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Introduction

Few Victorian foresters have set down much in the way of recollections about what it was like working in State forest districts in East Gippsland in former times, when technology and activities were different from todays in so many ways. I would not have tackled these notes unless a forester of a later generation had persuaded me that they might enlighten or amuse someone delving for information in years to come.

I have resisted the temptation to include merely personal stories, and have avoided naming individuals in passing. My memories of work mates remain vivid, and it would be fitting to acknowledge elsewhere their friendship and encouragement of a Junior Assistant Forester, Class E, during his first district postings.

The Times

The war had been over less than four years, and the demand for sawn and other forms of timber was voracious. The salvaging of logs from fire-killed timber in the mountain ash forests was all but finished. It was virtually over by 1953, (see my account in the Victorian Year Book, 1984).

From early times the eastern forests had provided hewn railway sleepers, poles and piles, heavy construction timbers, and minor produce, but not much of the sawn timber produced in Victoria. In 1947 there was a major shift of hardwood sawmilling from the central districts to Mansfield and Heyfield; in 1950 new log allocations were made from the East Gippsland forests. A radically new royalty system for hardwood logs drawn from State forests was introduced at the beginning of 1950. The aims of this equated scale of royalty rates were to encourage sawmillers in remote areas to compete on the Melbourne market, and to promote the milling of lower grade logs.

The Forest Districts

The Bruthen and the Nowa Nowa forest districts extended from the coast high into the mountains. Their common boundary began at the footbridge over to the ocean at Lakes Entrance, which had some practical implications for staff at leisure during the proclaimed fire danger period each summer, because they were required to stay inside their district boundary unless duty took them outside. The Bruthen District extended well north of Omeo.

There were extensive tracts of roadless forest, not mapped in any detail, if at all. Access to many parts for timber reconnaissance and firefighting depended on the use of horse-tracks, or arduous walking.

Away from the current timber harvesting areas, forest staff encountered few other persons in the forests, apart from wattle bark strippers and beekeepers where they could take their trucks and bee-boxes.

The District Forest Officer

The declared peak of aspiration of junior foresters was to become a District Forest Officer, abbreviated to DFO. Their duties and responsibilities in advertisements in the Victoria Gazette said it all plainly: To control all operations in a Forest District.

Appointment as a DFO indicated a good personal record and the confidence of the Forests Commission in the capacity of the officer to exercise authority and lead staff in a manner creditable to the Commission and the public service.

The district foresters at Bruthen and Nowa Nowa were under the eye of an Inspector of Forests stationed at Bairnsdale, where he had a tiny office staffed by a typist behind the departmental house. The Inspector came quite often, usually to set off with the DFO for a joint inspection of works or licensed forest operations, or to meet Lands or local government officers. He and the DFO used travelling time for talking rather than sit in the district office. Driving hours were often many, and staying in the office just wasted daylight.

The Inspector could and did transfer junior foresters to other districts within his division by oral instruction through the DFO, not necessarily confirmed in writing, and, I learned, at very short notice if he saw fit. Subordinate staff addressed him as "Mr".

I addressed the DFO at Bruthen as "Mr", originally out of respect according to the general custom of the day, and later because he never told me to call him otherwise. The story was that the DFO at Orbost was called "Mr" by all his staff.

Members of the public and other public servants treated the DFO with respect. Sleeper cutters and all the other forest licensees and contractors recognised his authority and power, and toed the line. Sawmillers, whose timber allocations and licences were decided by the Forests Commission, took a more independent stance, when they thought a decision was worth tussling over or defying. In such instances it was a matter of judgement by the DFO whether to stand firm or compromise before a sawmiller might go above his head.

There were no continuing training courses for staff, except for an annual Divisional fire equipment training day. The development of young foresters depended to a large extent on precept and example, not only from their DFOs but, most importantly, the forest overseers and foremen, and, if any, more senior assistant foresters.

Staff

There was an easily understood hierarchy of professional staff, technical and general staff, and wages employees.

The staff were appointed by the Public Service Board, and were permanent, after an initial probation, so after they that spent none of their time and energy worrying about tenure. Any suggestion of redundancy would have been hilarious: the Forests Department was short-staffed, and there was a huge job to be done in mapping, roading and protecting the State forests, and controlling forest utilisation.

Professional staff were moved about the State fairly frequently; three-year postings were regarded as average. Junior officers were transferred more frequently, to vary their experience of forest work and districts. The older brigade of foresters seemed to end up in districts regarded as easier, on account of topography, distances to be travelled, occurrence of major fires, and fewer commercial pressures.

Transfers, in contrast to promotions, were decided without any reference to the officer, who would normally be told of his transfer by a telephone call from head office before a letter arrived. Of course, gossip and the grapevine sometimes beat the phone call.

In the 1980s, the new wave of bureaucrats branded compulsory transfers as a brutal way to treat staff, but all professional officers in former times understood that that was the system. Applicants for the School of Forestry, Creswick, had it drummed into them that transfer anywhere in the State at the convenience of the Forests Commission would be their lot. There were always brighter sides to any transfer, which released

officers from positions on school committees, sporting clubs and so on which an officer had accumulated and were difficult to pass on. Compulsory transfers allowed the Forests Commission to exercise compassion when transfers could meet medical or other special needs of an individual or family. The body corporate could act swiftly without being hampered by petty procedures.

Transfers took place in batches, outside school holidays and the fire season. The State Tender Board organised furniture vans, choosing the lowest of five tenders. One van, only one, would be used to move the belongings of three or even four officers in turn. The Board decided the sequence and dictated its arrangements, in spite of the difficulties caused by the arrival of a full van at the second and subsequent destinations, where most if not all the large furniture was still inside the house. The van might arrive about sunset, not in the early morning as scheduled. Running late made the driver and his mate grumpy and rough in handling precious belongings. At remote locations the removalists might go hungry at late hours, especially if the outgoing family had eaten what food they had put aside in the morning during its long wait for the van. Rain would fray everyone's tempers. After loading up, the family might face an overnight drive so that they would arrive at their new quarters in time to influence the care with which their possessions were unloaded, and into which rooms the heavy pieces of furniture should be placed. Lowest tender seemed to equate to least care and desire to please.

Being a small department in terms of staff numbers, everyone knew or had heard stories about the majority. All the professional foresters had enjoyed the three-year traineeship at Creswick, which meant that an individual had lived at the School with trainees belonging to four other annual intakes. This promoted an effective fraternity based on friendships and rivalries.

Mr A V Galbraith, the Chairman from 1929 until 1948, and a Commissioner since 1925, had been Secretary before 1929. After 1948 the Chairman of the Forests Commission was a Creswick forester, and the other two Commissioners also had that advantage. The fact that all three commissioners had forestry training and had come up through the ranks was a reassuring fact for the post-war generation of foresters.

Close supervision of staff at sub-stations and in camps was obviously out of the question. A discipline observed by all staff was keeping a rough diary, and entering up a monthly summary of hours of work, distances travelled, types of work done, and other details of their daily rounds. This went through the DFO and the Inspector, and then to head office.

Quarters

The State Forests Department had an active Buildings Branch, and even its own architect. The Branch looked after quarters, offices, general and fire equipment stores, workshops, and associated structures. The outside design and painting of the quarters were much the same and it was easy to spot the office or district forester's quarters in a strange town, although radio poles were the first sign the traveller looked for.

The inside layout of quarters around the State varied enough to bring headaches to transferring staff and their wives. Occupants of quarters provided all floor coverings, and after three or so transfers the original rectangles of kitchen linoleum could resemble a crazy puzzle.

Quarters were provided for married officers and, at a very few locations, for single men. Rent for the former was a percentage of salary set by the Public Service Board, and for the latter a much smaller amount assessed on the worth of the accommodation. Rent was deducted before salary instalments were paid each fortnight.

There was no single man's quarters at Bruthen or Nowa Nowa in 1949. When I arrived at Bruthen in the autumn of 1949, as a Junior Assistant Forester "Class E", I was the first assistant stationed in the town. I had the choice of living in a Stanley hut of fibro sheeting in the yard behind the Forest Office or boarding with a family in the town. I chose the former. An extension cord from the nearby workshop provided electricity for a single light globe, an electric jug and a toaster. The hut was unlined, and there was no cupboard or plumbing. The toilet block at the rear of the Forest Office was connected to a septic tank. There was a cold shower. No rent was payable, for the hut was certainly not counted as quarters.

The evening of my arrival, I was told by the DFO that my cut lunch on weekdays had been ordered from a cafe in the main street, because, for six weeks, I would be out with overseers and foremen learning about the forests, the timbers being cut and supervision of forest operations. The cafe belonged to the parents of one of the clerical assistants in the forest office. My breakfast was simple, and my evening meal was taken at the cafe until a second but had been attached to the Stanley hut. The twin huts were set up around the back of the stores, out of sight of the office, near the rear of the office yard. T scrounged a kitchen sink and we connected tank water, put in a wooden bench on which I placed a two-burner kerosene stove, and I was in business to run a bachelor establishment, once I had illegally connected electricity from the store.

Offices and Depots

The weatherboard office at Bruthen faced the street frontage and the DFO's quarters were next door. Behind the office and the galvanised iron toilet block at the rear there was a gravelled yard which allowed some parking near a large workshop/store. There was a general store, a fire equipment store, garaging space for vehicles, a lubrication pit and working space for mechanics and fitters. A mouse-proof part of the fire store housed rolls of unlined linen fire hose, canvas waterbags and tents.

The office comprised three rooms, the large general office with three desks, the DFO's office, and the map room. There was a public counter just inside the front door. Two women (clerk and typist) looked after the office most of the time, including the operation of the two radios, one on the regional frequency and the transmitter/receiver on the State-wide frequency.

The office typewriter was, of course, fully mechanical, a heavy machine suited to pounding out multiple copies with carbon papers. The map room contained a draughting table, a light table, and map drawers. Nearly all of one wall was covered with a composite map of the district, formed of parish and county sheets stuck to fibreboard. Forest roads were added progressively to the wall map, which was amended often to provide the best information available. In those days there was only limited coverage of East Gippsland by topographical and detailed maps. The wall map served as the fire detection map, using lines of sightings from fire towers.

Forest Gangs

With the exception of building major roads, labour for all the jobs to be done in the forest was provided by local forest gangs. The employees were hired and fired locally and paid fortnightly through the district office. A couple of the foremen at Bruthen had worked on the Omeo Highway up the Tambo River valley during the Great Depression, when they laboured equipped with picks, shovels, crowbars, sledge hammers and wheelbarrows.

Road construction and improvement occupied most of the energies of the forest labour force. The men assembled at headquarters early on Monday and returned on Friday afternoon, to disperse for the

weekend. They travelled to the job on tray trucks with a canvas canopy, sharing the space with stores. Most of the Bruthen men lived in and around the town. Some came from Lakes Entrance, but not Bairnsdale. Some road gangs lived in tented camps in a small clearing by the new roadside, each man providing his own tucker. Usually, fresh bread and meat were delivered on Wednesdays by forest staff or truck drivers making deliveries of fuel, culvert pipes, and so on. There was no mess or ablution hut. Each man had a tent, 8ft by 10ft, with a galvanised iron fireplace to one side of the entrance, for personal comfort and heating or cooking food. The Commission issued each man with a galvanised dish for ablutions, and a hurricane lantern. The wick lantern was all that was required by the industrial Award. It was years later before kerosene pressure lanterns with mantles were specified.

In 1947 Australia had agreed with the International Refugee Organization to accept displaced persons from Europe, and the first batch arrived in November, 1947. In 1949 the 50,000th displaced person arrived in Australia. The term 'New Australian' was coined then. At Bruthen the DPs working at the sawmill who had bought motor cycles were called 'temporary Australians' by some of the local wags. A group of DPs was sent from Bonegilla to Nowa Nowa where they were received from the public bus from the railway station at Bairnsdale. In individual 8 x 10 feet tents in a paddock opposite the forest office they found galvanised iron beds and palliasses ready to be filled with straw. Facilities for cooking were primitive. Their bewilderment was aggravated by a fear of venomous snakes. To their credit, they settled in quickly and some of them were dispersed to roading camps soon afterwards. Collectively, they were called Balts.

The foreman of each camping gang was in touch with his district office at Bruthen by radio every morning, and could call up from the camp at scheduled times during the day if required. The ex-Army radio sets were bulky and used heavy, external batteries. They were type RC16B and reliable, except at night when static drowned out speech.

There was not much in the way of powered assistance to manual work. Gangs were skilled in using timber skids (ramps), and parbuckles for loading and unloading heavy items. Crowbars and timber levers, on the right sort of fulcrum, were commonly used to good effect.

From time to time Union organisers called at the District office and camps. Virtually all the work force were covered by the Australian Workers' Union. The organisers travelled on a shoestring, it seemed. Some slept rough, at least for a night or two, as they made their way around remote and scattered work sites. Militancy was almost unknown. Relations between the Department and the Union were well handled by industrial officers at head office and union officials who had known one another for years.

Junior foresters received less pay than adults on the gang, and less than lad labourers (who were on proportionate wage rates according to age) when they were receiving some overtime pay. This was cheerfully accepted, because a forester enjoyed security of employment and could look forward to increments of salary. The substantial Cost of Living Allowance that was added to salary at the time almost doubled when a really young junior forester turned 21 and attained adult status.

Occupational Health and Safety

Safe working and accident prevention was not highly organised across the Department, which did not have a full-time safety officer. The industrial and staff officers saw to legal responsibilities and safety rules generally, and field supervisors were expected to guide workers in safe practices.

Members of forest gangs had to be largely self-supervising in occupational safety, 'working with one eye for yourself and the other for the Commission'. The overseers and foremen and other experienced workers taught their work mates safe practices as best they could. If the frequency and severity of accidents were relatively low, it was perhaps largely owing to agility and good luck. Anecdotes of lucky escapes served to warn and instruct their hearers.

The roading program used a lot of gelignite and quarry monobel. Explosives were distributed from the suppliers by train in a special railway truck, strictly according to State safety regulations. From the railway sidings at Bruthen and Nowa Nowa consignments of explosives and boxes of detonators were taken in an explosives van owned by the Commission to a nearby magazine which was constructed and operated according to regulations double door-locks, felt boots, brass nails, lightning conductors. But, after that, explosives were often carted to the job on the steel tray of an open tip-truck, detonators being carried in the glove box. On the job, cases of explosive were held in portable magazines, wooden lockers sitting out in the open. Detonators were sometimes held in the powder monkey's tent, under his bed. Handling of explosives in the field could be described as casual but cautious, with the occasional notorious lapses.

Rolling logs anywhere were rightly regarded as prime hazards to life and limb.

Protective headgear was unknown in the forests. APM Forests Pty Ltd introduced hard hats for its staff and contractors in the early 1950s, Protective helmets were first issued to its workers by the Forests Commission about 1955. Safety boots were not worn.

Very few forest workers had recognised first aid qualifications. Some of the men who had served in the armed forces were versed in first aid procedures.

Other Departments and Agencies

The Country Roads Board and the Victoria Police had most to do with day to day operations in forest districts. The CRB was concerned mainly with overloading of log trucks, and its inspectors used portable scales to weigh wheel-loads at roadside from time to time. When word was passed up the road that an inspector was on the job, a truck driver of an overloaded truck might stop and in desperation roll off some top logs before proceeding.

There was one policeman at Bruthen, and none at Nowa Nowa. Police generally did not have the time nor the transport to patrol the roads regularly. It was in the mutual interests of foresters and police to pass on information of use to the other party. Typically, information about unusual comings and goings, and the movement of employees into and out of local employment helped to fill in the picture and so keep tabs on shifty or illegal activities.

There was no State Emergency Service nor State Disaster Plan in those days. Local emergencies were dealt with through the collaborative efforts of officers of local government and State agencies, on the initiative of experienced and senior officers in the district.

In the East Gippsland forests it was rare indeed for forest staff to encounter anyone from other State departments. Occasionally a Mines Inspector or a Soil Conservation Officer would appear, something to be remarked on. Lands Inspectors and Lands Officers inspected forest, nearly always adjoining the forest boundary, that was the subject of an application for alienation, often in company with a forest officer.

Th District Forester was king of the forest, and at Nowa Nowa was called that — King McKinty.

The Commission maintained a weather station at Nowa Nowa, from which observations at 9.00 am. and 3.00 p.m. were sent by telegram. Monthly summaries of observations were entered in a booklet and sent by mail to the Meteorological Bureau. At Bruthen there was a rain gauge only, and its only public use was to measure rainfall on Saturdays when there was a home football match, for the purpose of the Pluvius insurance taken out by the Bruthen Football Club. The idea of the cover was to compensate for lower gate-takings in the event of more than a specified rainfall in the hours before the match began. I was the gauge reader for the insurance company, and got into disfavour with the football officials one Saturday when the gauge read nine points of rain, just one-hundredth of an inch below the rainfall needed to gain the insurance payment.

Alienation of State forest

The Lands Department received applications for alienation of Protected forest from adjacent farmers and other parties, in the form of selection purchase leases. Each application was referred to the Forests Commission for comment and recommendation. The Inspector of Forests and the Lands Officer, both stationed at Bairnsdale, agreed that there was so much partly-developed cleared land in the region that it would have been wrong to encourage or allow the alienation of more public forest for agriculture. Their stance has been recorded in publications about the history of land use in the region. Sometimes an application for the land was no more than a manoeuvre to get the timber on it. Even if an application was not opposed by the Commission and became successful in the hands of the Lands Department, there could be a condition that first the Commission would sell the marketable timber standing on the block before the lessee took over. Nearly all applications opposed by the District Foresters and the Inspector, and probably by the Lands Officer, were unsuccessful. One of the two times I was commended by the Inspector was over the standard of the report I compiled about a forested block that was wanted by a land-clearer.

The inspection of the area of forest for which a lease application had been received was typically made by an assistant forester or forest overseer or foremen. This involved walking over the area and recording the forest type, types of stands of trees, estimated sawlog and other timber volumes, streamside vegetation, access tracks, and the consequences for fire protection if the area became alienated from public ownership. The report included an annotated sketch plan. These inspections were good training for junior staff because they called for systematic observation, precise reporting, and focused the mind on local land use questions.

Pine Plantations

The idea of pine plantations was a novelty: there was a cornucopia of hardwoods with a range of wood properties; there was no softwood industry in the region; and there were other immediate uses for funds that might have been invested in long-range timber production. The State primary school at Mount Taylor had a small plantation of radiata pine, but no other comes to mind.

Transport

The vehicle fleet in the Bruthen Forest District in 1949 comprised the DFO's Chevrolet six-cylinder utility (replaced by a Ford V8 utility in 1950), two White scout cars , a Norton motor cycle with sidecar, a Chevrolet 3-ton tray truck, a Ford Thames 3 or 5-ton tray truck, and at the Mount Taylor sub-district headquarters a Chevrolet utility and perhaps a truck. In 1950 the motor cycle was replaced by a Land Rover.

In the 1950s manufacturers specified that new vehicles be run in at a low and constant speed for 500 or so miles. New vehicles for the districts were always bought in Melbourne and picked up by a driver who had brought in the trade-in unit, or travelled to the city by train. When the Ford utility was allocated to Bruthen I was sent to Melbourne on the morning train from Bairnsdale, and left for home early in the afternoon. The point of honour was to cruise steadily at 25 miles per hour and deliver the DFO' s new ute safely. The DFO was relieved and pleased to welcome his assistant before 10.00 p.m.

The US Army scout cars were ugly lumbering vehicles, clad with thick armour-plate steel and did about 5 to 7 miles to the gallon. Their tyres were the run-flat type useful in battle. A tyre on one scout car had been punctured but not repaired, because the wheel nuts were immovable with the tools we had. Other drivers tended to give approaching scout cars a wide berth. They were supposed to be used for fire protection only, with just enough running at other times to maintain their readiness. Sometimes the need for transport, for surveys or general supervision, was so acute that a scout car was used as a runabout.

The registration plates for all the vehicles were the same as private plates, that is, black on white. The vehicles carried no official signage. This anonymity was handy when patrolling the forests and strangers to the district were encountered. It was not until 1955 that red Government plates were introduced. For the State Forests Department the prefix letters were MZF.

The departmental fleet was supplemented by some private vehicles, for example a light Chevrolet truck used on mileage allowance by a forest foreman on supervisory duties around Bruthen.

At Nowa Nowa the DFO had a Ford V8 utility, and there was a Ford Thames tray truck for carting and general transport, and a Chevrolet tray truck. The forest foremen and the forest overseer used their horses for supervision of timber cutting, for which they received an annual allowance. For fire protection around the lakes, there was a motor launch.

Two forest foremen at Nowa Nowa rode horses to the forest to supervise timber cutters. Near the outskirts of the township in the morning they would be passed by sleeper cutters going out in their truck, and would catch up late in the morning.

The departmental vehicles had no radio or heater. Day-time reception of the two Gippsland radio stations was poor in any case, so the lack was not important. A heater, especially in a canvas-topped Land Rover, would have been a comfort during the run home in the evening after a damp day in the hills. There were heaters to be had as accessories which a few owners put into cars, like the new Holden. The Commission did not buy them.

Fire guards and track-cutters working in the northern parts of both districts provided horses for their transport, for which they also received allowances.

The DFO did not own a car, nor did the assistant stationed at Mount Taylor have one. The junior assistant dreamed of owning a car, but realised that even a motor cycle was out of his reach.

Roads and Tracks

This was the time of a post-war surge in the construction of roads and tracks. The machinery required was being offered by Caterpillar, International and Cletrac distributors. Operators and foremen with experience in the Defence forces were available for work in remote places. There was plenty of money allocated

through the Department for new construction and for upgrading old access to the forests, to serve the sawmilling industry, for fire protection and for forest surveys and management.

The "A" class roads were designed and built by the Engineers Branch. The men and equipment transferred from high country in the Mansfield District to Bruthen for the winter, and returned in the spring. In this way resources were kept intact and occupied, and main roads were extended according to plan.

The Engineers ran their own camps and worked independently from the District, except for a little administrative help from the District office: they brought their own clerk. The Mt Baldhead road was the project in the Bruthen District. Such major roads were not yet being constructed further east in Gippsland.

DFOs were responsible for constructing "B" and "C" class roads. These classes were defined according to formation width, maximum gradients, and radius of curves. "D" class roads and tracks and horse-tracks were constructed for fire protection access.

Typically there would be two angle dozers and a compressor for jackhammers to build a "C" class road. Final grading would be done with a grader drawn behind a truck or with a powered grader. The dozer operators attended to lubrication and weekly inspection and service of their machines, and fitters from the Orbost workshop carried out maintenance as needed.

Cleanliness of diesel fuel and petrol had to be watched carefully. Liquid fuels were carted to the construction sites in drums by the forest work force. Petrol, kerosene and diesel fuel were stored at the camp or along the road in 44-gallon drums. Care was taken to incline sealed and opened drums so that rain would drain off, and away from the bung. A puddle inside the rim at the top of a vertical drum, or a puddle inclined towards the bung, could result in contamination of the fuel with water, introduced into the drum when air on top of the fuel contracted during the night after the heat of the day. Some foremen insisted that new drums of diesel fuel be delivered as near as practicable to the end of the roadworks and stand untouched for a long time, so that sediment would settle before fuel was pumped out.

Further, a couple of inches of fuel would commonly be left in the bottom of the drum, to ensure that suspended particles were not sucked up by the hand pump. Care of the fuel injectors on dozers and tractors was a matter of pride and prudence because the sources of service and replacements were a long way off, and the lengthy delays when injectors gave trouble disrupted the work.

The District roading in 1949 was concerned mainly with providing roads in the foothills and beyond into higher altitude forests. To survey the lines for extensions and new roads was largely a matter of setting out the best way to climb from an existing road up to the main ridges of the foothills and mountains.

The ideal "best way" avoided the steepest side-cuts, obvious hard going through surface rock, managed to cross watercourses where a huge fill would not be required, and generally did not lose elevation once gained. In practice the compromises reflected the experience and flair of the gradeliners who pegged out the roadline with a line of bush stakes.

Assistant foresters and a work mate often pegged out the line for district roads, and had been responsible also for preliminary reconnaissance of the route. Only a few areas were covered by topographical maps, and reconnaissance was made with the aid of an aneroid barometer. Distances could be estimated by timing the walk between identifiable points. Experience allowed "one mile an hour " or whatever, judged from the heaviness of the vegetation, rockiness and ground conditions. Bush pegs about two-metres long cut from wattles or other saplings were stripped of some of the bark for visibility and driven into the ground

to form a line, for either the top side of the road or its centre line. The choice rested with the preference of the operator of the angle dozer which would be used to clear the road line and start the earthmoving to form the road. Two sawn or bush sticks were used with an Abney level (clinometer) to achieve the desired slope of the road line. The stick on which the level was rested was shorter than the other by the half-inch or so from the bottom of the level tube to the cross-wire in the tube. This was essential when pegging out a long ascent. The position for each successive road peg was set when the tip of the longer stick, held vertically on the ground, coincided with the line of sight past the cross-wire from the rear peg. The work could be slow when dogwood and other low shrubs, or tall bracken, had to be slashed down to provide a line of sight. Especially on windy days the front man relied on hand signals from the Abney-man.

The maximum gradient was set by the road class, say 1 in 10, and the working gradient was reduced for curves through creek crossings, even to almost zero for the wider watercourses. In the steeper foothills the gradient of "C" class roads could be as steep as 1 in 8, or even steeper for very short distances, provided a laden truck could approach the steep pinch at a fair speed. Road lines were surveyed in sections, typically from one saddle to the next, or from a creek or road junction to a saddle above. The initial line of pegs could be adjusted when it failed to ascend to the saddle, or when it climbed too rapidly and projected a line in the air above the ground in the saddle.

Of course, when the length of road line and the difference in elevation between the start and finish had been estimated well, and the creek crossings and other variations worked out favourably, the initial line ended up just fine. The grade-liners also recorded the creek crossings and estimated the diameters and lengths of culvert pipes that would be needed, to allow for forward ordering of pipes.

The culvert pipes used were either concrete sections made by Rocla or Armco corrugated steel half-sections wired into bundles at the factory. Concrete pipes often had a short razor-sharp edge of cement at the rim which could cut hands to the bone as a section was being loaded or unloaded from a truck or being edged into position in the culvert trench. At Bruthen wash-leather gloves were issued to prevent these injuries. When Armco bundles were undone it was important to lay out the adjacent pieces in order, because the outer ones had been spread open just a little over the one next inside. By doing that it was much easier to assemble the culvert piping and secure them with the galvanised iron pegs. If the pieces were muddled up, the out-of-order pieces could ruffle or defeat even strong and experienced men. The heads of culverts in unstable soil were lined with rock gathered on the spot but rarely cemented together. An apron of rocks could be laid out to absorb the energy of water outflowing from a culvert and to disperse it into undisturbed vegetation.

Bridges were constructed with stringers, cut in the forest as close to the site as practicable, on to which sawn decking was spiked and then a gravel rail of sawn timber was fixed along each side of the decking to finish it off. These low-level bridges allowed flood water and debris to pass above the top with least obstruction. Stringers were the heaviest straight poles that could be got reasonably close to the site. They were usually embedded in the ground at their ends and covered with earth and perhaps pieces of rock, compacted by the tracks of a dozer. At larger streams, short piling or grader blades set vertically into the ground might be use to anchor the end of a stringer against flood water. If one end of a bridge gave way in a flood it could be pulled back into position, or even the entire bridge might be retrieved from its downstream resting place.

District roads were not designed on paper, and balance between cut and fill were not calculated. In places side-cuts were quite high, considering the width of the road formation. The camber and crown of the earth carriageway of a new road depended on the eye and skills of the dozer and grader operators, as

supervised by their foreman. By and large the standards achieved by operators who kept and liked their jobs were commendable.

The final job was to survey the road with chain and prismatic compass and plot it on to the master map at the District office.

Naming of District roads in the forests sometimes recognised an individual such as a well-known foreman, but usually simply related to a locality or the destination of the road. The Commission and senior officers discouraged the naming of roads after a forester. When this was done there were likely to be sardonic undertones. One road in steep foothill country in the Nowa Nowa District ended abruptly at rock faces, a certain sign of failure of reconnaissance, but, fortunately, its name was not "Folly."

In those days it could be a struggle for the staff available to keep ahead of new construction with reconnaissance walks. At one stage in 1949 the newly-arrived Junior Assistant Forester was working alone from his tent in a camp in the foothills in the Nowa Nowa District. I walked various ridges ahead of the dozers that were making new road to try and settle the right route to the ultimate destination. My equipment was an axe, an aneroid barometer and a County plan. The plan was laughably useless because it consisted largely of blank paper for the area in question. Late on the second day the scampering forester was convinced that the dozers were in fact working along a wrong ridge and the whole show had to be turned back to the right take-off spot. This was an isolated bungle by management, not the road foreman.

Communications

The public telephone service was woefully inadequate to cope with trunk line calls, that is, calls outside the local telephone district. All connections were made by PMG telephonists. The exchanges in the small country settlements were open during specified hours only, but could be opened at any hour by payment of a fee, provided someone was there to answer the service.

The delays experienced in securing a connection to head office in Melbourne were exasperating at times.

A service provided by the Postmaster-General's Department was the fixed time call. A caller prepared to pay an additional fee could specify the day and time when a call was wanted. For Melbourne this often fell down. The Construction Overseer in charge of the "A" class road work would book a fixed time call to the Engineers' Branch at the Commission's head office two or three days ahead. On the day, he could cool his heels in the Bruthen office for one or two hours waiting for his call.

One day a logging contractor at Bruthen gave up waiting for a call to Dandenong for tractor parts to be sent by train. He jumped into his utility truck and returned with the parts well before the connection was made. A resident of Swifts Creek booked an ordinary call to Melbourne but told me he cancelled it when he had not got through in three weeks.

Fire calls were given priority, and connections were made immediately. It would have been reckless to cry "Fire" because operators would listen in to verify that the call was genuine. The magic words were "This is a bushfire emergency call." Telephone operators were gems during large forest fires, handling calls and messages with intelligence and generally being helpful. Even in winter the local operators were likely to know whether a called party was away, or even where he was at the time.

In a fire and other emergency a technician from the PMG could attach a telephone instrument to wires along a roadside, so providing access to the public telephone system. This form of communication with the district office could be invaluable.

The Forests Commission had its own telephone lines connecting fire towers with one another and the district offices. The main East Gippsland telephones were at Mount Taylor, the Mount Taylor depot and quarters, Bruthen office, Mount Little Dick, Nowa Nowa office, Mount Nowa Nowa, Mount Tarra, Mount Victoria, and through to the Orbost Forest District office and Mount Raymond. The line was a single 8-gauge wire (as used for farm fencing) through barrel insulators. The insulators were strung from trees or poles when necessary. The wire was deliberately slack so that fallen branches of trees could bring the wire to the ground without breaking it, so maintaining communication, at least in dry weather. A limb or a tree might fall on to a line in storms or forest fires and speech could still be heard with any luck.

The magneto in only one of the wooden-cased Eriksson telephones was not strong enough to ring the bell of a distant instrument, so towermen enlisted the aid of intermediate operators. Their telephone handles were cranked in unison to tinkle the bell of the distant instrument, and sentences could be relayed.

The adoption of radio by the Forests Commission had been initiated by the fires of 1939 and the subsequent Royal Commission. The Forests Commission had developed very good radio support for its field staff by 1949. Head Office ran VL3AA, the central transmitter for the statewide system, and offices such as Bruthen and Nowa Nowa had 100-watt transmitters which allowed reliable communication with VL3AA, and, under certain emergency circumstances, similar field installations. Then approved, operators in two or more districts could use the State frequency for short, urgent transmissions between them. The traffic on that frequency was able to overcome to some extent the lamentable telephone service, within the limits of the licence issued by the PMG' s Department. There were three daily scheduled times for general radio traffic, and during dangerous fire weather transmissions to Melbourne could be made at any time. Of course the whole State could hear what was being said, so prudence called for a certain guardedness in phrasing transmissions. In addition there was a regional frequency used for traffic between district offices and portable equipment in camps. Local traffic from each transmitter was scheduled for set times of the day, but emergency transmissions could be made at any time by butting in to whatever scheduled traffic going on.

In an office such as the one at Bruthen there were two transmitters, operating on the Melbourne and the regional frequencies. At 7.20 am. on weekdays I called up in turn the camps and the Mount Taylor depot with outward messages and to receive messages. Early in 1950 there were six satellite transmitters. Morning traffic took up to 20 minutes. Transmissions followed a formal procedure, it being assumed always that PMG monitors could be listening in for infringements of licence.

The equipment used for the regional frequency came from surplus Defence Department stocks. Away from electricity supply it used bulky, heavy batteries.

Characteristically, there was a lot of background noise after sunset, so bad that use of radio at night was more trouble than it was worth. The radio equipment could not be used in a vehicle as mobile equipment, because it needed an aerial slung over a tree, forming a quarter-wave aerial. At camps, a half-wave aerial was stretched between two trees.

Late in 1949 came the TRP radio, a small, lightweight set with external dry batteries, designed by the Communications Branch of the Department. It had a whip aerial or could be used with a quarter-wave aerial

slung into a tree. The TRP was ticklish to adjust and tune, but generally performed well. TRP stood for Transmitter Receiver Portable.

There was no radio in District vehicles, but the driver could stop by the roadside and use a TRP outside the vehicle, although dead spots were plentiful.

Office staff who were regular users of the radios in the VL3AA network became well-known throughout the State. The Commission was extremely well served by several young women in district offices who operated the radios throughout the year, and who rose to the occasion in times of emergencies. They were known, with affection, as the office girl but they had and knew they had the respect of all and sundry.

Maps

At the beginning of the 1950s foresters in East Gippsland were not well served by maps of the forests. County and parish plans showed the main public roads and road alignments abutting the forests, and these were used as base plans on which to draw roads and tracks as they were surveyed by chain and compass, or merely sketched in.

The elevations of the main peaks were shown on some plans, but topographical coverage of the forests was scanty.

The master map compiled in a Forest District was used chiefly for determining the location of smoke reported by the lookouts up fire towers in the summer, for showing progress with extending roads and tracks, and for showing the locations of sawmills and permanent beekeeping sites. This map at Bruthen consisted of the individual map sheets which covered the district and part of its neighbouring districts glued to a large fibre panel, itself attached to the wall of the back office (map and draughting room) at Bruthen.

In 1949 the Nowa Nowa office was a small, one-roomed structure near the rear of the DFO's quarters, with no space for a wall map. A new office at Nowa Nowa was built soon after that.

A protractor around the location of each fire tower enabled a cotton thread to be stretched from the centre along the bearing towards smoke observed by the lookout man. The intersections of two or more threads allowed the location of the fire to the estimated. Care had to be taken in some instances not to confuse true bearings and compass bearings when the sighting from a secondary lookout point had been taken by compass.

It was in later times that the locations of fire towers on wall maps were at the centre of a brass eyelet through which there was a long string held taut by a weight on the end behind the mounting board. In 1949 a strong pin at the centre did the job.

Tracing paper was used to transfer features from one map to another. Even had there been photocopiers in those days, they would have been useless when features drawn on a wall map were needed on another map.

I was responsible for maintaining the wall map, plotting traverse measurements, and sometimes making copies of mapped information on tracing paper or blue linen with black or coloured inks. These could be sent with reports to head office or to adjacent forest districts for use with their maps.

Fire Protection

Protecting the forests and settlements from fire was never far from mind, whatever the current activity. The holocausts of 1939 were known to old and young forest workers in 1949. Junior foresters, scarcely 21 years old, had been impressionable schoolboys in 1939, and were aware of the widespread fires in 1944 and the 'Save the Forests Campaign' launched in Melbourne in 1944. As an applicant for a traineeship at Creswick each of them had solemnly told the selection panel that one of their prime ambitions was to protect the forests from destructive fires.

Field foresters had a day-to-day responsibility to enforce the observance of fire protection regulations by landholders, travellers, sawmillers, timber cutters, apiarists, truck drivers, and licensees such as wattle bark strippers.

An important task was to see that the fire protection regulations covering sawmills and logging operations were observed by the millers and licensees. At the mill the focus was on emergency water tanks on stands usually 30 feet high, the condition of hydrants and hoses around the mill, the construction and operation of the pits in which slabs and edgings were burnt, and keeping the mill yard clear of accumulations of bark and other inflammable material. The relatively new McCashney sawdust burners„ constructed to a CSIR (CSIRO) design were becoming common at hardwood mills throughout Victoria, and forest staff had to keep an eye on their safe operation to prevent spread of fire. In the forests the regulations required efficient spark arrestors on the exhausts of heat engines, construction of refuge dugouts to the Commission's specifications, and maintenance by the licensee of the blanketed entrance, first aid kit, drums of water and other supplies in the dugouts. Stirring up licensees to bring the dugouts back to the required standards in the spring was a thankless and time-consuming chore. Licensees were reluctant to spent money on a dugout which would only be needed in a local emergency, and what was the probability of that this coming summer? With better roads, better firefighting equipment and organisation, and the availability of some field radios, wasn't insistence on these dugouts unwarranted, whatever their value might have been in former times? So the predictable tussle went on.

The Commission had two similar trailer pumps, the Coventry Climax and the Beresford Stork, from war-time firefighting in British cities. The Climax had a four-cylinder Austin engine to drive a single-stage centrifugal pump. taking water from a dam or some other static storage, or from a water main. The pump put out large volumes of water at relatively low pressures, providing a most effective stream through 1.5inch canvas hose with a small delivery tip (nozzle).

Trailer pumps were used to fill tankers, and not much else in forest firefighting. They were, of course, well suited to fires in buildings, such as the Bruthen Inn, when, it was said, the trailer pump worked so hard and long into the night that the exhaust manifold glowed.

The portable pump of the day was the Pacific Marine gear-pump from USA carried on a wooden stretcher by two men. It was a self-priming, high revving, high pressure outfit very suitable for lifting water high above the water-source. These pumps were demonstrated on instruction days working in relay with a trailer pump or another Pacific Marine to lift water through an extensive hoseline to the fire line. Relays were either open, using a canvas tank from which the higher pump drew water, or were closed, where the suction hose of the second pump drew water from the hose supplied by the first pump. Operating a closed relay demanded an alert operator at the second pump, to throttle down immediately the flow of water to it diminished or stopped, else the engine would race and the pump gears be damaged. A few Pacific Marines had phosphor bronze components to allow sea water to be pumped to coastal fires. Special care had to be

taken with positioning of the suction hose of a Pacific Marine pump, to avoid silt and mud being drawn into it: the suction screen could be suspended on a float just far enough below the surface of the water to avoid sucking in air.

Another pump was the Johnson HOK from Canada, a centrifugal pump attached to the bottom of an outboard motor, all being mounted on a wooden stretcher. This unit had a high centre of mass, an exposed manual gear to engage the pump to the engine, and the cooling water required continual adjustment to keep its temperature within a reasonable range.

The Commission had, since 1939 during the difficult years of war, assembled the best available power pumps, to test them in firefighting in various parts of Victoria, and this should be applauded in retrospect rather than hastily criticised.

All that said, it quickly dawned on foresters just out of Creswick that, although the use of power pumps featured in their training, for several reasons they had few applications in forest firefighting in most native forests.

Firefighting was solely or largely dry firefighting by making control lines by hand or with dozers, with or without backburning according to circumstances. Aircraft were not available to drop water or retardant. Practical firefighting built up knowledge of the behaviour of fire in various fuels under different conditions. This knowledge was not quantified by measurements to any extent. At district offices small sticks of planed pine kept under standard conditions were weighed daily to give a measure of fuel moisture content, more as a trial of their usefulness than to guide levels of readiness.

So, by example and anecdote the experienced firefighters taught the new chums how to tackle forest fires.

The hand tools were fire rakes, slashers and axes. Rakes were wide and had long tynes, good for making a fireline in loose dry litter. There were three or four patterns of slasher - light fern hooks, heavier less-curved slashers for shrubs and light wattle, and the "Gippslander" two-edged heavy slasher. "Trojan" slashers had distinctive catalogue numbers which almost come to mind as this is written.

Crews using hand tools were not commonly organised to work according to named methods such as "Step up". Men using a mixture of hand tools would work a line by responding to continual instructions or simply by observing what tool was need where, and working in with their mates.

Although Assistant Foresters outranked Forest Overseers and Forest Foremen, their relationships were usually set by trust and deference to experience and age. Where exceptions existed the technical staff were practised in taking an assistant down the requisite number of pegs. One afternoon with two foremen from Bruthen I arrived at a fire in steep forest near Tambo Crossing at which Country Roads Board men and some farmers were already present, The senior foreman nudged me forward when the Bush Brigade lieutenant asked who was in charge. The late-summer afternoon was mild and calm, the forest fuels were relatively light and there were enough men to check the fire before sunset - a good opportunity to try out the lad. Under my "direction", with my foreman friend near my shoulder, the fire was held at 300 acres, all went home pleased, and the DFO said "Well done". On such beginnings modest or even great reputations can be founded.

At that fire I carried a TRP for the first time and was able to talk to the observer in a RAAF plane from East Sale aerodrome as it circled the fire. Arrangements were being explored that summer for RAAF aircraft to

report on the extent and behaviour of forest fires in East Gippsland. On this occasion it was reassuring to know something of the far side of the fire before anyone on the ground could get a look at it.

The RAAF also assisted the Forests Commission in 1949 by familiarising district firefighters with the use of a helicopter to transport men to remote fires, and for reconnaissance. When the helicopter came to Nowa Nowa it used the sports ground near the old hotel by Boggy Creek to pick up its passengers for their flights of five or so minutes. Two or three volunteers were hoisted into the hovering craft to demonstrate its value for evacuating an injured firefighter. All present learned a valuable lesson as the first volunteer standing beneath the helicopter reached up to grasp the descending sling and cable that would lift him skywards. As he touched the harness there was a static electricity discharge and he was half-flung to the ground. Care was taken thereafter to let the harness touch the ground before grabbing it. The helicopter was not used operationally during the ensuing summer, probably because there were no large fires in the Bruthen and Nowa Nowa districts.

Fuel reduction in the forests by burning was an important part of fire protection. In the coastal and foothill forests the dried heads of trees felled for timber near strategic roads and ridges were burned in autumn and winter. The wax matches (vestas) that were issued for this work were reliable in damp weather and flared effectively where were thrown. Some men were adept at flicking a wax match in a certain way from the thumb and forefinger to land several feet away, just where ignition was desired. Horsemen in the high country with plenty of vestas in the pocket could achieve a lot of patch and trickle burning in a few hours.

Bryant and May waterproof matches were also used in large numbers for fuel reduction burning.

For strip burning one often dragged a burning leafy branch along the edge of a track, instead of using a kerosene drip-torch.

Forest Industries

Controlling the removal of timber and other forest produce from State forest was a big part of District work, entirely through the supervision of licensees. There was no departmental utilisation in the region at the time.

The Forests Act provided the basic definitions of forest produce for reserved and protected forest, and Forests Commission circulars of instruction provided the detail for issuing local licences, calculating and collecting royalty. All seemed orderly and well defined.

A good deal of the timber was converted directly in the forests with hand tools to the form required by the final consumers. The direct conversion of railway sleepers, beams and other hewn and split products required skilled workers, in the case of sleepers with a special sleeper cutter's licence which set the holder apart as a top dog. The intensity of supervision of licensees by forest staff was designed to control which trees were felled, accurate measurement of output, illegal removal from the forest, observance of fire regulations, patently unsafe working practices, and responsible use of the roads and tracks. Several forest overseers and foremen, and tree markers employed under the AWU Award were kept busy with this side of District work. Supervisors usually went out in pairs.

This made the best use of motor transport and allowed them to team up where large logs would have to be measured, or a fractious licensee pulled into line. By planning the day one supervisor could drop his work mate off and pick him up at an agreed time.

Supervisors carried an axe, branding hammer, log and notebooks, pencils (preferably the indelible sort, although they were a nuisance in the wet), and timber crayons, say, red and blue.

The products of the forests were sawlogs, pit logs, poles and piles, sleepers, beams, keels, paling, rails, chop logs, wattle bark, charcoal. There were many permanent and temporary beekeeping sites in the accessible coastal and foothill forests, and some grazing and agistment licences to oversee. Apart from the sawmills, there was a tool handle factory at Wiseleigh, and a tannery on the river at Bairnsdale taking in wattle bark from public and private land.

Whatever the product being cut, it was the rule that all trees judged by the supervisor to be fit for that product had to be felled, or if the tree turned out to be full of rot at stump height that the scarf showed that plainly. Butt fire scars, swellings from ant nests and nasty-looking bumps were useful indicators of internal defect, on which supervisor and faller could agree. Being wrong about the soundness of a tree was a useful way to gain experience on the job, mixed with a measure of humility. The sounding of trees with the falling axe as a reliable way of testing a trunk for rot was often warmly debated The axe was struck into the tree, say two metres above the ground, at an angle of 30 to 40 degrees from vertical. The faller interpreted the sound and the vibration up his arms, to say whether the wood was sound. Trees that were so rotten as to be just a tub of mud sounded very dull, to the faller and the supervisor. Sounding was unreliable for grey gum trees, for instance, if the blade of the axe happened to enter a kino pocket or some other dead spot. Sounding seemed to work most of the time for stringybarks, but was not much used for trees in a stand of vigorous silvertop ash. The introduction of chainsaws made it easier for fallers to fell trees and long-butt if required, so the question of sounding trees lost its importance within a few years.

Sawlogs, poles and piles, sleepers, beams another construction timbers were branded on the butt or end section with the face of a branding hammer bearing the Crown inscribed with a serial number registered against the forest supervisor's name. This brand allowed the timber to be removed from the forest.

The supervisor also branded the stump from which the produce came, to show that he had approved of the standard of tree utilisation, and that produce had been matched up with that stump. A senior officer could make an inspection of stumps and know which supervisor had been in charge. On some occasions the head of the tree was also branded, if close supervision of full utilisation of trees was in question. If unauthorised felling had taken place in the forest the stumps would be unbranded. The opposing side of the head of the branding hammer stamped the broad arrow into timber, and this was used to seize produce as provided under the Forests Act. To lose or mislay one's branding hammer was a shameful event, and great efforts were made to recover a lost hammer. When one was declared lost its number was circulated statewide and staff instructed to keep an eye out for timber bearing that hammer brand. New assistants were not issued with a branding hammer until they had shown a grasp of field procedures and a reasonable level of proficiency in judging timber and products.

Sawlogs

Sawlogs were measured at stump, where any allowances for defects were recorded by the supervisor. There was no checking station then, but a load of logs could on rare occasions be check-measured in front of the office by office staff, supposing that forest supervisors had been prevented, say, by a fire, from visiting an operation when expected The contract fallers entered their measurements of each log in a book provided by the Commission and the supervisor took the book when he visited the site, so that he could check the entries for length and girth under bark. Logs were numbered serially on the butt with timber crayon, and in the measurement book. Log books were exchanged at each visit to the operation, so that

entries could be transcribed into log folios at the office, and the faller had another book to carry on with. The interests of the fallers were also the Commission's interests, because the faller was paid on gross volume of sawlog prepared and fallers tended to err on the big side when rounding off or allowing for the remaining bark at mid-length under the log where it could not be axed off.

The tapes used were so-called metallic tapes, linen with metal wires running in them, to resist stretching or shrinkage in use. The tape was wound into a circular leather (later plastic) case, but, of course, the first few feet of a new tape were soon the worse for repeated wetting and drying. A slightly shrunk tape resulted in recorded log girths in the faller's favour, and these were also favourable to tractor operators and truck drivers who were usually paid by the volume of logs handled.

An important aspect of the sawlog measuring system was to keep track of every log book, with its distinctive red cover. Imagine four sawlog harvesting sites with four fallers at each, requiring at least 32 current books and spare books in the hands of supervisors. It called for a simple, methodical recording and handling of books to ensure none got lost or missed. The pages of the log books were not serially numbered, but, of course, a tom out page required a convincing story.

Check-measurements of sawlogs were not very accurate, largely because the supervisor had to stoop or kneel with his tape and poke the end under the log so that it could be drawn back over the log. In the case of large logs the supervisor had to hop over the log to fish up the end of the tape, or rely on help from a second supervisor. Often a thin dry stick stuck in the wire loop at the end of the tape was needed to poke the tape through debris and mud, especially where the log had thumped down on to damp earth.

Where many check-measurements were found to be acceptably close to those recorded by a faller, it was allowable to check ten per cent of the logs and to use the faller's measurements for calculating royalty. Fallers whose measurements were regarded in this way scored a small store of trust which could be handy if a small misdemeanour or misunderstanding should arise. It was prudent to include several logs lying far away from the landing or track in the measured sample: a lazy supervisor would probably find all the logs near the road had been well-measured.

After measurement and inspection of the standards of log-making, the supervisor struck the butt of the log with his branding hammer, so it could be legally removed from the forest. Fallers were expected to cut stumps low and to make sawlog as far as practicable up into the head of the tree. The latter was seldom cause for argument where sawlogs were being made from old trees in the mixed species foothill and coastal forests, because the point of heavy branching was clear-cut, and fallers wanted to get maximum log length. As for stump height, this was largely what was reasonable given that crosscut saws were used for falling. The arrival of the first chain saw at a sawlog site near Bruthen was greeted with caution. It was a very heavy, two-man "Darnam" machine, made in England, with a scratcher chain. It worked well for cross-cutting, unless the chain jammed when it tended to throw one operator against the log. The fallers were wary about using it for falling, both for the difficulty of handling it accurately and because its noise drowned out all other noises. Between the strokes of a cross-cut saw a faller could hear splintering and creaking in the trunk, or a call from an offsider, but not with a petrol engine roaring in front of him. Also, the task of carrying the saw and fuel on steeper ground and through scrub was arduous and slow: a man carrying an axe, a couple of wedges and his favourite crosscut saw reckoned he was far better off.

Kelly and Plumb axes, both made in USA, were the brands used until the Australian Hytest appeared in quantity, perhaps as early as 1946. The steel in the Kelly was harder than in the Plumb, which needed sharpening more often. Loyalty to one or the other was often strong. The early batches of Hytest were

prone to gapping in hard wood, sometimes in the shape of a big bite from the edge of the blade. On frosty mornings it was common for axemen to warm the head of the axe at the billy fire before starting work, to reduce the risk of gapping. The American axes came with hickory handles. The Hytest handles were spotted gum.

At best, supervisors and licensees got to know and respect one another's work and difficulties, to the advantage of all parties. Often they were near-neighbours in their small communities, although they might not associate very closely. Remember, there was always the realisation that the licensee you had to reprimand today was the man you might call on for help with a fire or other emergency next week.

One of the first lessons received by a new assistant forester from bush supervisors was to park the vehicle ready to leave the site without any reversing or turning which could delay a dignified exit after an exchange of words, or worse, could result in getting stuck in mud badly enough to need help to get out. It was said that the chances of getting stuck when the blood was up could be rather high. The second lesson was always to leave the ignition keys in the lock, so that someone else could take the vehicle in the case of an accident, or move it out of harm's way in the summer. If some scamp abused the general trust he would have been dealt with by several parties, and, remember, these were the days when strangers were seldom in the forests. (The only man to lock his car was the Inspector, who would lock it even in the yard at the rear of the office at Bruthen, within a few feet of the workshop. The mechanic-fitter in particular was vocal about this habit, because of the attitude it reflected.)

Sawlogs did not lie for long. The demand for green sawn hardwood was huge in those post-war years, and sawmillers enjoyed the clamour for their output. I explored the progress of some grey gum sawlogs on one occasion, to find that the trees from which they were made were felled yesterday morning, the logs were in the mill yard in the afternoon, timber sawn from some of those logs this morning will be loaded on to a truck today and driven as part of a house-lot of scantlings to a building site in Melbourne, where the first bearers and joists will be nailed in place tomorrow.

Transport regulations required a large proportion of sawn timber to be taken by rail from Orbost, Nowa Nowa and Bruthen to the Melbourne market. Permits could be secured for certain consignments to go by road. In October, 1950 a railway strike began and it ran for 54 days, during which sawn timber was carted to Melbourne by road.

Poles and Piles

The State Electricity Commission and the Postmaster General's Department required large numbers of hardwood poles for overdue replacements of old poles in transmission lines, and for extensions to the electricity and telephone systems. The growing stock in the large areas of accessible eastern forests could satisfy large orders for poles of various specifications.

The royalty rates for poles were high compared with sawlogs, and were specified in detail according to species group, length and head diameter. Contracts to supply poles were usually won by well equipped licensees.

Selecting trees for a pole contractor called for skill and experience. Imagine estimating the diameter under bark of a tree at some ten metres from the ground, bearing in mind it straightness and freedom from signs of rot or defect, before deciding if one should mark the tree for felling by that contractor. Not all supervisors were good pole-tree markers. On one occasion a forest foreman dropped off two junior assistant foresters to let them try their hand at selecting pole trees in a stand of some 30 hectares, and almost scoffed two

hours later when they told him how many trees they had found to specification. He then marched them over the area, increasing their tally several-fold at the same time as he tried to instruct them in the art.

Whenever a supervisor came across an outstanding tree which could provide a very long straight pole, he made a point of remembering where it was growing so that the rare request for such a pole could be met promptly. Radio masts at the East Sale installation of the RAAF come to mind.

So that SEC timber inspectors could be certain about species, some bark would be left on yellow stringybark poles near the butt.

Poles and piles of the naturally very durable species were cut from time to time from ironbark and boxes. Forests in other parts of Victoria were supplying most of this class of timber at the beginning of the 1950s.

Sleepers

The Victorian Railways and the SEC required large numbers of railway sleepers, chiefly to overcome the lag in replacing old sleepers during the war years.

The VR paid royalty to the Forests Commission for sleepers cut for the railways, based on tallies of sleepers loaded into railway trucks at designated spots by the cutter who had hewn them. The VR also covered its cutters with accident insurance, even although they were pieceworkers.

Cutters were paid well for each sleeper produced and passing scrutiny by a Railways inspector, but a cutter received nothing in wet weather, on loading days and when time was lost through sickness. Then, deducting the costs of running a truck and paying for equipment, the net earnings were not that great An energetic cutter of sober habits who worked carefully to avoid injury could earn good money. That said, at the beginning of a wet spell the bar at the Nowa Nowa hotel could resound to rousing choruses before noon, but would be quiet towards the end of a week's wet weather.

Sleeper cutting required close supervision. Trees for failing were marked by a supervisor who checked up on his next inspection that all marked trees had been felled and, in some areas, that no unmarked tree had been felled. Trickery could be prevented by toe-branding a selected tree as well as blazing its bark on two sides. A tree was toe-branded by axing a notch in a toe or prominent root and branding it with the hammer. Unless a supervisor ensured that his brandings were distinct, a cutter could counterfeit branding by cutting a notch and bruising the surface with the corner of the back of his axe. He ran a risk by doing that because it was an offence under the Forests Act to counterfeit a Crown brand.

Railway sleepers, for broad gauge, were nine feet long and 10 by 5 inches in section. After cutting a length and taking off the bark the cutter would prepare a flat face with his broadaxe from which to work. He would then use a template to mark the position of the first sleeper or pair of sleepers, to be back-cut , that is, with the 10-inch face running tangentially in the trunk. A cotton line, kept in a tin with carpenter's blue, was stretched the length of the billet and flicked to leave a line of blue powder on the log (billet) to guide the broadaxe. When opposing faces had been squared the timber was turned and the fourth side cut. If the grain of the wood was spiral or interlocked the line of a cut would be cut out with a falling axe as a lengthwise groove, to assist broadaxing. The cutters used the broadaxe with precision; sometimes the face of a straight-grained sleeper looked and felt as smooth as a sheet of glass.

Sleepers for the SEC's rail lines at Yallourn were smaller and called pup sleepers. The SEC engineers specified naturally durable species, such as red box. The VR's list of acceptable sleepers even included

silvertop ash for a time, which was a popular option for the cutters. Silvertop was easier to work and the daily tally more than with some of the stringybarks.

Specifications for sleepers, the standard rectangular ones, excluded rot, grub holes, more than a trace of sapwood, large branch inclusions and other defects that would impair the strength and service life of the sleeper. A cutter could prepare a few, probably up to ten per cent of his output, roundtop sleepers which did not fully meet the rectangular specifications. The Railways used them for lines with lighter traffic or for short-term scattered replacements along a section of line. The cutter was paid less for a roundtop.

Each cutter had his brand, registered with the Railways and the Forests Commission, with which he branded each sleeper he produced. The metal brand was held against the end of the sleeper and struck sharply with the back of an axe.

Sleeper passes, when an inspector tallied sleepers as cutters loaded them into railway trucks, were usually held every fortnight, at the Bruthen or Nowa Nowa station, or perhaps at a siding east of Nowa Nowa. Presumably there were also passes at Bairnsdale. Two cutters took a sleeper from a stack that had been built up, probably daily, during the fortnight and pushed it up two skids to the door of the railway truck where it was taken over by a third man and stacked according to a pattern in the truck. Often two men worked up in the truck. The inspector had usually looked at the brands on sleepers in each stack beforehand, but would verify a brand at whim or randomly as sleepers were going up the skids. A cutter could try to conceal a defect in a sleeper with mud, or hug a bad end to him. One was told stories of splits in the ends of sleepers that had been pulled tight with an iron S-staple (made by a blacksmith for the purpose), but these tales might have been a single event multiplied in the telling.

Forest staff did not attend passes, except for a few minutes talk, and to observe the scene for a while.

Sleeper cutting was a well-paid and glamorous occupation only to those at a distance. Days started early and homecoming, sometimes via the railway yard, was often late. A cutter without a tray truck would have to pay another to cart in his sleepers. Carting and pass days ate into production time.

If there were no wet days for maintaining equipment this would still have to be done. Swarms of mosquitoes in humid summer months were sometimes so troublesome that the cutters would prefer to work in smoke than clear air. A smoke-pot was made out of a 5-gallon oil tin by cutting out the top and puncturing a few vent holes around it low down. Fuelled with wood scraps, damp bark and leaves it was an effective smoke generator. Of course, it was just another item of equipment to be moved around.

Sleeper slabs remained the property of the Crown. If the cutter wanted some, he had first call, after that the farmer or other citizen who might want them as a base for stacked hay, for a pig sty, a rough fence or even firewood could obtain them. Royalty for sleeper slabs was quite low.

If memory serves reliably, the sleeper cutters worked from tree to tree rather than at a workplace to which logs were dragged. When picking up sleepers to take them to rail it was sometimes a matter of carrying sleepers a fair way to the truck, or cutting a minimum access to where sleepers lay. Most of the newer trucks were from UK; Bedford and Austin, rather than Ford Thames. The cutters said the gearing of these makes suited forest work much better than American trucks, and they were smaller to manoeuvre. Ex-Army vehicles were also used by licensees, but their maintenance could be a problem compared with trucks from commercial agencies.

Lunches for sleeper cutters had taken a turn for the better in 1949 or thereabouts, when jaffle irons became common. The general stores sold more of them than their keepers ever anticipated. Standard sandwiches could be converted into tasty hot jaffles over the billy fire, provided the outside of the bread had been buttered, at the time of making or as the jaffle iron was loaded. The iron comprised two circular, hinged convex aluminium shells which closed on the sandwich when their handles were drawn together and secured with a wire clip. The corners of bread could be cut or brushed off. A couple of minutes in the coals each side and the toasted jaffle was ready. Enthusiasts went in for jaffles containing cooked minced beef and pickle, banana and honey, and other imaginative combinations.

The sandwich from today's electric sandwich-toaster is a new-generation imitation, lacking a sleeper cutter's special, with its hint of wood smoke. (I still have the jaffle iron bought at the time and used originally over the circular flame of his Lane kerosene stove in the hut at Bruthen.) Some supervisors had a good idea of the times when individual cutters would brew fresh tea, and I wondered silently in the early days how many billy teas they could be cadged in the course of the day.

Beams

The VR and the CRB required hewn beams for track crossings and bridges. There was a small but continual demand for these heavy construction timbers, as well as for round timbers known as cattle pit and crossing logs. Royalties for them reflected the scarcity of trees which could yield such large long pieces, free from major defects, as well as the worth of a large very strong construction timber.

Keels

Very occasionally there would be an order for a hewn keel for a new boat. The story went that the longest keel hewn during the war was for a minesweeper, 80 feet long. When squaring up a keel, or octagonally dressing poles with the axe, the hewer kept in step on the left and right sides as he worked up the timber. If not, the growth stresses in the wood on the uncut side would pull the long timber in a curve.

Rails and Palings

Split rails and palings were ordered, usually by the VR, from time to time, and these required a truly straight-grained trunk of a large tree. Splitters would select their own trees, after scrutinising the form of the tree and the fissuring of its bark, and cutting a window into the wood about two metres from the ground. A window would be up to 25 cm square, axed deep enough to allow inspection of the run of the wood grain. The efficacy of this was debatable, but splitters seemed to value it, and in certain stands quite a few trees trees had old windows. The clean, pale rails and palings from silvertop ash looked well on the forest floor. If neatly stacked together and the bark from the trunk draped over them palings could almost reconstruct the log from which they had been split.

Chop Logs

When the organisers of the Bairnsdale and other annual shows in the region put in their orders with a licensee for chop logs the serious job of finding just the right trees for them would begin. Red stringybark was the timber used. The short logs had to be matched up in batches for the axemen competing in each event. The organisers of one competition tried alpine ash but stuck to red stringybark.

Firewood

Most of the firewood cut from State forest for sale came from forest blocks around Bairnsdale, for box and red gum were strongly preferred. There was a lot of standing and lying dead timber in private paddocks, a deal of it box and red gum, and the total commercial demand for firewood in the towns was relatively small.

The forest staff liked to use box and red ironbark. The lowland winters were mild and therefore annual usage was not all that great The Inspector expected and got his domestic firewood delivered in a Commission truck by men from Bruthen. This was done on a Saturday morning when he could supervise the delivery over his back fence. In 1950 the men had a chainsaw to cut the wood to length in the foothill forest near Mount Little Dick; hard dry ironbark and box, painstakingly selected to be the toughest to split, such was the standing of the Inspector with the men. The prank misfired, because on the occasion of the next delivery the Inspector watched the unloading as usual, and then instructed that some two dozen blocks of wood he had put aside be loaded up and taken away. The consolation was examining the blocks for axe marks to show the Inspector had tried but not succeeded in splitting off manageable firewood.

Willow Clefts

While I was at Nowa Nowa a contractor was cutting small volumes of willow for cricket bats. He felled some old trees and cut off large limbs from others along the Buchan River, where they had been planted many years earlier. The clefts were spilt radially from billets cut from clear sections of log, and were a little longer than the length of the blade of a bat. The three angular corners of each cleft were trimmed roughly with an axe to prepare them for carting. The royalty was to be paid by volume of clefts taken, and it fell to me to work out a practical way to arrive at the volume. I traced the outline of both ends of many clefts picked up at random, and came up with an average cross-sectional area to apply to the standard length of the clefts. This method was accepted by the contractor and the Department, and royalty accounts could be made out on a tally of clefts. The operation would have left a mess of bark, trimmings, rejected billets, bark and small branches and along the grassy banks of the river had not we insisted that the contractor gather up the debris and burn it in heaps. The green willow did not burn well and it was just as well that the willow utilisation was a small, short-lived thing.

Wattle Bark

The tannery at Bairnsdale, at the river inside the town, was a ready buyer of bundles of bark stripped from black wattle on public and private land. There was a lower diameter on trees that might be stripped, but otherwise little control of which trees were stripped in State forest under licence. Unlicensed strippers took their chances from time to time. Stripping was a quick and quiet operation and bundles of bark could be taken out of the forest that day, or night. The thicker butt bark up to about four feet from the ground was carefully removed and then streamers of bark pulled off the wattle as high as practicable, more or less in maypole fashion.

The streamers could be cut to a convenient length or merely folded to suit the bundling.

Bundles were tied with hay-twine. Payment to the stripper and of royalty for State bark was made on the buyer's dockets showing the weight of the bark.

During a solitary patrol of State forest near a creek I came across half a dozen or so good bundles of bark lying near stripped trees. Knowing that no licence had been issued, I seized the bark by drawing the broad arrow on inner bark here and there, because the hammer would not brand bark, even if a chunk of wood

was held behind it as an anvil. A District truck carted the bark in later in the day. If memory serves, the bark was not claimed and was later sold to the tannery and the proceeds put through the revenue account. Doubtless the DFO weighed the chances of a magistrate in Petty Sessions taking the view that the time of the court was being mis-spent were the procedure laid down in the Forests Act to dispose of seized produce followed through, and he took a short-cut. The DFO would have considered also the staff time involved in preparing for a court hearing and the waiting in the court house while other cases were heard first.

Charcoal

The war-time charcoal industry had folded up before 1949, but some kilns still stood at several sites in the forests. They were more items of curiosity than immediate value, except to farmers looking for a large steel bin. Petrol was rationed during part of the two years 1949 and 1950, but those who could not obtain enough petrol for their needs (one way or another) had no wish to put up with the inconvenience of gas producers. Remember, there were few cars and local people did not travel far afield by private means for work or leisure. So, there was virtually no market for charcoal. (Petrol rationing had been lifted in June, 1949; was imposed again in November, 1949; and finally lifted in February, 1950.)

Grazing

Grazing leases were issued by the Department of Crown Lands and Survey for Protected forest, and there was virtually no grazing in Permanent forest. Licences could be obtained to agist farm stock in Permanent forest in times of drought. Graziers were supposed to be responsible for lighting many of the fires in the higher country, and fresh horse-tracks could be found in the vicinity of some fires. Even if firefighters were to come across a stockman when they arrived at a fire, what evidence was that? As the old foremen would explain, all the horseman had to say was that he had seen the smoke and rode over to see what he could do. Perhaps it suited the Commission's politics with respect to the Lands Department to heap the blame for ignitions in the high country on to grazing licensees, rather than to recognise lightning as a frequent cause of fires. The recommendations of the Royal Commission into forest grazing in 1946 were fresh in mind, and relations between Forests and Lands seemed to be uneasy.

Honey

Beekeepers were regarded as friends of the forests. They were quiet, gentle men and women who did no harm to forest interests, and were reliable sources of information when asked. Wild honey from bees' nests was forest produce, and there was a nominal royalty on the honey taken from a bee tree. If the tree was felled in the process the royalty was the same. The honey obtained by commercial beekeepers resulted from their occupation of forest for the purpose of "grazing" their bees, and licences were issued by the Commission for Permanent forest, and by the Lands Department for Protected forest. The opportunities for confusion and hard feelings were compounded by private landholders allowing beekeepers (for recompense in cash or by a tin of honey) to place hives near State forest boundaries. Temporary Bee Site licences lasted three months, intended to suit eucalypt flowerings. In practice, an apiarist might hold a prime site continuously by taking out a new licence when the current one was about to expire. It was a matter of securing that site for the next honey flow. A choice site for a caravan near water would be taken under Bee Farm Licence, devised to accommodate a honey-extraction caravan, living caravan or both. Temporary sites were shown on maps by brown paper or cardboard discs two miles in diameter, it being recognised that a mile was the effective limit of working for the bees. The Farm licence covered an area of one acre.

The poor communication between Forests and Lands offices over bee sites prevailed statewide. There was no directive to liaise effectively, and one officer's efforts to iron out real problems of conflicts in his area could achieve very little, when the Lands Officer did not know or care what they were.

The Forests Commission required district staff to send in quarterly reports on budding and flowering of eucalypts, ostensibly to assist the apiarists of the State. The migratory beekeepers did not think much of the value of the information in these reports, preferring to rely on their own observations or intelligence from local sources on which they could depend.

Tool Handle Factory

A factory at Wiseleigh, just out of Bruthen, made axe, shovel and other tool handles, mainly from grey gum. The repetition lathes were fascinating to watch as they followed the contours of the iron pattern.

Forest Assessment

The Assessment Branch of the State Forests Department had several crews at any one time carrying out forest assessment and mapping. District staff confined themselves to timber reconnaissance and a few spot measurements of trees. At the time in question, there was a camp of assessors at Bulumwaal but none in the Nowa Nowa Forest District. The assessors were working in stands up toward Mount Baldhead. The crew comprised two assistant foresters (both from the same Creswick year as me), two mappers and two or three chainmen. The work produced contour maps of forest types and timber stand classes, with estimates of sawlog volumes.

Assessment of the forests was the usual assignment for about half of the newly appointed foresters. The length of appointment to this work varied a lot. The 1949 crop of new foresters was the third successive year of large outputs from the School, and a higher proportion went to district work immediately or soon after appointment. At the conclusion of an initial training camp at Kinglake West I was told I was too immature to take on the responsibilities of an assessment camp, so would be posted to a forest district.

The assessment work towards Mount Baldhead was not much ahead of logging for new sawmills. The Engineers were busy building the main road, and sites for sawmills within the surveyed limits of the Bulumwaal Township were about to be selected. (Bulumwaal was little more than a place name and an old surveyed site. Following the 1939 fires in Victoria sawmills had to be situated within surveyed townships, not in the forests, hence the usefulness of such a township to satisfy the letter of that requirement.)

Silviculture

Silviculture was to be a focus of tomorrow's forestry. For now, there were roads to be made, fires to be fought, timber to supply to a State turning its energies to post-war goals. Assessments would, in time, reveal the composition and structure of the forests, knowledge on which silviculture would be planned and its practice built. For, now the pole stands would be thinned, advantage would be taken of the hungry market for sawn timber to sell as many logs from defective old trees as practicable, and areas of regeneration would get preferential protection within the practicalities of firefighting.

Unless access to the forests and firefighting capability combined to provide far improved levels of protection, the fruits of years forest custodianship could be wiped out in a few hours. No doubt a DFO seized with an imperative could have achieved some advances in the understanding of silviculture of one or two forest types. But, the priorities of the time seemed so clear at the time. The DFO at Bruthen in 1949

had served only four years as a junior before so much of the forest estate had been engulfed by fires at the beginning of 1939, and he and all his workmates had had to pick themselves up as best they could after the impacts of their various experiences, shoulder war-time responsibilities, and sort out future priorities in their own minds, and prepare to lead a new generation of field foresters.

The effects on forest composition and health of selective marking for removal of the favoured timber species in the coastal forests were not a topic of discussion in 1950.

Public Recreation in State forest

Apart from the odd angler, hiker or naturalist, there were very few visitors to be encountered in the forests. Forest drives for holiday-makers at Lakes Entrance or Buchan were not even thought of.

The fireguard who spent the summer based on the log but at Bentley's Plain (up from Ensay near Mount Nugong), Bill Ah Chow, kept a visitors' book year after year. He welcomed several academics and others to share his hospitality while they walked, painted or photographed in the forests. He would have a load of sheep brought up the Big Lift at the beginning of the summer to a small paddock near the hut, and at the end of the season the skins would accompany him down to Ensay. He was a renowned character.

Helping the Community

Foresters were encouraged at Creswick and thereafter to be active in support of the community in which they lived and worked. The Forests Commission had equipment at its district headquarters and depots which was valuable in emergencies and in many other situations. The goodwill of scattered communities was invaluable in protecting the forests and in controlling activities in them, and near their boundaries. Help to communities was defined by a convergence of its expectations and the DFO's perception of what latitude the Forests Commission would accept.

To do an occasional grading for half an hour or so around the town's sports ground as the machine was driven in to the Commission's depot for the week-end was a small fraction of the cost of operating the grader for a week, yet the assistance to the community was substantial and a fillip to the grounds committee.

A load of water for the tank at a public hall after a long dry spell was a gesture appreciated widely. After all a fire pump had to be given a maintenance run every so often.

There was, of course no SES in those days and searches for lost persons, and assistance during floods was a matter of what best could be done with local resources. Some of the forest foremen and overseers who had been in the Defence Services were memorable leaders in emergencies.

Helping the community was overshadowed by the fact that the Minister of Forests lived on a property at Mount Taylor, and nurtured his electorate carefully. On one occasion I refused to lend the licensee of an hotel (who turned up out of the blue at the Bruthen office on a day the DFO was away) some hundreds of feet of canvas fire hose and a trailer pump so that the chap could fill up water tanks at his hotel for the summer. Fortunately the Senior Overseer happened to be around at the time and tactfully took me into the office while he explained that the Minister would see to it that his friend got the equipment, as he did year after year, and would be displeased at a refusal. The 50-foot lengths of came back three weeks later, muddy and roughly lapped up. The hoses had to be scrubbed clean and hoisted to dry, the pump to be serviced and checked over.

Late one afternoon during a wet spell I was passenger in a 3-ton truck returning home via Bairnsdale after delivering culvert pipes to a road gang. We were traversing a flat grassy clearing and came across a traveller and his wife whose car was nicely bogged in a soft section of the track. We pulled the car clear with a rope the driver always carried and received the thanks from a taxpayer who would have otherwise been stranded as night fell. He pulled a ten-shilling note from his pocket for us to take and have a drink on him. I declined his gift, saying it was our duty and pleasure to help him, and Forests Commission staff did not accept presents. The note went back in his pocket and we drove once we saw he was safely on his way. The truck driver did not speak all the way home, and was a bit cool toward me for weeks.

Shopping and Services

At Nowa Nowa there was a small post office store and a general store besides the hotel. That's all, except the primary school and the railway station. The Police were at Lakes Entrance. where there was also a doctor. The nearest hospital was at Orbost, and there were several doctors and the much larger hospital at Bairnsdale.

Nowa Nowa was an unattractive settlement in several major ways. Suffice to say here that when I left I vowed I would never again stay a night in the place, even if it meant walking the 15 km to Lakes Entrance to fulfil it.

The bus from Bairnsdale to Buchan via Lakes Entrance brought the Melbourne newspapers and parcels to Nowa Nowa late in the afternoon.

In Bruthen there was a general store, a chemist/barber, post office, police station with one policeman, two cafes. a motor garage. two hotels, a woodworking shop, railway station, primary school and not much else. The butchers were in Bairnsdale and Lakes Entrance. There was a Congregational Church or Church of Christ and a Church of England in Bruthen.

I had meat sent on the bus from Bairnsdale every Friday, which the DFO and his wife allowed me to keep in their refrigerator until needed. The weekly orders alternated: small leg of lamb and steak; beef roast and chops. My pressure cooker had a diameter of ten inches, and the butcher had my standing instruction to saw the lamb-bone to fit. I paid him monthly by cheque.

The afternoon bus to Omeo ran from the railway station at Bairnsdale. Presumably there was an early one from Bruthen into Bairnsdale to catch the morning train to Melbourne. Otherwise there was no public transport.

That meant no chance of an evening trip to the movies in Bairnsdale unless a friend offered a lift. I cannot remember seeing a film while at Bruthen, and only once did I go to the hall at Nowa Nowa. It was a James Mason movie and I gave up part way through and went 'home' to the hotel to bed. The background noise of the electricity generator and the restless chatter of folk from the Lake Tyers Settlement combined to defeat the sound-track.

All in All

All in all, district forest work as a junior in those times was nearly as good as memories of it today are rosy. So many things were clear-cut and we were full of optimism. A secure and no doubt exciting, worthwhile future was going to unfold. In time, one might become a District Forest Officer.