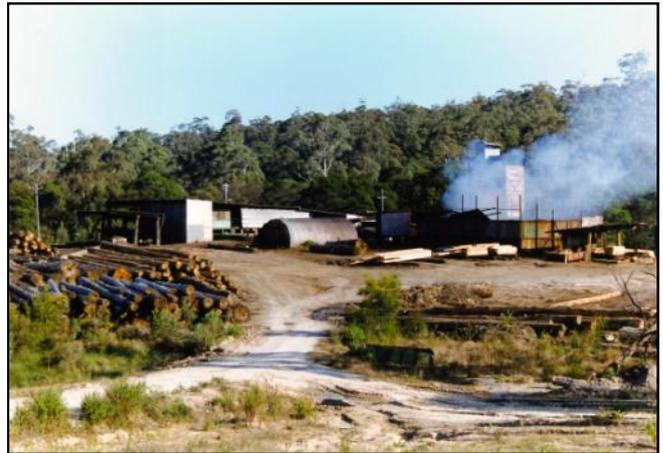
me and it doesn't.

Hec Pow and his father sold the mill to Henry Silverberg and Les Grace. They were only after the bush but they had to work the mill for so long, so I went benching for them for so long. Then I decided with my wife that this was not going to do much for the kids so we headed back down to Maffra where the kids had a chance of a good education at Maffra and Sale, and the chance of a job which they all got. They would have had no chance out there in the bush as my wife never had a licence in those days to drive them into Orbost where there were plenty of people looking for work. The boys would have had to work in the mills and the girls would have had to stop home and us keep them, so it was time to move.

At this time when we were leaving Cabbage Tree there were actually five mills still working. Alstergrens had two which were run by Barry Johnson, the manager and office worker. George Ross was in charge of the mill work and Reg Hammond the bush. Reg later had a mill at Newmerella. Broons had the one run by Tolly Watson. The bush crew there was run by two lots of Dutchmen, and the trucks and dozers by the three Robinson Brothers, Mick, Gordon and Allan. Gordon had had a bad accident. He had slipped off the top of his dozer as he was dogging it down on his low-loader, and crushed his legs and ankles. I think the whole lot of them have gone now. Then there was Henderson and Bells who had a mill up the side road. They had a bloke by the name of Wally Koebcke who had the bush contract. He came from down in Maffra and had a bloke by the name of Teddy Brills driving his [190] International truck. He also had a chap who was starting out on his own with a Commer Knocker by the name of Tony Battel — this family has now got a big transport company in Orbost. Also they have one of the wildest men in Gippsland by the name of Cliff Bailey falling for them. He even had the coppers frightened of him. He had damaged them a few times. Then we had the mill where I had been working which was owned by the Jew boys, Henry Silverberg and Les Grace. They also had one up at Club Terrace, as well as Newmerella. They had a chap from down at Heyfield by the name of Ian Crowe who had the bush contract. He sometimes had a chap by the name of Dadda Kendall from Heyfield up their working with his [180] International if he was behind in the bush, or sometimes Tony Battel. When I first went up to Pows to work they still had the barrow under the bench to wheel the

sawdust away. They never had such a thing as an elevator to take the edgings out to the fire hole. These had to be stacked by hand on trolleys, then wheeled out to the fire hole and unloaded. They had only just stopped bringing in the logs by bullock wagon. They had the best set of bullock yolks I have ever seen hanging up in the harness room.

At this time they had two sawmills at the Bemm River, one was the Blackwood Sawmilling Company run by the Melroses, the other one was owned by the Brunt family. Old Bert was the father, then there was Des and Rod and I think the young one was Daryl. He



Blackwood Sawmill — Bemm River

drove the trucks. They had a bloke by the name of Bobby Archer driving their dozer and trucks as well. Bob got killed in an accident I think it was in the bush too, I think a dozer went over on him.

There were plenty of spot mills in the bush around Orbost at this time, but I'm not counting them.

Up the Bonang Highway there was one at Martins Creek. Alf Barling was the benchman, Alf Cattanach was the engine driver and saw



Moving Logs at Newmerella

filer, as it was a steam-driven mill. Also at Bonang there was Macdonald's Mill. At Bendoc the Yells Bros. had one. In Orbost itself they had Smith Bros., Wilson and Gorman's, Savory Bros. Out at Newmerella they had Reg Hammonds, Les Grace and Henry Silverberg. At Waygara there were two run by the Waygara Sawmilling Company, owned by Harry Lederman and Bill Roselli. They also had the



Working amongst the Logs at Waygara

one at Sardine Creek where I started working in sawmills.

I don't know for sure how many were in Buchan but I do know the Crowe Bros. had one. They were friends of ours. They shifted their mill from Flooding Creek at Sale to Buchan. At Club Terrace the De Ross' had one mill, and Les Grace and Henry Silverberg had one, also Cuthbertson and Richards. I think there was another one or two but I just can't remember at present. This was a fair while ago and I'm doing all this from memory, not research, so it is a bit hard.

At this time all the sleeper cutters I can remember in the Orbost district are: the Donchi's, Martin's, McDougall's, Beau Ross, Clarrie Stevens, S. Taran from Cabbage Tree.

Mick Spoto and a lot of his new Australian mates, I knew them to talk to but I didn't remember their names. I remembered Mick's as he married a friend of ours, a girl by the name of Edith Benson. She was from a sawmilling family. Mick and Edith later had a sawmill at Bombala in N.S.W., but had to give away because of the greenies.

At the same time there was a big sleeper cutters camp at Nowa Nowa. It was run by the railways themselves. A chap by the name of Jack McNamara was in charge of that when I worked on the railways at Nowa Nowa. They were mostly new Australians, but there were a

few Aussies amongst them. Two I can remember were Stan Asher and Vic Britton, they came from down at Stratford.

Most of the sleeper passers were ex-bridge carpenters like myself. Bill Elliman was one, Bert Wilson was another, Russell Eastwood is another one. They would come around on a given day and you had to be there when he passed them. Pass day was a big day for the cutters as they nearly all headed for the pub afterwards.

These cutters not only cut sleepers they also cut big beams and cross arms for our railway bridges, also cattle pit logs which I finished off with an adze. Nearly all their beams and sleepers were still cut with broad axes then, as swing saws and chainsaws were just coming out. They got more money for the ones cut with the broad axe as they said it sealed the grain and it never soaked the water up, but it didn't take long for them to start using the chainsaws and swings saws. There also was a sawmill beside the Tostaree railway station in those days. At Nowa Nowa Ramsdells had a sawmill, also Collins. There were others too but I don't



Donchi's Sleeper Cutting Coupe

know who had them, I think most of them are closed now.

Some of the sleeper cutters at Nowa Nowa were: Porky Wallace, some of the Banfields,



Brian, Ken and Alan Donchi loading sleepers

some of the Waites, George Answer, Colin and Billy Mooney worked on sleepers and in the mills, some of the Brookes. At Bruthen the Rawlings Bros. had a sawmill, some of the Mills worked in the bush and in the mills, the same with some of the Hooton's. Amongst the sleeper cutters at Bruthen were: Curly Maynard, the Russells, the Lee Bros. (their father, old Bob, an ex-policeman owned the Star Hotel at Bruthen).

I don't know much about the Bairnsdale ones, but I do know that the Hollingsworth's were fallers around there. Heading back down the highway to Stratford, where Alf Duncan had a mill there, there was also another one there, I think it was another one of Cuthbertson and Richards. There were quite a lot of timber workers around Stratford, Sale and Munro. These blokes were cutting sleepers, fence posts and firewood. They were: the Luxfords, Hollingsworths, Swans, Harry Olsson, Tommy Mitchell and some of his sons, also Len Schlipalius.

Out at Briagolong there was another mill run by the Downing family. I think Bill, the son, did most of the business. Old Curly and some of the other boys did the mill work. This mill was burnt down and rebuilt in the 1960s. They later went up and took over some mills at Nowa Nowa. There also was a mill at Valencia Creek, run by the Killeen's. Maurie, snr., used to run it then he handed it down to Maurie, jnr., a better family you couldn't get. We then go to Heyfield where we had Alstergren's, G. N. Raymond, Neville Smith, and also Ernie Hugg. Wilbur Saxton also had a mill up at Licola.

This is about as much as I can remember. Now I have finished, a lot more will more than likely come to my mind.

Another mill has come to my mind — it was Charlie Truscott's at Goongerah, actually I think Charlie had one at Stratford too.

Stan Hunt (1-5-2000).