

A Forestry Family
Alan Eddy

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By

Alan Eddy

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PREFACE

'A Forestry Family' is a short sketch showing glimpses of the human face of the Victorian forest service, chiefly from 1939 until 1983.

Some background of State forest administration before the Forests Commission was established in 1918 adds perspective to the sketch. It identifies formative events. It throws some light on the work and attitudes of its members and relatives; the public servants, the employees of the Forests Commission, the principals and employees in the forest industries, and the neighbours of State forests.

The glimpses of men and women who, well supported by their colleagues in head office, protected and managed the State forests are given context by comments on the circumstances of the times. They lie within the experiences of the writer or anecdotes passed around by others which are memorable for one reason or another.

The title District Forester is used throughout for the officer in charge of a forest district. District Forest Officer or DFO was replaced when Inspectors of Forests became Divisional Foresters, in 1957.

The writer joined the family in 1946 as a trainee, and left its working ranks in 1989, having been a field forester, a staff member of the School of Forestry, and occupant of several roles in Melbourne for his final ten years with the State Forests Department and its successor.

INTRODUCTION

It is by no means far-fetched to call the forest service which was developed by the Forests Commission a forestry family. The Macquarie Dictionary, to which we turn these days for reassurance about Australian usage, includes in family a group of persons who regard themselves as having familial ties, and the staff, or body of assistance, of an official. Such a family enjoys particular strengths and resilience, and survives occasional disharmony between some of its members. With scarcely an exception, the members of the Commission's workforce had pride in being part of the forestry family.

Consider the foresters. They had a similar background of selection and training, usually they subscribed to the same ideals, knew one another well or by repute, and they respected experience and generational ranking. As in natural families there was rivalry, help for the weak, and tolerance of the occasional black sheep.

Nearly all the foresters in 1950 had known one Principal of the School of Forestry, Edwin James Semmens. He got to know them well, and liked to remind the youths in his charge that they were not in Creswick to find a life partner. It happened that some did, and this seasoned a sense of family, with its own anecdotes and attitudes tied to Creswick, 'the cradle of the forestry profession as far as Victoria is concerned', according to A. O. Lawrence when Chairman of the Commission.

The Victorian State Foresters' Association brought together men of the professional and the technical and general divisions of the Public Service for an annual conference, and it published a newsletter from 1953 until 1985. From 1979 women foresters arrived on the scene and were welcomed as members. The newsletter kept its readers aware of interesting ideas and information. The Association disbanded in 1986 owing to changes in departmental identity and structure, and new classifications of staff not based on occupational groupings. The Association published an account of its history from its beginnings as The Foresters Association, Victoria in 1900 until its end. *A Fraternity of Foresters*, published in 1993, records the benefits it achieved for its members over those years.

The fact that in 2007 the Forests Commission Retired Personnel Association has a lively membership of former foresters, administrative officers, engineers, forest overseers and foremen attests to a sentiment peculiar to a family.

THE STATE FORESTS

Pastoral settlers had made few major impacts in the forests and woodlands by the time the first of a succession of goldfields in Victoria was identified. In the 1830s a few pastoralists brought their flocks and herds to the northern districts. Settlement near Portland by the Henty venturers from Van Diemen's Land in 1834, and the arrival of Batman at Port Phillip near the site of Melbourne in 1835 brought the beginnings of occupation of pastures to the west. Melbourne had but 50 non-aboriginal persons in 1835; the following year the same population of the Port Phillip District was fewer than 300 settlers. The population in 1850 was about 75 000. In five years it had increased to about 350 000, and by 1860 they numbered more than half a million.

The impacts of farming settlement and gold mining were swift and locally very destructive; woodlands and forests were freely utilised for timbers, fire was a cheap land clearing tool, creeks and watercourses were dredged and vegetation stripped from their catchments. The gold rushes and attendant industries comprised Victoria's industrial revolution, coupled with pioneer farming and the formation of towns and cities which otherwise might have taken centuries of endeavour.

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Swarms of miners from Europe, the Americas, and China, dreaming of riches, populated the goldfields, felling trees and shrubs to obtain framing poles, shoring billets and slabs, and firewood. Carriers, storekeepers and tradesmen added to the influx. The development of deep-lead gold mining expanded the demand for mine timbers and for fuel to power the steam engines and pumps used to counter the inflow of water into shafts and tunnels. Other newcomers and former miners cleared land for their farms.

'The virgin forests abundantly served the needs of the early Colony and the developing State. The northern and coastal forests yielded large volumes of strong, durable timbers for bridges, railways, wharves, telephone and electricity systems, and for fencing pastures and crops. Fuel wood and charcoal from the forests satisfied constant domestic and industrial markets. Tradesmen learned to use the unfamiliar woods of the native forests for furniture, boats, and vehicles. The forests yielded tannins and medicinal and industrial leaf oils for local use and export.' (Special Article, 'Forests of Victoria', 1972, Victorian Year Book used with permission from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.)

Destruction of forest was accelerated by government land settlement schemes. There had been some settlement around the Otway Ranges by 1870, and in 1886 the Beech Forest area was thrown open for selection. In similar, heavily forested country in the southern uplands east of Port Phillip there was a rush to settle the Strzelecki Ranges from the mid- 1870s into the 1890s. This region of abandoned farms and depressed settlements became the Heartbreak Hills. The stories of hardship and disappointments that became the lot of hopeful settlers and their families are indeed heartbreaking.

During the early years there was scant control of timber cutting on Crown land, for which the Department of Crown Lands and Survey, established in 1857, was responsible. Although some State forests and timber reserves were declared from the 1860s, it was close to 1880 when a Bill was introduced into the Parliament for creation of new State forests and reserves, and for control of timber cutting, but no Act resulted from this.

In 1894 a Central Forest Board was formed under the Department of Crown Lands and Survey, to reserve and control Victoria's forests. In 1907, after 40 years of inquiries and false starts, and shunting of the forest branch between departments, a *Forests Act* established the Forests Department. The Forests Commission Victoria was formed under provisions of the *Forests Act* 1918, which introduced management by an independent agency to provide for post-war demands on the State forests.

Developments in State forestry from 1934 onward are summarised in Chapter 14, 'Forestry' in the 'Victorian Year Book', 1984.

At the end of World War II in 1945 there were few national parks and other special reserves of public forests. Wilsons Promontory and Mt Buffalo had been established in the previous century, Wyperfeld in 1921, and new national parks such as Bulga and Tarra Valley, both established in 1941, were not extensive. The State forests extended over virtually all the other lands that had not been alienated for pastoralists and farmers, towns, roads and railways since European settlement, together with abandoned farm land which had been acquired by the Forests Commission for reforestation. Radiata pine and a few other softwoods had been planted in various locations to the extent that budgets allowed, to provide softwood logs and pulpwood, and to encourage industries to fund their own plantations.

It was a time of renewed pressures to alienate public forest for farming. One of the duties of district foresters was to report on the merits of applications made to the Department of Crown Lands and Survey for selection-purchase leases of Protected forest, the category of public forest which was open for

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settlement under certain conditions. Time and again it was plain that an application was nothing more than an attempt to acquire valuable timber for a song. Often when the Forests Commission objected to alienation of forest, to conserve the public forest estate, the application was refused. Where an application was successful a common condition of lease was that the Commission would have time to have the merchantable timber harvested before the lease began. At every level in their bureaucracies there was a measure of tension and conflict between Forests and Lands.

Licensing of beekeepers fuelled local tensions regularly in some districts. The pattern of land tenure – Permanent forest, Protected forest (unoccupied Crown Land), and private property – caused continual squabbles and friction over sites for hives during blossoming seasons. The Forests Commission issued licences for the first, the Department of Crown Lands and Survey the second, and landholders could invite or allow an apiarist to set out hives for an indefinite time. The Lands Office for the Maryborough and Avoca district was in St Arnaud, as distinct from the Inspector's office and depot in Maryborough from which the noxious weeds gang worked. To try to get improved practice through cooperation of the Forests and the Lands officers meant first persuading the Lands Officer that harmony would be in everyone's interests, and then to secure and nurture effective communication. My own endeavours in the mid-1950s made little progress here, partly because the idea was novel to the Lands Officer and partly because of the long-standing poor relations between the two departments.

So, we had to endure a situation where apiarists competing for effective use of the same area of forest tussled and schemed as best they could for the best sites. The Commission's Temporary Bee Site Licence, with a currency of three months, reckoned on a bee-flight of one mile from the site of the hives. Picture, at worst, the situation where a licensee could have hives in Permanent forest, and a short distance away another apiarist had his hives on Protected forest, and, possibly, another had hives in a private paddock a few hundred metres further on. Some apiarists paid for successive licences covering several sites throughout the year, effectively blocking their use by competitors. The expense of a succession of quarterly licences bought them preferential use of those sites.

Returning to alienation of public forest, the Heytesbury Development Project to establish dairy farms over 40 000 hectares of virgin Crown land in the western district commenced as recently as 1956. The wholesale destruction of forest without efforts to salvage the timber was a feature of this project, which was partly financed with overseas loans obtained by the Commonwealth Government. The vegetation along watercourses was not preserved in the clearing, nor were the sites for the settlers' houses sheltered by leaving some trees. The new houses and paddocks for the dairy herds were windswept.

More recent land use decisions by government have not alienated public forest but transferred State forest to national park or other special reserve. From 1971 for a quarter of a century the people of Victoria had the benefit of the processes of the Land Conservation Council. It provided an effective means of publishing information on public lands, gathering and considering inputs from organisations and individuals relating to proposed recommendations for different uses of the lands, and finally providing recommendations to government for decisions for land-use region by region across the State. Despite its good work, the LCC was abolished in 1997. It was succeeded by the Environment Conservation Council, which was itself replaced in 2002 by the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council.

ORGANISATION OF THE SERVICE

The three members of the Forests Commission were appointed by the Governor-in-Council for a statutory term, and each was eligible for reappointment at the expiry of his term.

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The organisation which had been developed by the Forests Commission by the end of the war in 1945 was relatively simple. The head office and field complements were numerically small for the work of protecting and managing a vast public resource. The Royal Commissioner had reported in 1939 that the resources of the Forests Commission had been woefully inadequate, and there had been scant chance of increasing them during the war. At the beginning of 1944 the intake of forestry trainees was tripled, and by 1946 increasing numbers of demobilised servicemen were able to return to forest management and the timber industries. The tasks and scope of the branches and sections which provided services from head office were easily understood from their names: secretarial, finance and accounts, stores, staff and industrial, fire protection, plantations and nurseries, engineers, transport, draughting, estates, surveying, forest assessment, buildings, library. The Commission even had its own architect, whose plans for foresters' quarters, store sheds, fire protection stores and workshops were distinctive.

The Chief Inspector oversaw the work of Inspectors of Forests stationed in regional towns, and they in turn supervised the work of District Foresters in charge of forests districts within his inspectorate. An inspector's book had been kept in each district office in which the Inspector would enter the dates of his visit and comments on the performance of staff and matters requiring attention. Use of these books had passed into history by 1945. A Chief Technical Officer, K V M Ferguson, provided advice and guidance as required. His role included editing publications and reports. The Commission's annual report to the Parliament, which he edited, was a succinct account of its activities year by year.

There was a forest entomologist, C J Irvine, but no research branch.

Lines of responsibility had been established in a pragmatic way, and custom substituted for a rigid charted organisational structure. Generally speaking, field staff regarded the branches and sections as allies in their work rather than watchdogs or opponents of their efforts.

The titles of the positions held by some officers gave no clue to some of their supporting activities. The Chief Draughtsman, Mervyn E Bill, scripted and produced films, among which was *The Hand of Man* that dealt with the fires of 1939 and their aftermath. The title came from the report by the Royal Commissioner, Judge L E B Stretton, appointed to inquire into the fires and their causes. A forester, Geoff Weste, became absorbed in radio communications after the fires, and spent the remainder of his career developing and managing the Commission's central and regional radio systems. The transmitter in Melbourne was VL 3AA, celebrated in a film [Calling VL3AA](#). G A Weste maintained a lively liaison with the Commonwealth Meteorology Bureau and the Post-Master General's Department. He and the technicians who ran the Commission's radio laboratory designed a quarter-wave aerial for field transmitters which the PMG's Department designated the Weste aerial, and designed and built light portable transmitter/receivers at the beginning of the 1950s. These TRP sets were truly portable, unlike the bulky ex-Army sets such as the RC16Bs with their heavy batteries, more suitable to a base camp or the tray of a truck. In about 1950 the radio laboratory equipped a medium van as a mobile communications office large forest fires.

Staff of the fire protection workshops designed and built fire tankers and equipment, continually improving equipment for protecting Victoria's forests and adjoining lands from fire.

The Transport Branch wielded power beyond its overt functions and far exceeding what would be expected by its size. Alf Nelder, the Transport Officer during the war and for about a decade after that, was backed up by a typist and several drivers who were available for vehicle maintenance and errands when not on a country trip. Alf knew every policeman on traffic duty in central Melbourne, and was well known otherwise. Late one afternoon in January 1952 he was asked to despatch an essential part for a bulldozer to

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Gippsland on an evening train from Flinders Street. He collared a young forester on vacation duty in the Fire Branch to go with him to the railway station, parked the car in a 'No Standing' zone and also at a fire hydrant, and instructed 'Stay here and if a policeman comes along say this is Alf Nelder's car'. Rationing of some foods persisted after the war restriction, and black market dealing in butter was an offence, but one could walk into the small Transport Branch office and almost trip over a wooden box of one-pound butter pats. The final lifting of petrol rationing in 1950 must have relieved the office of a lot of work, but also deprived it of the means of bestowing favours.

January 1952 was a fiery month which saw the swift destruction by fire of Wilson Hall at the University on a hot day with a strong hot wind, and extensive forest fires. Late one day that week the same forester, on vacation from the university, was among a few who were within earshot of messages to and from VL 3AA about the fire situation in far Gippsland. A Commissioner was one of the audience. Alf Nelder was also there. During a pause in radio traffic, the Commissioner turned to Nelder, and quietly asked, 'What are we going to do, Alf?' He got no reply, at least not then. Perhaps it was merely a rhetorical question, spoken to the nearest person.

The Draughting and the Assessment branches began to make good use of vertical aerial photography for photogrammetry and photo-interpretation immediately after the War had ended in 1946. So much forest had to be mapped and every aid available was used to the extent that training and budget allowed.

An enlightened feature of the Commission's support for its staff for decades was the library services it provided, especially to its field staff. The Commission subscribed to all the forestry journals in English as well as journals in related fields. All field staff were eligible to choose freely from the list of publications which they wished to receive by mail, and the library staff did the rest. A staff member in the most remote posting had far superior access to library materials than his successors have today.

A curious feature of the Commission's organisation was the distinction between the hardwood forests and plantations of softwoods. For practical purposes management of the latter had grown to a separate organisation within the Department. It included operation of the tree nurseries, from which it had originated.

In 1957, two years after A O Lawrence became Chairman, there was a major reorganisation which created functional head office divisions, revised the boundaries of the field divisions and districts, and abolished the partition of management of the hardwood State forests and the plantations and nurseries. Rumour had it that Mr Lawrence had secured his new position on the understanding that such a reorganisation would ensue.

Given time, the functional divisions started to get ambitions for influence and power which had not been able to flourish in the old organisation, in which rivalries and dominances had been personal. Their role of ally to field officers was eroded, to some extent. Foresters on district staff welcomed the passing of the separateness of the plantations and nursery staff and employees. Gone were the days when men from the nursery at Creswick, who had turned out one afternoon to help suppress a fire in forest near Cabbage Tree in the Ballarat Forest District, looked at their watches at half past four and announced they were returning to base to be homeward bound at five. Gone were the days of cast iron aloofness, verging on hostility, displayed, for example, by district staff at Mirboo North toward the staff of the Commission's project for planting up abandoned farmland in South Gippsland with seedlings raised by the prison nursery at Olsens Bridge.

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The district office and the plantations office occupied adjacent blocks on the main road in the town. The dividing fence, which ran down to the back street, was a border not to be crossed without good reason. There was a separate letter box at each street fence. The District Forester, Alan Galbraith, proclaimed, 'We are the Forests Commission; they are Plantations'. Plantations had a proper office of several rooms, an office assistant, and a petrol bowser. We pumped petrol from a 44-gallon drum, but had the 100 watt radio transmitter to VL3AA Melbourne. Derrick Rolland had personal permission to go into the Forest Office at weekends to use the radio to get the weather forecasts. In those days staff received no payment for overtime for fire standby or for firefighting. We were paid by the year and worked by the year.

The Forest Commission's divisional structure served well until 1983, when by government decision several agencies were amalgamated to form the Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands, and reorganisations set in.

Organisational upheavals and increasingly complex names of new entities have been common in Victoria for a quarter of a century. The State Forests Department became part of a new Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands (1983), and State forests have been under the Department of Conservation and Environment (1990 to 1992), Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (1992 to 1996), Department of Natural Resources and Environment (1996 to 2002), and now the Department Sustainability and Environment is responsible for the protection and utilisation of the State forests. In its ranks members of the former forestry family continue to follow their vocation with persistence, as do foresters working with Parks Victoria. They hold the respect of those now pensioned-off from active duty, and who are thankful for more guileless times, and realise there is no gain in lamenting their passing.

NATURAL RESOURCE COMMISSIONS

The Forests Commission was but one of the bodies corporate established to meet the needs of the developing State.

Several statutory commissions were established by the Parliament of Victoria from time to time to develop the conservation and utilisation of forests, rivers, and coal for electricity.

These commissions were both authority and manager, responsible to their minister who provided policy guidance and could champion their cases for funding. A minister seldom interfered in operational affairs which were squarely the responsibility of the commission.

The *Water Act* 1905 set up the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission to control all rural water supplies and, in 1917, it was enabled to constitute flood protection districts and to carry out necessary works. It designed and constructed major water conservation and irrigation systems, and supplied piped water to residents of some small settlements.

The State Electricity Commission was established in 1919. Its role was to generate, transmit and distribute electricity in Victoria. By 1934 it was well on the way with these tasks. Also, reluctantly, the SEC ran the tramways in Geelong until 1955, in Ballarat until 1971, and in Bendigo until 1972.

The Forests Commission was also established in 1919 by legislation that gave it wide powers to discharge its duties to protect and manage the State's forests and output of forest produce from them.

The Housing Commission was constituted in 1938 to be the advisory or regulatory housing authority of the State.

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The *Soldier Settlement Act* 1945 provided for a statutory body, the Soldier Settlement Commission, to manage rural settlement of returned servicemen, and in 1959 its duties were expanded to cater for men ineligible for soldier settlement assistance. From 1952 until 1974 it established new farms in western Victoria and elsewhere. Its biggest undertaking was the Heytesbury Development Project through which 385 dairy farms occupying nearly 41 000 hectares were established.

Although not styled a commission, the Gas and Fuel Corporation, which began operations in 1951, was a public authority of the State, owned jointly by the Government and the former shareholders of the Metropolitan and Brighton Gas companies. These bodies were terminated or merged with another agency before the end of the century. The SRWSC and the Housing Commission finished up in 1984, the SEC about 1993, the G&FC in 1995, and the SSC had merged with the Rural Finance Corporation in 1962 (to form the Rural Finance and Settlement Commission which was succeeded by the Rural Finance Corporation of Victoria).

Of course engineers were numerous and dominant in the water and electricity ranks, and many of them had military experience. These agencies enjoyed particular loyalties, promoted in part by residential concentrations of staff at Eildon, Heyfield, and Rawson, and at Yallourn and Bogong where they formed hierarchical communities.

Commissioners and their senior officers had one thing in common, a good working knowledge of what they were appointed to manage. They had climbed the ladder of experience in their field, usually with a strong sense of lifetime vocation. In contrast, the managers who supplanted them had little familiarity with the programs and activities being managed. Often they had no training at all in them. Managerial skills as a facilitator were supposed to suffice and even be superior to technical knowledge and years of experience, which were thought to trammel a manager's reception and adoption of new goals of resource management.

When senior management lacks technical expertise its major occupation becomes manipulating those below them in the bureaucratic structure to suit the dictates and whims of the masters of the day. A good deal of the time and energies of underlings is used preparing expository position, briefing papers and draft speeches for senior managers and ministerial advisers to put before the minister. These were often written to meet stressful deadlines, in the hope of partially equipping someone for meetings and encounters where they would skate on thin ice. Hasty scanning of briefing papers cannot make up for technical ignorance.

CONTINUITY AT THE TOP

Of all the ministers responsible for the State forests, it happened that Albert Eli Lind (later Sir Albert) was Minister of Forests, with a couple of breaks, from 1935 until 1952. After serving from April 1935 until October 1945 in that capacity, he was again Minister from June 1950 until December 1952, with an interruption of a few months in 1952. He was a country man, from a farming property near Mt Taylor, not far from Bairnsdale.

The Minister himself experienced a continuity of Chairman of the Forests Commission, because it also happened that from 1929 until 1948 Alfred Vernon Galbraith held that position, and he had been a commissioner since 1925.

Having the Minister of Forests' farming property in one's forest district was a mixture of gain and loss. The usual limits to helping the community were blurred by the Minister's nurture of his electorate. On one occasion, when I had not been there long, I refused to lend the licensee of an hotel (who turned up out of the blue at the Bruthen office on a day the District Forester was away) some hundreds of feet of canvas fire

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hose and a trailer fire pump so he could pump water from the river to fill elevated water tanks at his hotel for the summer. Fortunately the Senior Overseer, Charlie Wain, happened to be around at the time and tactfully called me into the office while he explained that the Minister would see to it that his friend got the use of the equipment, as he did year after year, and would be more than displeased by obstruction by a junior forester. The 50-foot lengths of hose came back weeks later, muddy and roughly lapped into bundles. The hoses had to be scrubbed clean and hoisted to dry, and the pump had to be fuelled up, serviced and cleaned, and, of course, it had been unavailable had an emergency occurred.

Perhaps the Bruthen Forest District enjoyed a favoured status. There were ample budgets for road construction and maintenance, and the consequent allocation of brand new heavy dozers, valuable also for firefighting. Construction of the Mt Baldhead road went ahead to supply new sawmills to be erected at Bullumwaal. The junior forester had even pegged out potential sites within the original township survey for millers to choose from. Sawmills had to be within township boundaries after the lessons of 1939, and in this instance an old survey by the Department of Crown Lands and Survey made in anticipation of settlement which had not taken place satisfied this requirement. The new rules for location of sawmills meant primarily for fire protection also meant that the employees and their dependants were closer to schools and the amenities of towns.

When the Minister travelled home for weekends in 1949 and 1950, his driver often came to the Bruthen depot to fill up with petrol and have a yarn in the assistant's hut behind the fire equipment store. Eric Rust liked to do some fishing in the area, to fit in with appointments the Minister might have, before their return to Melbourne. He was a small, affable man who traded scraps of harmless news for tea and company for half an hour. He often wore sleeveless pullovers in a diamond pattern.

Such a long association between a minister and his permanent head no doubt fostered a belief that political stability was normal, the provisions of the *Forests Act* were permanent, and the Forests Commission was secure ruler of its domain. Surely any future disruption would be short-lived and could be shrugged off while awaiting a return to normality.

ROYAL COMMISSIONS

A man who contributed uniquely to State forest management in Victoria was Judge L E B Stretton. Three of the five Royal Commissions of inquiry he conducted concerned forestry; the first into the fires of 1939, the second into the Yallourn fire in 1944, and the third into forest grazing in 1946.

His reports were very influential and in particular they led to effective and swift expansion of the Commission's fire protection organisation and capacity, to the Country Fire Authority in 1945, and to the formation of the interdepartmental Land Utilization Advisory Council in 1950, which functioned until 1970, when the Land Conservation Council was about to be formed.

STATEMENTS OF POLICY AND OBJECTIVES

Until the dawning of the 1980s the Commission perceived no imperative to compile detailed policy statements for publication. Where was the need? The *Forests Act* and *Regulations* set out the powers, duties and authorities of the Commission, and its annual reports recorded aims and achievements as the years rolled by. To the Commission's credit, it did recognise in 1981 the prudence of starting to prepare systematic statements of policy and objectives for the protection and management of the State forests, and the other established activities of the Department. It had the Public Service Board approve a new position of Policy Coordinator. This forester reported directly to the Commission, his being a unique extra-divisional

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one. When the annual report for the year ended 30 June 1982 was published, the list of principal officers placed his name immediately after those of the commissioners, preceding the chiefs of divisions. This did not help to dispel hints of resentment, as unwelcome calls on their time, of the requests he made for divisional chiefs for comments on draft statements. The change of government had introduced its own distractions and prohibitions for the chiefs of divisions and the Commission, and the initiative foundered.

There was at that time woolly thinking about the usage of policy, goal, objective, principle and related words which were coming into common, and fairly careless, bureaucratic usage.

The coordinator's first task, as he saw it, had been to get usage sorted out in the minds of the participants, not easy when they were reluctant to be bothered with semantic frills.

'Macbeth', he thought, provided examples of usage shorn of any forestry connotations, but they fell flat: name, Lady Macbeth; role, Thane's wife; policy, personal ambition should be satisfied by any effective means; objective, become Queen of Scotland as soon as possible; strategy, persuade husband to regicide and provide every support of his bid for throne; goal, murder of King in sleep whilst guest; functions, spur on husband, pacify him, bolster his resolve. One had to adopt 'objective' as ultimate or longer-range and 'goal' as immediate, or vice versa: authorities differed. Sloppy usage of 'policy' still plagues documents and corporate statements. A policy is simply a decision rule for pursuing objectives. It expresses a relationship; 'honesty is the best policy'.

These attempts to revise and renew expressions of policy and objectives within the ranks of foresters and their allies ended overnight in April 1982 when the articulation of policy became the province of the Minister and his advisers.

The Forests Commission had made statements of what was called forest policy for Victoria from time to time, originally in its first Annual Report. In 1928 the Third Empire Forestry Conference was held in Australia and New Zealand, for which the Commission prepared a booklet of 118 pages in hard covers. It consisted of three parts; forest types, policy, and Victorian eucalypts. A summary of the disabilities under which forest administration had laboured from 1876 until 1919 was followed by 'Present Forestry Position and Policy of the Forests Commission'. The broad outlines of the Commission's policy were given as:

1. The conservation, development, and utilization of the indigenous forests, based on sound forestry principles.
2. The establishment of adequate plantations of exotic softwoods.
3. The prosecution of essential research and experimental work.

A Handbook of Forestry in Victoria, published in 1957, declared that that basic policy had not changed from that originally enunciated when the Commission was constituted in 1919, and repeated these three basic statements. It went further, by listing eight 'major points of detailed policy'. These were repeated in a revision of the Handbook in 1965, with the addition of a ninth about water conservation. These major points were:

1. To organize management with a view to ultimate attainment of sustained yield and the establishment of a stabilized and permanent timber industry.
2. To provide an adequate forest road system designed to facilitate economical timber extraction, access for fire protection and general forest management.

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3. To develop silvicultural techniques which will ensure natural regeneration of the indigenous forests following utilization and to improve the productive potential of each site in order to secure maximum output of high quality timber.
4. To further intensify the fire protection organisation to a degree which will ensure maximum safeguards against the worst possible foreseeable conditions of hazard.
5. To secure permanent dedication of all land which in the public interest should be reserved for timber production or other essential purposes.
6. To establish and maintain a sufficient area of coniferous plantations to supply the anticipated internal softwood timber requirements of industry.
7. To achieve maximum utilization of forest products by encouraging establishment of new industries, particularly in the pulping and hardboard manufacturing field, and development of more efficient processing techniques.
8. To cater for maximum conservation of water for domestic and industrial use by the application of appropriate management prescriptions to water catchment areas in State forests.
9. To conduct such research as is necessary to achieve the foregoing objectives.

PARTNERSHIP WITH INDUSTRY

Salvage as much of the mountain ash timber from the mature trees that had been killed by the 1939 fires was essential to supply Victoria with prime sawn timber for years to come.

The Government provided immediate funds to construct roads and tramlines into virgin forest, and further funds to advance capital to sawmillers to be repaid when logs were milled. The Commission itself invested in logging machinery, and established a sawmill at Erica. The Commission and industry were thrown together in an ambitious partnership, which was to last until as late as 1950 in some forests.

While the enormity of the losses caused by the fires in 1939 was fresh upon them the public servants and the timber millers were called on to rehabilitate the forest service and the sawmilling industry.

The names of four who had died in the fires were displayed on a plaque on the wall beside the lift in the Commission's offices in Treasury Place, as a reminder to staff and visitors of their loss. When the Commission moved to other offices, in Latrobe Street, and later to 'Forestry House' in Bourke Street, the plaque was remounted in a similar position. In the 1980s it was stored away for safety. The men were :- J H Barling, a forester, 31 years; C I Demby, a forest overseer, 56 years; H J West, a forest foreman, 40 years; Hugh McKinnon, a forest employee, 57 years.

A committee of foresters and representatives of the sawmillers, timber merchants, trade unions and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research was formed and it came up with a plan of operations for timber salvage within three weeks. This extraordinary effort in the public interest forged a kind of partnership which was to survive in the minds of sawmillers and foresters for nearly 50 years. The urgency of war-time demands within a few months for sawn timber and for wood for the new pulp mill at Maryvale was soon an extra spur for the salvage to succeed.

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So the forest industries and the forest service became partners in utilising, protecting, and conserving the State forests for the people of Victoria. It was moulded by events in forest history as much as any strategic ambitions on either side. The Minister and the Forests Commission held control of the where, when and how much forest utilisation took place, and on what terms, and the sawmillers and other timber converters lobbied and made representations to influence decisions and improve their lot. Like all partnerships, this one survived the tensions of conflict and benefited from recognition of common interests. A handful of senior men in the Department and in sawmilling had led the forestry companies raised during the war for duties in Great Britain, New Guinea and the Northern Territory. Their shared military adventures promoted post-war cooperation.

A radical change in the way in which royalty would be paid by sawmillers for hardwood logs from State forests took place when the timber salvage had finished. A royalty equation system for hardwood logs had been introduced in 1950 to replace payment of royalty on output of sawn timber at the sawmill. By 1960 this had been extended to all logs from State plantations of softwood. Preparations for the introduction of the royalty equation system involved negotiations between the parties to ensure its acceptance, especially by sawmillers who had to relocate from central Victoria to East Gippsland where new log allocations were available.

A high proportion of the hardwood sawmills were owned by individuals or families, and in the mid-1980s the Board of Inquiry into the Timber Industry recorded that many of them had been in family ownership for three or four generations. So, on one hand there was a continuity of familial personalities, and on the other a stability of membership of the Forests Commission which was altered only when a member retired through age, for commissioners were reappointed when their statutory term expired: no one expected otherwise. From 1925 to 1983 two commissioners served more than 20 years, and five between 10 to 20 years. Commissioners seldom died on the job, but for a span of years they died quite soon after retirement from public service: there were more ex-Kings of England than there were ex-Commissioners.

The forest manager and the major harvesters of forest produce sparred and argued, yet cooperated in fire protection of forests and sawmills, in making and maintaining roads, in harvesting timber to improve the growing stock of State forests, and in promoting effective, profitable industry in Victoria.

The working relationship between the Commission's staff and the sawmillers and their logging crews and contractors was usually cordial, with a good measure of mutual respect.

Both sides recognised the imperatives of the other, and settled down to a productive if wary working truce.

The discovery of the European Sirex wood wasp in sawn pine at Nunawading in 1961 sparked off prolonged, combined efforts to search for and destroy it before it could spread further into pine plantations and farm trees. The emergency involved the Commonwealth Government as well as the Victorian Government and the softwood users and softwood plantation owners. When the extent of its occurrence had been mapped the eradication program was scaled down and then replaced by biological control by parasitic wasps and nematodes, itself the product of cooperative research and breeding up of control wasps and nematodes.

An important cooperative Australia-wide planning conference attracting wide active participation by forest services, forest industries, CSIRO, and representatives of universities and conservation groups marked the 1970s. This was called the 'Forests and Wood-based Industries Conference' and its sessions ran over 1974 and 1975. FORWOOD was organised by the Australian Forestry Council following years of

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discussions that heralded this event, which stirred participants into preparing descriptive and analytical reports and papers that had never been tackled before. It was the most comprehensive attempt ever undertaken in Australia to review forestry and the forest products industry and to plan ahead, in this instance to 2010. The forest services and industry exchanged information and their representatives talked together and debated positions in a common cause.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

The forestry family had a lot of documented practices and procedures for staff to follow day by day.

The Commission made scores of decisions every year on specific recommendations which had made their way up the chain of command to appear as agenda for meetings of the Commission. Each Commissioner recorded every decision in his own hand, and the Secretary checked the wording of these three records before having the decision recorded on the relevant file and in the register of Commission decisions, which were given a CD serial number. The Secretary did not sit in on meetings, unless he was one of the officers sometimes summoned to attend for a specific item of business. A decision might appear Delphic and its interpretation called for care and caution, because decisions were terse and could call for a degree of interpretation. A decision could not be applied to a related question with utter confidence, but was often a handy guide to an operational officer.

A set of numbered Standing Instructions was built up over the years, and was available in almost every field office. It was a comprehensive source of guidance and requirement. One District Forester had a habit of replying, with confidence, 'There's a standing instruction on that' whenever he was asked about something of which he was in doubt. Standing Instructions were revised from time to time, and most were examples of clear, specific statements of what to do when confronted with a question, or an unfamiliar situation. Remember, foresters often had no colleague nearby to consult.

In November 1967 a forester who was mid-way through a two-year tour of duty in the central divisions at head office, was called from the management division to join a group going to firefighting duty in the Erica Forest District, where an extensive fire would require assembly and coordination of resources quartered at the Moondarra camp. This officer had not worked in a forest district for some seven years, and as he hopped into a rear passenger's seat of a wagon headed for Moondarra he held in his hand the pages of detailed Standing Instructions for gathering and summarising the flow of information received at a field fire base, and for recording orders for the day and the disposition of vehicles and fire crews round the clock. There was enough time to read and memorise the main points of organisation before arriving at the camp and setting up a field office. With some confidence he drew up record tables and intelligence sheets which were used throughout the excitement of about a week's fire firefighting, and afterwards they were taken to head office with the other records for eventual use during the usual review called the post mortem. The SIs had enabled that forester to do what was required, and more, for which he was pleased to be commended by the Chief, Division of Fire Protection, sometime later. How many times did the Commission's system of instructions save someone's bacon?

Circulars were also essential references. They were serially numbered, and one of their purposes was to inform or remind officers of deadlines, calendar events, procedures, loss or theft of equipment, and ephemeral items of intelligence. A revised or updated circular replaced an existing one annually or whenever it was expedient.

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The statewide short-wave radio service of the Commission played an important part in keeping the family informed about what was going on. The broadcasting licence limited the nature and duration of messages, which were often worded like a telegram, except when there was no reliable telephone service between Melbourne and a field office. Important announcements or news could be made known state-wide within minutes. Awareness of what went on came from unavoidable eavesdropping on messages during the regular broadcasting schedules and throughout the day during periods of fire danger and in emergencies. Two radio receivers were on listening watch in a district office throughout the day. The voices and personalities of the Melbourne operator and office staff in the country became very well known. Most of them were young women who had grown up in the town and district. Their local knowledge, calmness under pressure, and common sense earned them a good deal of respect. They could not have performed in that way if they had not enjoyed the confidence of foresters who were necessarily well away from base in times of fire or other emergency.

The field radio traffic, using separate regional broadcast frequencies, provided communication at another level, between a field office or depot and fire towers, roading camps, a fire guard's cabin, or at a roadside where a wire had been thrown over the branch of a tree to make a quarter-wave aerial. A disadvantage of the High Frequency equipment was failure to overcome the static and interference that blotted out speech after sunset. The ex-Army radios and the Commission's own TRP sets used in the 1940s and 1950s were replaced in time by line-of-sight VHF equipment, which did not depend on reflection of transmission from the ionosphere. Local traffic was more informal and transgressed the limits of licence, but was apparently not strictly monitored by the Postmaster-General's Department. On the second Tuesday in November, for example, when VL 3AB Bruthen called up one of the roading camps at 7.20 in the morning, to receive routine messages and fresh food orders to be delivered mid-week, the leading hand recited a list of Cup bets to be put on with the starting price bookie in the town during the morning. Not only that, but he named the illegal bookmaker, Stan Royal, the pharmacist in Bruthen.

The law was not always observed by those appointed to uphold it. The only general store at Nowa Nowa supplied many wants of the people of the timber settlement, but was not licensed to sell strong drink. It was run by Robert Hodder, JP and SP (starting price bookmaker). A woman asked Mr Hodder for a bottle of methylated spirit. 'None in stock'. 'Well, what other drinks do you have?'

The hours of working with one ear necessarily on the one or two radios in the office were sometimes enlivened by unexpected messages. One afternoon the District Forester at Beechworth reported a fire to VL 3AA, the Melbourne transmitter, stating that a rabbit, ablaze, had bolted from a heap of rubbish being burnt by a landholder who had a written permit, and the creature spread fire until it dropped. Murray Thompson, known well for his dry wit, obviously enjoyed broadcasting that rare cause of fire.

Local radio had dispelled the practical isolation of forest gangs and others scattered in the vast forests east of Melbourne. If a base radio was not on watch a neighbouring district office could be called up to ask them to telephone a request that the set be turned on to receive a message.

Informal, local communications in rural style were, naturally, vitally important. Throughout the State, a talk over smoko, at an encounter along a road, at a depot before and after work, in a pub, and at a farm gate served to spread news and views, often surprisingly quickly. A relaxed talking time with licensees and neighbours of the forest could yield gems of local information for those charged with custody of the forests.

DAILY WORK AND SUPERVISION

Field staff often worked alone and out of communication with work mates.

A forester would make a solitary walk through trackless forest to inspect forest stands or a likely route for a jeep track or minor road. Often two men went for safety and companionship during a long day. Typically, they would be dropped off from a Land Rover at a chosen spot along a track, to look forward to meeting up with the driver when they emerged at the end of their walk, sometimes when the sun was very low in the sky and the driver had started to wonder whether he would see his work mates again that day.

'Patrol' was an entry which appeared very often in the monthly summaries of field work performed. When an accessible area of forest had not been travelled by a forest foreman or one of the foresters for some time it was usual for one of them to make a detour from the day's route to look for signs of illegal activity, drainage of a road or track needing attention, and wind-thrown trees causing an obstacle or roadside tinder-fuel. The wheel tracks left in damp clay by the vehicle served to advertise patrolling to those coming after.

A case can be made that then there was a real measure of community forest management, executed by the staff of a forest service who were under orders as servants of the public, yet trusted to adapt the application of rules to meet as far as practicable a local situation. A public servant in the Forests Department was indeed a servant of the public. At best, the forester in charge of a forest district was trusted by his seniors to be disciplined, and by his local community to be fair and reasonable in fulfilling the duties put upon him and his staff.

A local communities' exerted influences on the behaviour of the forest service in their neighbourhood in subtle ways, seldom in writing but mainly through hundreds of conversations, some brief and a few long and vigorous, which conveyed approval, criticism, and suggestions to forest foremen and overseers, and foresters of all field ranks.

Lobbying by forest industries and other vested interests was carried on at Commission and ministerial levels, and could result in specific decisions and general orders to add to the instructions and rules to be observed by forest district staff.

The number, social mix and mood of forest neighbours are different now. The staffing and structure of the bureaucracy that has replaced the forest service is scarcely its remnant. It is no wonder that a Community (Collaborative) Forest Management movement has found expression (through dreary documented submissions, forums, meetings, and working groups) in attempts to regain former links of trust and cooperation.

Back to patrol, Jim McKinty, who worked at Erica, Nowa Nowa and Orbost before promotion to divisional level, was renowned as a prodigious walker in his younger days when he mapped the forest types and the extent of commercial timber stands in the mountains of Gippsland, sometimes on horse in company with cattlemen as his guides for a broad reconnaissance. Not only were his maps used with confidence, for some localities they remained the best available forty years later.

A new forester's induction into the supervision of forest licensees usually involved an important practical hint about parking his utility or station wagon ready to go, without any turning or reversing, when it came time to leave a log landing or roadside. Even if the carriageway was not muddy or narrow there was always a chance that the vehicle could become stuck, requiring assistance to get going. Should the forester have

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just been reprimanding a licensee, a dignified departure could be ruined by a request for help. In any event a smooth, confident departure from the scene was far better than, say, backing and filling, perhaps with some skidding of wheels.

In Gippsland it was bush courtesy to leave the ignition keys in the parked vehicle. The reasoning was that the vehicle would be available immediately in case a worker was injured, or it needed moving because of fire or it was in the way. This practice also implied trust in the licensees and their employees to leave the vehicle untouched. I never heard of any incident of a Commission vehicle parked in the forest being stolen or misused.

A young forester stationed in a sub-District might attend to his duties in the office or at the depot, patrol the forests and deal with licensees and forest neighbours for a fortnight or more before a senior forester came by. His daily hours of work and what he did were entered in a rough diary and he would record a summary every month on a detailed form on double-foolscap paper (about A3 size) which was posted to the district office. A monthly return for each vehicle accompanied these reports, so that daily mileage, destinations, and the volumes of petrol and oil used could be scrutinised. Distances travelled were also recorded on the personal reporting form. Attending to these monthly reports may sound a tedious chore, but doing them allowed an officer to review his activities as he filled in the daily instalments, and could jolt his memory to attend to any unfinished business. Field duties were mixed and varied, which allowed vehicle travel and travelling times to be used efficiently. The rough diary could be handy if a licensee or anyone else raised a question about something that had happened some time before.

All field foresters had to put in these monthly personal and vehicle summaries. The District Forester could assess what his staff had been up to, and he or the clerk could use the figures for various classes of vehicle to make a rough check of miles per gallon of fuel and whether maintenance had been carried out. The reports went to head office via the Divisional Forester, to give him the chance to query anything he wished. The transport branch in head office made detailed comparisons between the performance and costs of maintaining various vehicles as a guide for future purchases, where a purchase was not bound by the current contract between a major maker and the Government.

Government contracts for fleet purchases were determined by price as much as how suitable a make or model was for forest work. A model of Valiant station wagon proved to have suspension ill-suited to forest tracks and minor roads, for example, but new ones were purchased until a contract with another manufacturer applied. When it came time to replace cars and station wagons with new ones, an accounting puzzle could arise. On one occasion the trade-in valuation of several Ford station wagons exceeded the contract price for new ones, by some \$750 each, because the Commission paid no sales tax and the used-car valuation in a favourable market reflected tax in the original price.

During the early 1950s allocation of a Land Rover for one's work was a great thing. The ability of the Land Rover to negotiate narrow, steep, rocky tracks and spaces between trees extended its future in the State forests well into the 1960s. Their relatively high maintenance costs reduced their number in the Commission's fleet when Toyota utilities came on the scene. Their superior torque at low engine revolutions and lower maintenance costs gave them the edge. For some firefighting the short wheelbase Toyotas were gems, as when carrying water in a rubber 'pig' (water tank) lashed on to the tray next to a small centrifugal fire pump, such as the Quench Quick. These outfits were deployed along containment lines at a large fire in the foothills near the Moondarra Reservoir in the Erica Forest District in the mid-60s. The fire controller's battle board at the camp which showed where they were deployed referred to these units as Toy Pigs. A journalist queried what on earth toy pigs were doing at a fire.

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A permanent attraction about district work was the scope it gave to program the week's activities on days which were free of fixed duties or appointments. With an eye on the weather and availability of a vehicle, good use could be made of a liberty to choose the what and when of the work, optimising travel time when all went well. If wet weather had not allowed one to finish office and mapping chores, one or more fine days must be sacrificed to meet deadlines imposed by head office or the calendar. During times of high fire danger, standby for fire suppression could result in too many office days. Of course, emergencies or breakdown of machinery or the best laid plans meant disruptions, all of which were part of the continual parade of needs and responses.

Lawbreakers and schemers, and certainly not lost hikers and stranded motorists, did not observe standard working hours, so a field forester's work was potentially spread over 168 hours every week.

Mean-minded feuds between neighbours could weave plots into which one party might try to drag the forester. A prime instance occurred when two brothers came into the office at Maryborough to inform against a neighbour allegedly for cutting green saplings in State forest without a licence. There they were, saplings lying by their stumps. One brother farmed his land after a fashion, the other worked for the contractor laying sewer pipes in Maryborough. At interview together they looked hither and yon, and licked their lips a good deal, but strongly backed up each other's accusations. They said they had watched from a vantage point on one brother's land the accused wielding his axe. It was all too good to be true. The victim of the plot seemed a straight and simple man, although he was not a likeable person. He worked as a night watchman in Maryborough and probably had something on one or both brothers. What to do when two citizens say they are prepared to give evidence about the guilt of the near-neighbour of one of them?

The forester prepared a set of written questions, about 20 of them; what the brothers said they saw, exactly where they were, what colour clothes the accused was wearing, the time of day, the weather, which direction the man walked after felling the saplings, how many vehicles had gone down the road while they were on watch, what colour were they, how close to each other the brothers had stood, crouched or what, what cover they had hidden behind, and so on. Then, having checked that the farmer was home one morning and that his brother was at work on trenches in the town, the forester went with the senior forest overseer to the farm and put the questions to the landholder.

He was only too pleased to give detailed replies to a diligent forester who was taking action.

Then it was back to town immediately for the diligent forester, (no mobile telephones in those days), to put the same questions to the brother, with permission of his employer. A lot of hesitant answers, lip-licking, vagueness, and "What did me brother say?" The discrepancies in their answers were convincing and they got no further with their allegation, but here was a sequel. Shortly after five on the next New Year's morning, one brother telephoned to report a fire in the forest. For two hours the forester and an overseer searched the vicinity he had indicated but were unable to find fire or smell smoke, despite careful patrolling. No other report of fire came in. At his farm gate the brother was unable after all to be too sure of the direction of smoke he said he had seen. 'Perhaps it was a caravan, a moving smoke from a caravan.' This time he looked the forester in the eye. There was a message in his steady stare.

In those balmy times, the forester was unchallenged custodian of the forest and a Samaritan to anyone in real need. The Victorian State Emergency Service, which succeeded the Victorian Civil Defence Organisation, was not established until 1975. In any event who knew the State forests better than the foresters the condition of roads and tracks, and what was currently the best way to reach a given destination or to deploy searchers?

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At Maryborough in 1956 an old man had wandered off from the outskirts of the town in the late afternoon, and had not been sighted by the next morning. The forest staff found this out by accident soon after seven the following morning when one of them happened to speak to a constable who appeared to be scanning the forest with binoculars from the Bristol Hill lookout. Three of the forests staff went to the Police Station and offered help in searching for the chap. They drove quietly into State forest by a track near to where the man had been last seen, and within five minutes saw him lying on the edge of the track. He was unable to get up, and was not fully alert. While two kept him company and lit a fire of twigs to warm him, the District Forester drove to the Police Station with the news. The policeman at the counter told him to put the man on the tray of the Ford utility and take him to the hospital. The forester replied that he could commandeer the vehicle and be in charge of loading the man on to it, but the forester was not going to do it. The policeman agreed grumblingly to use of the ambulance, which followed the Forests Commission utility into the forest. Within two days the old man died in the hospital. The forest staff speculated what his relatives might have thought and done had their dear one been carted to the hospital on the bare tray of a utility.

When *The Royalauto* or some other popular publication featured a day's touring into State forest, the district staff could expect calls for help by stranded motorists. The staff at Powelltown used to dread the Powelltown–Noojee day trip, for the latter part of the day could bring appeals from a bogged driver to be pulled clear. There came a time when the District Forester at Powelltown displayed the name and telephone number of the nearest tow truck operator at the office and quarters, having become fed up with city drivers stuck along forest roads. No doubt other locals were also affected.

At Mirboo North in the early 1950s it was common for motorists to end up lost and bewildered, with little petrol in the tank, because they had driven around and around the roads, not trusting the finger posts and apparent contrary direction when the position of the sun suggested otherwise. It was the pattern of ridges and roads that confused them. At an intersection, to travel west one might need to take the immediate road to the east to progress west after a while.

LABOUR FORCE

The Commission developed a multi-skilled labour force. Its members were employed in the professional, technical and general, and administrative divisions of the Public Service, or by local engagement under various trade union awards.

The forest licensees and their employees throughout the State were also an important part of what today would be called the Department's total human resources. The timber licensees and their crews provided firefighters, transport and heavy equipment such as bulldozers and low loaders to move them to fires, whenever their assistance was needed. Even a solitary post cutter was required to keep one or more items of firefighting equipment with him, depending on whether he used hand tools or a power saw. That was a condition of licence to harvest timber or other forest produce. The importance of the services of these skilled and experienced forest workers for firefighting must never be dismissed as trivial.

They could be the first to arrive and start work on a fire. From time to time they helped find lost hikers and others in distress in the State forests. The bread and butter contribution of timber workers to forest management was to harvest timber according to the thinning or mature felling rules imposed by the Commission and its foresters, for without utilisation there is no silviculture. Virtually all these workers respected the skills and motives of the supervisors 'to keep the forest going'. The relationship between the forest officers and the licensees was moulded by mutual respect, and a good-natured acceptance of control rather than a resentment of it.

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It was generally true to say the duties and responsibilities of nearly all the Commission's foresters were well within the limits of their training and abilities. They had spare capacity to innovate and question current practices, and to be one jump ahead of a scheming licensee or other adversary.

A particular feature of staffing in the field was the role of office girls, correctly called that in former times. Sometimes there was a typist as well as the clerk in a district office. Almost without exception they earned respect from the men, not grudgingly but from confidence in their initiative and common sense. Typically a girl of some 20 years could be alone in the office during routine days or when fires were blazing in the forests. The office girl handled telephone calls, radio messages on the regional and head office frequencies, and dealt with arriving firefighters, truck drivers and any others, and ordered food and other supplies.

Without doubt she would have agreed that she was a member of a forestry family. Owing to their dealing with inward and outward messages on the statewide radio service, the voices and natures of some office girls became widely known. To be the clerk in a Commission office was a plum job for young women in small communities where opportunities for employment were few.

The typical free-standing office was clad with weatherboards and had a corrugated iron roof. The building plan was the work of the Commission's architect, J S B (Bishop) Hart, and it looked similar to a modest cottage in most respects, down to open fireplace in the main and private offices. A small entrance hall with an enquiry counter gave entry to a main office, the forester's office, and a mapping room at the rear. There was usually a back porch with a hand basin and cold water. The Commission installed a septic tank for toilets, accommodated in an outbuilding a few feet behind the office. At Bruthen and other newer offices there was a cold shower in one end of the toilet block. The office at Nowa Nowa, situated between the quarters and a tennis court, belonged to an older generation of district offices, and consisted of one room. Inside it did not exceed two by three metres, and the walls were lined with tongue and groove boards. There was scanty room for filing papers, and an array of bundles of dockets, used forms, invoices, and so on clamped in bulldog clips hanging on nails decorated the walls. An office similar to the one at Bruthen was built at Nowa Nowa in 1949-50. The tennis court adjacent to the old office played similarly to *en tout cas*, being a do-it-yourself surfacing of crushed termite mounds from the forests nearby.

Filing was not standardised from district to district, and changes of office staff could mean trials for new staff unfamiliar with the local thinking about files. The man in charge of Registry in head office, Lew Chambers, tried over some years to establish a standard filing scheme for field offices, but circumstances defeated his ambition. At Heyfield the filing cabinets were large four-drawer wooden ones, made in the Newport workshops probably, and the drawers, heavy with papers, were hard to slide out and in, because of the wood to wood friction. The bottom drawer seemed bigger than the others, and did not have an alphabetical range displayed on it. The alphabet occupied the three top drawers, leaving the fourth for 'Miscellaneous'. The clerk at Maryborough, Maurie Peart, had been there for at least 15 years when there was yet another change of forester. His office was a converted part of the front porch of the Court House which he ran quietly and competently. One of his first questions to the new forester in 1956 was whether he was set on reorganising the filing system. When the reply was no, his relief was apparent, and he revealed that a filing upheaval was almost the worst burden of a new forester.

Maurie Peart had some good advice. The street down the side of the Court House was quiet but parking often meant that the utility stood on the far side outside a pub. That was as convenient a spot as any, but Maurie cautioned against spiteful tongues in the town, wagged by individuals all too ready to accuse a public servant of idling in the pub. The forester found a safer place without delay.

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Car parking space at an office was not thought of in those times. The typist in the Bruthen office in 1950 lived near Mossiface, perhaps eight km from the office, and arrived with infallible punctuality on her bicycle in all weathers. The journey was flat for most of the way, and the cycle had no changeable gearing. She had a very quiet nature and worked steadily all day, not liking interruptions. The clerk had been a switchboard operator with the Post-Master General's Department, on shift work at the telephone exchange at Traralgon. Her father wanted her home on his dairy farm on the Tambo River flats, so somewhat reluctantly she had returned, knowing she would experience tiring days and a quieter life near a small town a just a few hundred residents. She too rode a bicycle to work and would often arrive just on time or late and flustered. She had to help with the milking twice a day and there were times when she put her head down on her desk and slept. No wonder her performance was a little erratic and irritable from time to time. Every Friday afternoon about three o'clock office work would stop and the girls swept and dusted, and polished the Public Works Department brown linoleum on the office floors with hand mops. Probably they also cleaned the toilets in the detached building at the rear of the office. At Traralgon contract cleaners came in to the Commonwealth premises and the clerk reckoned she and the typist were being exploited. If she could not beat her father she could have a go at the District Forester, so she persuaded her workmate to back her and they refused to clean the office. She was in the mood to go to the Public Service Association. The forester settled it by engaging a woman to come in once a week, outside office hours, to do the cleaning.

The clerk in a handful of field offices, at Orbost, Nowa Nowa, and Maryborough, and the divisional offices at Ballarat and Healesville, was a man. They contributed a continuity of experienced service locally, and some moved into administrative positions in head office, where their knowledge of field offices and district work added to their usefulness.

The wife of the District Forester in more remote places assisted with communications, round the clock at times of fires or other emergency. The quarters were usually next to the office and stores, and the telephone service was switched to the house at night and weekends, using a single toggle switch. Like wives of country school teachers and clergy, they were there to give unpaid support whenever it was needed. The wife of the District Forester at Bruthen in the post-war years had a habit of intercepting inward telephone calls during office hours, enjoying a breezy chat, and then switching the caller through to the office, because the switch was at the house handset. The staff resented her interference, but were not game to raise it with the boss, and simply had to endure the irritation on those many days when the forester was out of the office. There was also a view that even if they had complained, and he had spoken to his wife about it, she would have taken no notice.

The office staff made very few calls during those days, largely because they felt it was unfitting to have to go to the back door of the quarters to ask for the outside line to be switched through to the office. Protocol can be patchy in a family.

Among the labour force of a forest district the Technical and General Division men of the Public Service deserve special recognition. The forest foremen and forest overseers formed the stable backbone of staffing in the district, providing a source of local knowledge and wisdom for the professional staff, who were transferred between districts on an average of every three years. Their local knowledge embraced the forests and farming communities, and the residents and social interactions in the towns. Their assessments of foresters, young and old, who had come and gone, had equipped them to make the best of a new one.

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Foremen and overseers were the leaders of fire crews, often a mix of Commission employees, licensees' men and volunteers, and throughout the year they stood for the Commission in their day to day dealings with timber cutters, apiarists, and neighbours and visitors to the forests.

Overseers and some foremen were usually allocated a charge, that is, one or more forest blocks to look after, and with which they became closely familiar. The charge was their State forest to patrol, protect and supervise. A district forester would tell the overseer or foreman when he was going to make an inspection of activities within his charge, and preferably took him along.

Major forest districts maintained a mechanical workshop, and in some forest divisions there was a major workshop to service tractors and dozers from or in the constituent districts.

The labour force was organised into gangs for constructing and maintaining roads, bridges, and culverts, thinning regrowth stands, and whatever tasks were required by the district program of works. Some gangs lived in tented or hutted camps during the week, or in a substantial camp remote from the district headquarters. The classification of the employees included leading hands, drivers, plant operators, powder monkeys, cooks, pick and shovel men, jackhammer operators, grader drivers, and others listed on the union award. Their supervisor was a leading hand, foreman, or construction overseer depending on the type and size of the works. Weekly employees might stay on the payroll in a forest district for several months in the year, but worked on and off for the Commission for many years. Each man had a record card and the records for a few older seasonal employees consisted of multiple cards stapled together, held at head office until next time they applied for work in a district. Adverse reports on employees were entered on a card in red ink.

Demarcation was seldom a major issue within the usual forest gangs. Their members were usually proud to be recognised as multi-skilled and welcomed a short-term change of tasks.

This meant that an absence could be covered by a willing stand-in who might catch the eye of the foreman for future reclassification. Work on a forest gang might be seasonal and this suited local men who had a few acres and livestock, an orchard or some other source of income, and welcomed a month or a few weeks off the gang to work their holding.

Under a good foreman or leading hand a gang would develop high morale and confidence in their work. The best of them took an interest in their productivity and costings, most often when they were harvesting forest produce for sale.

The Ballarat gang of five men in the middle 1950s were put to work making three or four new culverts where minor forest roads crossed small watercourses in the Glen Park State forest. The men disliked mixing the batches of concrete with shovels to build up the rockwork at the ends of the culvert pipes, and clubbed in to hire a motor mixer by the day, towing it into the forest behind the Ford Thames truck when they came to work. They enjoyed the work much more, claimed their rock work was superior, and about mid-afternoon they cleaned up and knocked off. They did this without letting the District Forester know, fully expecting him to approve, which in due time he did.

This was the gang in which the lowest paid member owned a small farm on which he ran sheep. Whenever he needed help with fencing or sheep work Harry Bryans would hire the leading hand, Bill Petrie, and another workmate for a weekend. When protective hats were introduced, for compulsory use, Harry and his mates were issued with a heavy fibreglass imitation of a tropical pith helmet. Hot to wear at any time, it would slip off when the wearer was stooping unless the straps were uncomfortably tight. Harry claimed his

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gave him a headache and he wore it only when absolutely forced to do so. One day a dead branch about wrist-thick fell from a messmate tree and landed on a helmet, cracking it. This made Harry thoughtful and he took to wearing his 'hard hat' all the time, even in bed one of the gang reckoned.

There was inter-generational humour in some forest gangs. When I took fresh bread, other supplies and mail on a Wednesday from Bruthen to the district gang that was building a new road from Wattle Circle on the Omeo Highway up to ridges of the foothills, I used to bring back any personal letters for posting. The billy-boy was struck on a girl to whom he wrote often. He penned SWALK ('sealed with a loving kiss') on the flap of the envelope he asked me to lodge at the Post Office. A whiskery labourer with a dry wit, endorsed his envelope to a mate with SWTS, which excited the interest of the billy-boy, alert for a new catch phrase. 'SWTS? It means sealed with tobacco spit.' The billy-boy did not use that one.

The PMG pole depot at Ballarat needed a couple of hundred small hardwood poles to replace poles in some local telephone lines, not worth the delay and procedure of advertising for a contract price. The District Forester was asked whether he could supply the poles at roadside almost immediately for the PMG men to collect. There was a stand of messmate at Glen Park which could provide the poles as a departmental thinning, and the gang were eager to do the job. The leading hand was qualified to select the trees for felling to yield the required poles, his gang prepared the barked poles and reduced the heads of the messmate trees to posts or firewood, and he snigged the poles to the roadside using a Fordson farm tractor hired for the purpose. All parties were satisfied; especially the leading hand who tallied the operating profit in his head every time a pole reached the roadside.

There were sometimes unexpected opportunities for short-term timber operations employing a forest gang, which were useful to vary the work, expand the skills of its members, and to make money for the Department. One operation at Maryborough was unusual; pole cutting in the Majorca sugar gum plantation. In 1956, the Soldier Settlement Commission was developing several new holdings for ex-servicemen by subdivision of the Mt Mitchell estate, and a supply of hay shed poles, to a typically demanding government specification, was needed promptly. There was no local pole contractor and the Soldier Settlement inspector asked what could be done. It happened that sugar gum had grown splendidly in a Forests Commission plantation on the granitic soil at Majorca, and excellent poles could be made from trees felled to thin the stand. I loaded the prices for the prepared poles fully to cover all the on-costs one could think of, and then added a bit more for luck.

The SSC inspector was pleased with the prices and the quality of the poles, so everyone, including the youngest member of the gang who went around late in the afternoon applying a thick petroleum jelly to the ends of the day's poles to reduce drying splits, was happy.

The men liked the change of work, were interested in preparing produce to specifications, and got satisfaction knowing they generated revenue for the Commission. Some sugar gum poles were later cut under licence, and we heard they were sold to farmers in the western district as Maryborough Box. The customers liked their shape and soundness. A misnaming of timber that did not seem to attract attention from anyone over many years was Bealiba Box Blocks for prime firewood for the Melbourne market. The forests around Bealiba surely could not have supplied the tonnage of firewood sold under the famous name.

The experienced members of a forest gang provided the guides and leaders of crews fighting fires when they were mixtures of local men, forest workers from other districts, timber workers and local volunteers. Without local men the chances of getting on the wrong track or becoming uncertain about escape routes

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were often high. On rare occasions idiom could mislead a stranger. At an extensive, but fairly quiet forest fire near Noorinbee a recent Scottish arrival on the district gang was told how to return alone to the truck on which they had arrived. 'Follow the burn' he was told, meaning walk along the blackened edge of the fire until reaching the truck. Off he went and followed the burn, a small creek, leading him far away from his destination. It was hours later when he was found.

A few men worked alone, some in remote places. In some eastern forest districts one or two fire guards would be employed for the summer season, to report fire or burning without a permit, and to generally report on activities of interest to the district forester. These men worked with virtually no supervision. Their wages and horse and camping allowances where applicable were profitable use of taxpayers' money. For example, Charlie Pendergast, a grazier patriarch in the lands near Benambra, around The Brothers and Pendergast Lookout, had the confidence of the District Forester at Bruthen to dissuade his brethren from wrongly using fire. Charlie kept a stern patriarchal eye on forest interests.

Of those men who usually worked alone in East Gippsland, two men stand out as identities. Frank Moon manned a fire tower in the Nowa Nowa Forest District in the early 1950s. He slept in the hut near the foot of the wooden tower, and would answer a telephone call from the office in response to vigorous winding of the magneto in the office or another tower in the Commission's single-wire network. If Frank did not answer repeated calls someone had to drive to the tower to check that he was alive and well. His accounts of how he had discovered the Fairy Cave and other caves at Buchan in 1907 made interesting listening. He said he could call up dingoes on a moonlit night by howling to them from first level of the tower. They sat at the edge of the clearing and howled back to Frank. His stories of events and people in the Buchan area were colourful, and he passed on very useful background to a young forester. Frank's passion for sink-holes and caves as a young man attracted the interest of influential persons who soon promoted them as places of special interest.

[Bill Ah Chow](#) who lived in the log cabin at Bentleys Plain for the summer was a prince among colourful characters. For work he patrolled the forest tracks, kept horse tracks open to use for quicker access to remote lightning fires, and looked from Mt Nugong and other vantage points for smoke. His confident estimates of the location of distant smokes he spotted from his lookout, and the language he used on the radio to Bruthen when it was introduced, were well known. No doubt his patrolling presence alone justified the expense of employing his services.

The visitors' book recorded year after year that 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 from Ensay, over the Tambo and 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. Once in a while he rode over to Buchan South to visit his wife. His storytelling was embroidered but it was instructive, as well as entertaining. During the war Bill qualified for a special ration of rice because he was one-quarter Chinese. He delighted in giving this to friends who were missing rice. He kept a good table for visitors, and memorably gave guests a dessert of tinned fruit with Nestles tinned cream, a novelty on the market in 1949. Without doubt, Bill knew he was a member of the forestry family.

The log cabin Bill built is still known as Moscow Villa. The story goes that it was completed while the Battle of Moscow was being fought in 1941, but visitors' thought he should think about a more politic name. He stuck to the original name, saying it stood for 'My own summer cottage Officials welcome Visitors light luncheon available'. Bill liked to be reminded that his superb knowledge of the eastern ranges made him a notable fire-spotter; he often estimated the locality of a distant smoke remarkably well.

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The loyalty and cheerful endeavour of such men set examples to other members of their forestry family.

[One may ask *Google* for <bill ah chow> or for <frank moon> and read articles about their claim to fame. The web page for Kosciusko Huts Association records that Bill finished building the log cabin himself in 1941 and named it Moscow Villa. There is a photo.]

During the Depression unemployment relief camps were set up in State forests for men and youths. By 1936 there were camps in 15 forest districts, from which they made tracks and firebreaks, ringbarked unwanted trees, thinned young stands of saplings and coppice, and planted eucalypts and pines. The camps and work were supervised by forest staff. During the six years before 1939, when the scheme ended, more than 33,000 men had been given some work in the forests, mostly from unemployment relief funds. Some of the boys became long-term employees of the Commission.

LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Mutual assistance

There was always a spirit of mutual assistance abroad in small communities. During the war and after 1945 many of the towns and settlements which were the headquarters of district foresters had small populations. A local sawmiller who owned useful general equipment would probably make it available for a community use.

Unless a town happened to be the Shire centre there was often no large earthmoving equipment in the vicinity. Sometimes the most obvious, and most welcome, help from Forests Commission resources would be occasional work done around a sports ground.

The time spent in this way, and the consequent hidden cost, was very small compared with the weekly cost of operating a grader, but the boost given to the community was significant.

In places where there was no fire brigade the Commission's portable or trailer fire pumps were used for house and other fires. The red glow of the exhaust manifold of the four-cylinder Austin engine powering a trailer-mounted centrifugal pump that had been lifting water from the Tambo River on to fire in the Bruthen Inn for hours on end was still mentioned well after the event. Of course it was a matter of how long after an alarm was raised could a pump be set up at a source of water and a hose line be in use; usually far too late to save a house.

Such pumps were not used with static hose lines to the flank or front of a forest fire, as the American and Canadian manuals had suggested to forestry students, but for two main purposes in Victoria, for filling water tankers and to protect wooden bridges from fire. A secure line of supply or retreat from fire was essential and wooden bridges over streams on Shire and CRB roads were common. Occasionally a base pump and another one high above the source of water were used in open or closed relay to lift water to a ridge road to fill tankers, or to replenish a portable canvas relay tank, like a small above-ground swimming pool supported by stakes, by the roadside. Relays were needed where the total lift was beyond the effective capacity of one pump. The seepage of water through the unlined walls of canvas hose usually served to protect it from fire.

Practical help was given to the local community in small ways. A vermin-proof Commission store was just right for the quartermaster of a Scout troop. An assistant forester could be registered with an insurance company as an independent reader of the rain gauge at a certain time prior to the beginning of a football

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match, to certify whether the rainfall since 0900 hours had been enough for the home club to collect Pluvius Insurance.

The Commission encouraged foresters and other staff to be active members of school and other local committees.

Victoria Police

Liaison with local Police, often only one man locally, was extremely important, to mutual advantage. Country police did not have equipment which could be handy in emergencies, but the Commission did. As late as 1956 it provided a Land Rover and driver from Avoca to help in the search for the body of a policeman drowned in a flash flood of the Carisbrook Creek out from Maryborough. No one else in the vicinity had a small four wheel drive vehicle. By the time an Army DUKW arrived the flood was receding fast. The Land Rover came into its own on the muddy ground, ferrying men and food for them.

Close acquaintance with the local policeman could result in unexpected shortcuts. The Commission allocated a motor cycle with sidecar to the Bruthen Forest District to provide transport for staff who supervised sleeper cutters and mill log fallers in the foothill and coastal forests. It arrived from Melbourne one Friday at dusk on a tray truck, a shiny black Norton 598 cc with sidecar, and 56 miles on the clock. The idea was for me to learn to ride it over the weekend and get a driver licence on Monday morning. The yard behind the office was deep enough ride the bike up and down without going on the public road. No learners permit in those days. I mastered first and second gear for a few metres, and the knack of turning with and against the drag of the sidecar. Next to the forestry yard was the Police paddock for the resident policeman's horse, and next door again were the Police quarters. I ventured on the street around the corner on Monday morning and parked outside the Police Station. 'I can tell you can ride the bike because you've been at it on and off most of the weekend. Now I have to test your vision for colour.' Tapping the black frame of the official Remington typewriter with a finger he asked its colour. 'Black'. 'You've passed. The licence is ten shillings for a year'. I then set off for tree marking and supervising licensees, with an interim licence in my pocket and Alec Havers, a Forest Foreman, in the sidecar looking a trifle apprehensive.

Prison labour

In some forest districts work was performed by gangs of prisoners from State gaols.

Inmates of the Morwell River Reforestation Prison at Olsens Bridge planted up former farmland in South Gippsland with seedlings raised at the nursery adjoining their prison camp. Control of the planting of pines among the scrub and debris by prisoners was a chronic problem. A few of the men were no help to reforesting these abandoned acres. The planters would move out of sight and emerge at the other end of the line empty handed.

Shoddy work at its worst was to hide a bundle of seedlings under a log, take a short rest and walk on. Seedlings could also be thrown away singly, planted upside down, or laid in a mere scratch in the soil. The warders watched from roads or tracks, and seldom inspected how well seedlings had been planted. Forest staff sampled the standards of planting, but this could not achieve much to improve future work.

Inmates of Wron Wron prison, near Yarram, extracted seed from eucalyptus capsules and raised planting stock, and many of them had a positive interest in their nursery work. The level of security did not permit them to work in the forests.

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Warders would bring gangs of younger men from the Langi Kal Kal Prison, a medium security place with a working farm, into the Mount Cole State forest to collect seed capsules from the heads of eucalypt trees that had been felled for timber, or to thin out dense growth of saplings.

Stick insect surveys

Stands of mountain ash and alpine ash are prone to attacks by stick insects, and repeated infestations can kill the trees. This results in loss of timber, and can seriously disrupt the tree cover in a water catchment. If surveys of the numbers of their eggs in the litter in the forest indicate a build-up of insect numbers then early remedial action can be taken, preferable to waiting for an onslaught by a large emerging adult population. Therefore from time to time the Forests Commission employed local egg-counters for several weeks, to sort through samples of forest litter and count stick insect eggs. After some training women living handy to the forest were ideal for this part-time and short-term work, and one could, for example, call in at the Gladysdale Hall and witness several ladies going through the samples brought in by research assistants.

Seed collection

The collection of eucalypt seed for forest regeneration is partly an opportunistic occupation, when heavy seed years and tree fellings for sawlogs coincide. Peaks in demand for capsule-gatherers can be met partly by short-term employment of local workers, who may be rewarded by what they harvest or by the hour.

Emergency firewood

The community provided forest labour in a unique way to produce firewood, in particular for the metropolitan area, during the war. The shortage of firewood had become so acute by 1941, largely through a shortage of cutters, that the Commonwealth agreed to interned aliens and prisoners of war being put to work in camps to cut wood in the surrounding State forests. Men on the Forests Commission's road gang living at No. 1 Camp in 1947 in the Mt Disappointment State forest told stories of internees who had been sent there, a few being well-known in Melbourne at the beginning of the war. Their output was patchy, because of resentment of the work, physical limitations, or unfamiliarity with axe and saw.

Some 1000 internees and prisoners were in more than 20 forest camps in Victoria in 1943.

The shortage of cutters at one stage was such that hundreds of secondary school boys were called to help by cutting dry firewood. Some post-war migrants were encamped as cutters until the emergency firewood scheme lasted until 1956.

TRAINING FOR THE FAMILY

Foresters

The Victorian School of Forestry was run by the Commission almost solely to provide a three-year course for trainees it had selected for one of the residential scholarships the Commission offered every year. Upon successfully completing the course the fledgling foresters were eligible for appointment to the professional division of the State Forests Department. In 1945 and again in 1947 two cadets of Australian Paper Manufacturers Ltd were enrolled, and a son of a sawmiller in 1944 and 1958.

Until the 1970s the Commission's field foresters came from no other background. Trainees went to Creswick straight from school, shared experiences over three years, and were immediately appointed to

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the professional staff of the Department. Foresters in head office with other backgrounds were very few, and came from Canada and USA.

The Victorian School of Forestry was unique for at least three reasons. The body which ran it selected its students, provided them with a three-year full residential scholarship and paid vacation training, and appointed its diplomates for a lifetime's career in the profession of forestry. From the 1940s a few diplomates were offered opportunities for graduate and post-graduate study, until nearly new diplomates were eligible, again on generous terms endorsed by the Commission and the Public Service Board.

The trainee had to enter into a bond to serve the Public Service of Victoria for five years after completing the Creswick course. In practice this meant being bonded to the Commission, because there was virtually no position with other agencies of the State for relatively inexperienced foresters. Other employers looked for foresters with more than five years' experience, and therefore free of the bond. The Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works employed foresters for water catchment management, and the State Electricity Commission employed one at Bogong and one at Yallourn. Later on the Department of Crown Lands and Survey found a berth for a forester, and likewise foresters were employed in National Parks, Fisheries and Wildlife, and the Land Conservation Council. The Forests Commission had provided training and experience which made them attractive to these employers.

As would be expected, there were departures from the service for sundry pastures. Two made careers at the National Herbarium in Melbourne, one at Carlton and United Brewery (where for many years he managed yeasts; very specialised botany), three went to CSIRO, two left a district forester's position to join timber processing firms, one left to manage cinemas owned by his father-in-law, one married into a vinegar factory, one did well in his father's business distributing fruit and vegetables from the Victoria Market, one ventured into the arena of timber importing, one into house renovations, one went to manage a major snow resort, one to APM Forests Pty Ltd, two to pulp and paper firms in Tasmania, two to commercial tree nurseries, one took on a family farm, and there were others. Foresters took up positions with the Land Conservation Council and the National Parks Service. Several elected to make their contributions to forest science by following careers in the University of Melbourne.

The claim, sometimes heard, that VSF foresters were peas in a pod is laughable to anyone with even a passing acquaintance with them. Their individual traits and talents were and are diverse. The curriculum for their introduction to forestry certainly was the same, but their disparate natures were nourished by a latitude that it allowed.

In 1943 the University of Melbourne established the Bachelor of Science in Forestry course. VSF diplomates were admitted to two years' studies to obtain the degree. Three of them did that in 1944. Thereafter an increasing proportion of diplomates undertook this course, until nearly all the new VSF foresters went to the University after one or two years in the field.

The Commission encouraged its foresters to aspire to postgraduate studies, in Australia and overseas, for research and professional qualifications. This penchant allowed its expanding research branch to be well staffed, and for meritorious service to be provided to the people of Victoria by its specialist and field staff.

Foreman

In the years just after the war, the skills and attitudes of many forest foremen and overseers reflected their experiences in the armed forces. They had more than a whiskery bushman's knowledge of first aid, of how

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to organise the efforts of a gang of men and their equipment to tackle a particular task, how to build men into an effective work team.

This is not to disparage those foremen and overseers who had kept the work of the Department afloat during the war, when manpower, tools and equipment were short, and the need to increase timber output and to improve fire protection made burdensome demands on them. That cohort had gone through the extensive fires of 1939, and the fiery summers in 1942, 1943, and 1944. They and the returned men together shouldered the increasing work of the post-war State, together with recruits from the ranks of employees who were offered Departmental training to be foremen.

The Commission ran foreman schools for employees of the Department and a few other men from time to time, for example, in 1962, 1966, and 1973. These schools lasted for six months and the instructors and men lived in one of the Commission's permanent camps during the week. Most mornings were spent in the classroom, and afternoons on field work and practical exercises. Excursions to industrial plants, forestry operations, and tree nurseries expanded their learning experiences.

Afterwards the men were posted to the town or forest district they came from, or to a new location, as forest foremen. After a probationary period they were appointed as a forest overseer.

In 1975 the VSF began to offer units of study for the Certificate of Applied Science (Conservation and Resource Development) which had been introduced for employees of several government departments. The students went to Creswick for three-week block-study of general subjects and subjects germane to their field of work, such as park ranger, forest overseer, lands officer, or wildlife officer. These courses, which spread over two years or thereabouts, replaced foreman's schools, and initially were largely funded through the Department of the Premier. The tutors were a mix of Commission staff, specialist officers of the participating departments, Education Department teachers, and visiting specialists from government departments.

Bush tutors

The forest overseers and foremen seldom transferred to other districts, and so provided a stable core with intimate local knowledge and a wisdom in dealing with local people. VSF diplomates going to the field had been primed that these men knew much and were usually prepared to be friendly tutors to new chums. Some of these mentors tested the attitudes of a new assistant as they went about their work. An overseer might give an obviously wrong name to a eucalypt, to find out whether he would get a botany lesson, a polite question about it, or a scoffing put-down. An overseer and a foreman who took me out to measure sawlogs and supervise licensees in the foothills near Bruthen conspired to cover a huge distance in the first day's walking, taping logs, checking for waste of good log, and the rest of it. A long time after they told me they had gone to their beds that night with aching legs from the effort, and with some disappointment that I had cheerfully kept up with them, making no comment on the day's work. Seven years later the overseer called in where I was posted at the time, and in talking of former days, said that I had done well under test, unlike one or two pup foresters who started on the wrong foot with them. I had not fully realised I was being tried out; such was their skill and subtlety, or perhaps my inability to catch on.

The technical men and many employees were good trainers for practical dry fire fighting with hand tools. Their experience in a forest type they knew well allowed them to judge what was best to do to suit the wind, time of day, amount of fuel in front of the fire, and their familiarity with the topography and the roads and

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tracks, and the capacity of the manpower on the spot equipped them to do a job well. Fighting forest fires now is more an industry than an art practised by men of the forest.

Employees

The forest gangs, and solitary workers, who made and maintained the new roads and tracks required at the time, repaired structures, and played their parts in fire prevention and protection, comprised a great mixture of men. Many were long-time employees who provided learning on the job for newcomers through demonstration and imitation.

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 small motor cycles were called 'temporary Australians' by some of the local wags. These new arrivals were under contract to work for two years wherever they were sent after a short time at a reception centre from the ship on which they had landed. A group of DPs was sent from Bonegilla to Nowa Nowa where they tumbled off the public bus from the railway station at Bairnsdale late in the afternoon. New individual 8 x 10 foot tents had been put up in a paddock opposite the forest office. They were issued with a galvanised iron and wire bed and straw to fill a paillasse. These beds were called 'Cyclone' gates. Facilities for cooking were primitive, just an open fire in galvanised iron fireplaces. There was a tank of good water, and each man was issued with a new galvanised dish for washing. Their bewilderment in such a strange place 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, although there were Dutch, German, and a Pole in that first bunch.

Apparently the Commonwealth officials who made up the lists of men to be sent to various destinations thought it was a good idea to mix up the nationalities. This could be disastrous. The Dutchman who confided in the assistant forester that he had disposed of occupying Germans in a canal at night was not going to fraternise with a displaced German. The Polish tailor was not going to turn his back to the German, who set out to assert himself from the start. The German himself was at risk. Early one morning I had the job of driving him to the doctor's at Lakes Entrance. He slumped in the passenger's corner in the Ford utility, blood oozing from his scalp where it had been struck hard with the blade of a long-handled shovel. His pallor inspired me to drive faster than usual. After he was patched up he lay in his tent at Nowa Nowa until the next day, and then went back to work with a bloody bandage. The District Forester could see no point in reporting the incident to the Police, in Lakes Entrance. As soon as there was opportunity he partially broke up the Bonegilla gang, and distributed them among others in the district.

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.

The men employed on road construction who lived in Forests Commission camps such as Connors Plain were a distinctive mix. Most had been in the job for several years, the remainder were a transient element. Some were escaping from marital troubles, and perhaps a few from questioning by the police. Inward letters were tucked behind tape pinned crisscross on a noticeboard in the mess hut. Some were addressed to persons unknown on the payroll, and were unclaimed when the mess hut was deserted in the evening. By the time the cook came on duty the next morning the letter board would be empty. One winter's evening I was in the mess for dinner; it was warm inside and the two long tables of diners were well-lit by the

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kerosene mantles of pressure lamps hung above the tables. Several conversations were in progress. All of a sudden the door swung open and there stood Senior Constable Jim Draper roving his gaze over the room. The only sound was the hiss of the lamps. Cutlery was silent; conversation had been switched off by the sight of the blue uniform and Jim's scrutiny. He walked the length of the hut, slowly returned to the doorway, stepped out without a word and closed the door behind him. Eating and talking started up as if Play buttons had been pressed. Men in the camp had the option of riding on a Commission truck after work on Fridays for a weekend in Heyfield or beyond, to be taken back early on Monday morning. A few men seldom left the camp, where they quietly lived out the weeks of their year.

One of the district road gangs headquartered at Bruthen used several boxes of Gelignite AN60 and Quarry Monobel to blast rock and some tree stumps every week. On Fridays the dozer operator of one gang brought home the empty boxes and dropped them off at his house in Bruthen. The boxes were made in Sweden from dressed softwood, beautiful boxes with a snug lid. What did this Irish foreman use the boxes for but to build a sleepout on to his house to accommodate family. If carefully dismantled the dovetailed pieces from a box provided panels which could be fitted together to form a wall panel. Dan Kelty and his family were pleased with the result and all respected his persistence. A few boxes had been spoiled with engine or diesel oil, and the assistant forester scored them to split up as fuel for the chip heater in the toilet block behind the office to provide hot water for showers.

Jim Larkins, the overseer of a road-building gang based on Bruthen, used to travel part of the Omeo Highway on their way to new forest roading in the higher foothills. He had helped make this road when he was a young man in the Depression. They worked with picks, crowbars and shovels, using wheelbarrows to tip rock over the edge of the road towards the Tambo River. Jim remembered their overseer then would fire a man if he straightened his back too often for a rest, and Jim had worked on despite trickling blood from haemorrhoids. The unsealed highway in 1949 was a memorial to hard times and heartbreaking toil. Jim, a gentle man, had little time for any of his men who might whinge about some petty inconvenience.

From time to time Union organisers called at the District Office and camps. These men talked things over with the locally appointed union representative and the men as a group and individually. Virtually all the work force was 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.

An organiser called at Maryborough and talked to the forest gang, who had no problems to report. The organiser was pleased to learn that the District Forester drove the gang to work and picked them up in hot weather, when that arrangement was suitable, to relieve them of riding their bicycles to and fro. For the forester that was preferable to rounding up the gang for firefighting during the day and having to leave one man to guard their bicycles in the forest.

The foresters and district office staff had no interest in bluffing or fighting unions or their members. Rates of pay and Award conditions were spelled out in detail. The employment records and wages sheets generated locally were checked at head office for error or inconsistency.

Cooks in forest camps provided comedy and headaches. At No. 1 Camp, Broadford Forest District, the huts and mess hut erected for internees during the war was occupied by a road construction gang in 1947. Jam was put on the tables at tea-time in small glass dishes, so small that they were emptied over and over as the men topped up on buttered bread and jam. The cook got tired of the endless requests for more jam,

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and exploded one evening with "Jam! Jam! I'll give you jam!" and pelted the diners with unopened tins of jam. Luckily anger marred his aim and no one was hurt. He was not the most careful cook. One evening I decided to turn over the sliced cold beef sitting on my plate next to lettuce and beetroot. The platoon of maggots put me off eating that meal.

The cook at Kalatha Creek Camp in the Toolangi Forest District was a malcontent. He came to Melbourne to complain about his conditions to the Union secretary. While the cook was still in his office the secretary telephoned the Commission's Industrial Officer, Bill Longbottom, and said 'Look here Longbottom, I have a valued member in my office complaining about conditions at Kalatha Creek and the Commission had better do something to improve them forthwith. I will not have a member of my Union treated in this way!' Ten minutes later the phone rang again, and it was 'Hello, Bill, I've got rid of that troublemaker. Would you please ask your District Forester to have a sympathetic word with him to calm him down a bit?'

QUARTERS AND TRANSFERS

The houses for married staff, and the few single-man's quarters, provided by the Commission and the topic of compulsory field transfers are entwined in the memories of those who experienced both.

The Commission's aim was to provide a house for every district forester and to recognise the housing needs of married professional staff. The quarters were a mixed lot, having been built by the Commission where a house was needed, or purchased when one was part of property acquired for the department. After 1945 about five houses were built annually. A few of the houses were very old: The house in the grounds of the School of Forestry which had the serial number R7 had been built in 1872 for the nurses at the Creswick hospital.

Houses at the Commission's tree nursery at Macedon were other old houses.

The house allocated to the District Forester at Ballarat in about 1952 had been built in the Glen Park forest for Forester J Ritchie about 75 years earlier, and had been moved to a wind-swept paddock bought for the purpose at Invermay on the northern outskirts of Ballarat. It had no town water, electricity, postal delivery, nor the trade deliveries available in North Ballarat about two kilometres down the road.

Many houses were sub-standard. The Victorian State Foresters Association battled for years to secure hot water services, septic tanks, and electric light plants where there was no State electricity. At Erica, in the early 1950s, the married assistant did not own a car, and the couple's only outing together for the week for some time was in the Commission's utility to cart the can from their privy to empty it in the forest.

Rental for departmental houses was set by the Public Service Board, and comprised a fixed annual charge plus a proportion of the occupant's salary. The rental of a house changed overnight when the salary of the new occupant differed from his predecessor's.

The houses were unfurnished, and foresters needed to supply floor coverings. After three transfers the original, say, two pieces of linoleum bought by a couple might have been cut into six sections to cover the kitchen floors, such were the differences in their shape and size.

Two advantages stood out; there was no 'keeping up with the Joneses', and the transferee was not expected to find and maintain a house. The fact was that there was no house to rent in many places where a forester could be posted. The average term of a posting was reckoned to be three to four years, and the forester was spared the prospect of capital loss when he was next transferred, assuming there had been a

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cottage for sale when and where he needed one. There was no commuting from a house in the next town or settlement, because car ownership was unusual in the post-war years, petrol was rationed, and the Commission expected the officer to live in the place it had specified. Transfer notices specified where the officer was required to live. The forester and his family lived in the district community where they worked and played. They shared its attractions and any disadvantages. At best they were regarded by neighbours with affection, at worst they might hope for a measure of respect.

A predicament which could arise is illustrated by the instance of the assistant forester stationed at Mt Taylor whose father became gravely ill. He owned no car and to get to Bairnsdale for the train to Melbourne was no answer to the urgent message he had received to visit his father. He had no neighbour with a car nor could one rent one. His solution, with which one can sympathise, was to disconnect the cable to prevent mileage being recorded, and to drive to Melbourne immediately, and return as soon as he could, reconnecting the cable upon his return. Of course he had to make a false entry in the log book. In those times government vehicles carried ordinary registration plates and the Chevrolet utility did not stand out from private vehicles. He felt his one-off solution was justified in view of the unpaid overtime one worked, over seven days, especially at forest fires, and the caretaking duties attached to living beside the fire equipment and general stores. He revealed the episode much later on in confidence, relieved that his falsification of the record had escaped notice.

Noorinbee, some eight km north of Cann River, was one of the most remote postings, attended by high prices for foodstuffs and a need to travel to obtain medical and dental services. Parents of an infant with a raging temperature had to decide whether to drive their child more than 80 km over a gravel road to the doctor at Orbost or to wait and see. It could happen that a sick child was be a lot better before examination by the doctor, who might wonder why a parent had apparently panicked. Until the mid- to late-1950s when successive sections of the Princes Highway were sealed east of Orbost the trip was much slower, of course.

Field officers with children about to finish primary schooling could expect the Commission to recognise their need to be reasonably close to a secondary school whenever a batch of transfers was being worked out.

The children of the foresters at Rennick, sitting almost on the border of South Australia were probably the only ones to be disadvantaged when their father was transferred, because they were often 'kept down a grade' when enrolling at their new schools in Victoria. Differences in the positions of the rungs in the schooling ladders in various Australian states cause this sort of problem today, when families move interstate.

Applicants for a forestry scholarship were always told they must be prepared to be posted anywhere in Victoria and to accept transfers whenever required by the Commission. To a lad competing for a traineeship, the prospect of transfers in three years' time was a remote deterrent. Compulsory transfers were an essential part of the vocation. Many foresters found that transfers provided welcome release from community roles expected of them. A man could shed a presidency, a secretary's chores, and a treasurer's burden in one day, with a simple explanation. When the new district forester arrived at Nowa Nowa late one morning in 1950 he found he was president of the school committee and secretary of something else before sunset.

Following a change of government in 1982 the new masters soon branded compulsory transfers barbaric; to be abolished. No longer would unmarried foresters be made to live at remote locations for experience and to try their wings distant from close supervision. No longer would couples and families have to move to

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a place not of their own election. The wholesale selling off of government houses in the 1980s made some postings quite unattractive. Commuting to the depot or office in a government vehicle, from wherever a forester could reasonably find a house was permitted. The aggregate cost of this transport for officers must have been high.

The power of the Commission to order a transfer at very short notice could be exercised on compassionate grounds when the needs of a family illness or for special care might be met by transfer. Again, a forester whose recent performance had not met with approval could be sent somewhere where he had a chance of regaining the confidence of his seniors. A transfer of this nature was salutary for his peers and juniors. Furthermore, when a field forester neared the end of his career it seemed to happen that he benefited from a final transfer to a forest district north or west of Melbourne, where the land was not steep, the winter mild, the pace of duty less demanding, and the amenities of a large town or city were close.

An irksome feature of the actual removal of furniture and effects was the rigid management by the State Tender Board of tenders from carriers. At least five tenders had to be got, the lowest one being favoured. In addition, one van and one only would make a circuit to move, say, three or four households. This meant that the loaded van arrived and some of its contents were arrayed in the open air or squeezed into a room of the quarters to commence. Furniture out and furniture in, in the one manoeuvre, could be a frantic event for its owners if it was raining. The carrier's contract did not include neatly arranging the heavier items of incoming furniture to the forester's satisfaction or his wife's. Some carriers scrambled to close the tailboard of the van and get on their way.

Because of the distance to travel and the standard of some country roads, the van was often late, very late, which ruffled tempers and gave carriers the grumps. In 1955 the van from Broadford was due to arrive at Invermay at seven in the morning, having loaded the evening before. The forester and his wife at Invermay were ready on time, with corn beef sandwiches and so on for the carriers' lunch. During the morning they speculated what things would be like at Macedon, their new posting, as they kept an eye on the approaches for the van. Telephone calls to head office in the afternoon were pointless; no idea where the van could be, and no way to get in touch with the driver. By six o'clock the sandwiches had been eaten, and still no sign of the van. Soon after seven it turned up, its crew of two young men in a bad mood, made worse when there was no food waiting for them. The forester himself was in no frame of mind to drive into Ballarat to shout them fish and chips or whatever else might be available for the carriers. As soon as there were beds and some bedding in the house the newcomer's daughters were able to get to bed, but the whole operation staggered along until after eleven, culminating in a gleeful smashing of a prized daffodil in flower in its pot as the tailboard of the loaded van was slammed shut.

The outgoing forester's wife was exhausted and pregnant. There was no commercial accommodation in Ballarat, owing to the South Street Competitions, and the van was due at Macedon at eight the next morning. In their small car they drove, with a bulldog and six pullets in the boot, to Hawthorn where the wife's mother fed them steak and eggs before they fell into bed about three. Yes, they got to Macedon in time; the furniture in, furniture out business was repeated. The puzzle of pieces of kitchen lino was solved, the kerosene refrigerator set going and other essentials attended to by late morning. The couple went to bed about four o'clock, and slept until the next morning.

The family leaving Macedon were not without troubles that day. Their young son had raging measles, and their new baby was little more than three weeks' old. The spotted boy was in their car in the shade of a huge cypress, the best they could do for him at the time. His father had appealed to the Chairman of the

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Commission to defer their transfer until the baby was somewhat older, to no avail, the Chairman saying that at three weeks the infant would be mature enough to travel. Families can be like that.

Left to its own devices the Commission would almost certainly have hired two or more removalists vans for a leapfrog sequence, to the benefit of its staff and families, and the carriers. As it was there was no wriggling out of the State Tender Board's clutches.

Of course there was scant chance for the departing folk to do a final sweep-up of the house being left. Especially if it had been raining, the incoming family simply had an extra task on its hands after the carriers had finished tramping in and out. Most wives bore this with good humour, but some carping did do the rounds after a run of transfers. If there was any lull in conversation on those occasions when foresters and their wives got together, it was a certain remedy to mention carriers and transfers.

SPECIAL SKILLS

The department developed a number of notable skills which were outcomes of necessities of the time or particular interests followed by staff members in response to opportunities they and the Commission saw to advance the work of the Department.

Radio services

The Commission responded to the need for modern communications after the lessons of the fires of 1939. Something superior to the telephone services then available was clearly in the interests of improved fire protection and safety of persons. The public telephone system did not extend where the forest staff needed a means of communication, and the Commission had provided its own telephone lines in the forests where its need justified investment in lines and their maintenance.

Forests Commission telephone lines connected fire towers with one another and the district offices. The main East Gippsland lines connected 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 lower branches of trees, or poles put in where necessary. The wire was deliberately slack so that fallen branches of trees, even several per mile, 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 any one of the wooden-cased Eriksson telephones was not strong enough to ring the bell of a distant instrument. To overcome this, the magnetos of several telephones could be cranked in unison to tinkle the bell of the distant instrument. Sometimes messages would be relayed.

The Commission had developed good radio support for its field staff by 1949. Its central transmitter, VL 3AA, was the hub of the statewide system, and district offices had 100- watt transmitters which allowed reliable communication with head office, and, when approved in an emergency directly between field offices. The visitor driving into a town could find the office easily by keeping an eye out for radio aerials between a pair of tall, slender hardwood poles. Messages passed on the head office frequency were able to overcome the lamentable public 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

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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.

It may be hard to believe today that telephone services were so poor during and after the war. 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 telephonists working manual exchanges. A trunk line call from, say, Bruthen to head office would be connected through three exchanges. The switchboards in outlying places were open during specified hours only, but could be opened at any hour by payment of a fee, provided someone was there to answer a call.

The delays experienced in securing a connection to head office 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.

The Construction Overseer in charge of the "A" class road work near Bruthen 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 in 1949 but told me he cancelled it when he had not got through in three weeks.

Fire calls were given priority, of course, 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 fire emergencies, handling calls and messages with intelligence and generally being helpful. Even in winter the local operator was 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 come to clip a telephone hand set to wires along a roadside, so providing access to the public telephone system, for example, from the side of the Omeo Highway north of Tambo Crossing to allow calls to the offices in Bruthen and Bairnsdale.

In addition to the statewide frequency there were a regional frequencies used for traffic between district offices and portable equipment in camps. Local traffic from each base 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 a.m. on weekdays the assistant forester 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 an electricity supply it could be used with several 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,

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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 in its laboratory by the Communications Branch of the Department. It had a whip aerial or it 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.

In time VHF radios came along and were installed in vehicles, allowing field staff to work away from base more easily during fire danger weeks, and improving communication so much in obvious ways. Radio in trucks, on dozers, and graders reduced delays in summoning forces to a fire.

Road making

The Commission's Engineering Branch and road construction personnel were responsible for surveying the routes for major forest roads in the mountains in the Mansfield, Bruthen, Macalister (Heyfield) and other forest districts after the war, and for designing and building them to a high standard. Since 1939 the workforce had accumulated experience and workers skilled in machine operation and maintenance, the use of explosives, installation of culverts, and quarrying for surfacing gravel and rock. The road builders and surveyors occupied camps which could be relocated up the road when the travelling time to and from the main scene of activity became too long. The move was upward, because these major access routes ascended from the foothills.

These road builders migrated seasonally, for example, from above the snowline out of Mansfield to foothills below Mt Baldhead in the Bruthen Forest District for the winter. Their move involved several railway wagons bearing dozers and graders, low loaders, and trucks carrying air compressors, tool boxes, trailers, hand tools, and assorted camp gear.

In the 1950s the Forests Commission could design and construct mountain roads better than the Country Roads Board because its heyday in that field had passed. The Commission's competency resulted from the necessity to provide major lines of transport in roadless forest as soon as practicable, to allow further access to sawlog stands by way of secondary roads constructed by forest district gangs or by sawlog licensees.

Without doubt the legend among roading overseers was Les Kennedy, known as 'Bull' Kennedy. He was widely known and widely respected for his competence and authority.

In autumn 1949 he was in charge of the large workforce based at the Commission's camp at Mirimbah on the Delatite River. The road they were constructing had reached the King Saddle and was being extended along the ridge as the autumn settled in. Three young foresters and a technical assistant were billeted with Les, as a favour, sharing his hutment of several rooms above the main camp. They had been assigned the urgent task of making the field measurements necessary to construct a form table for alpine ash trees before snowfalls stopped such work. They had to measure the girth of felled trees at intervals along the trunk, as well as bark thickness, stump height, and total height of tree, puddling in soft snow some days. The work slowed as snowy days became more frequent. For transport they hitched rides on trucks and in station wagons traversing the road. A memorable feature of the roading arrangements was the lunch run from the cookhouse at the camp delivering meals in hot boxes to the workers, which, on lucky days, the trees measurers could share. Les Kennedy maintained very high standards of discipline. He provided a truck and driver for men to go to and from the pub at Merrijig on Saturdays, at times he specified.

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On a Monday morning he could be seen hurling the baggage of a sleepy head over the bridge over the Delatite before he dragged its owner over to follow it. Unpunctuality cost your job.

Les was also strict about safety. The driver of an empty truck coming down the Forests Commission road one afternoon on his way back to the depot by the river was plainly exceeding Les's speed limit of 30 miles per hour. Mr Kennedy told the man to get out of the cabin, walk to the office and pick up his final pay.

Film making

The Forests Commission encouraged its Chief Draughtsman, Mervyn E Bill, and his staff to make films for public screenings throughout the State. He wrote the scripts and directed the filming. By arrangement with district foresters he would put on free film evenings in halls in towns large and small. These were popular events. He would preface the films with a talk on fire prevention and other forest topics, to suit the occasion. There was opportunity for the District Forester to speak briefly. The program of short films usually included one on the lyrebird or the mallee fowl, tree felling, sawmilling, and a comedy starring W C Fields later in the program. Apart from their obvious value at the time the Commission's films provide a record of fire prevention publicity and aspects of forest history not otherwise recorded on film. Apart from the ubiquitous newsreels required for cinemas in the pre-television era.

Mervyn Bill and his assistant in Draughting, Ray Hilcke, toured by request to show films in the country. In 1956 they came to Maryborough for matinee programs in the cinema for the five or so schools of the borough. The total audience for the day was 1200, the biggest turn-out ever. In some places the audience in a local hall or school would be quite small, but the forest conservation message was proclaimed with unquenchable enthusiasm.

Fortunately the Commission films are now available [here](#) via YouTube

Timber Seasoning

In 1922 the Forests Commission and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research jointly sponsored a visit by an expert in timber seasoning kilns, in an effort to introduce far better seasoning of mountain ash and similar timbers for building and furniture. Kiln drying of a sort had been introduced in the 1880s, and in 1912 the Forests Department had promoted a new type of kiln, use of which gave poor results. The cigar-shaped fibres of mountain ash sawn timber actually crumpled flat when it was dried, resulting in an irregular washboarding of the sawn surface and distortion of the rectangular cross-section of the board, rendering it unfit for joinery and framing. In 1920 or thereabouts a remedy for collapse had been discovered by chance by two sawmillers near Alexandra, J and G Grant, and doubtless this inspired the Commission and CSIR to act. The story told was that some rejected pieces of collapsed ash had been placed by the wall of a machinery shed through which a jet of waste steam from an open pipe played on some of the timber. Steaming at atmospheric pressure reconditioned the wood fibres, and someone happened to notice the restored dimensions of the boards. H D Tiemann worked for the US Forest Service at Madison, Wisconsin, and had had experience with eucalypt timber grown in plantations and windbreaks in California, where high hopes held by investors for big profits from fast growing eucalypt timber had been dashed by collapse during drying.

The shortage of structural softwood lumber from overseas during the war had shown the extent to which Australia depended on interrupted shipping from Europe and North America. Also, the costs of imports of softwood timbers and products were high, and there were concerns that world supplies of softwood could diminish. All sectors of the timber industry were ready to learn how to overcome seasoning problems.

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Tiemann's lectures and demonstrations helped along the way, and when the Division of Forest Products was formed within CSIR in 1928 systematic research and development gathered momentum.

The Commission operated its own seasoning and joinery works at Newport, which received sawn timber from the Commission's sawmill at Erica, set up after the fires in 1939.

It was singularly fortunate for the Victorian forest service and timber industries that DFP was headquartered right in the heart of Melbourne and flourished for over half a century.

The Commission and the Division were able to support one another in several practical ways. The Commission had no need to contemplate setting up an expensive division of wood technology, as was done in New South Wales, so long as there was an energetic and cooperative DFP just down the river. But, later on, the Commission had to form its own small advisory section to deal with questions and problems put to it by timber users in Victoria, when DFP had had to put up the shutters in self-defence from hundreds of requests for advice. A former field forester, supported later on by a technical assistant, ably provided a service to the public and the staff of the Commission. DFP did not give evidence in litigation over timber specifications or timber problems, but the Commission's officer often appeared as an expert witness.

Visual management system

The Commission was fairly early off the mark in developing a forest landscape visual management system. For this innovation it enlisted the services of professionals from the USA already experienced in landscape classification and assessment. By 1983 a Victorian version was available for use by management planners and field foresters.

Byways

The flexible usefulness's of foresters was recognised by their appointment to boards and committees which managed assets well outside timber-yielding forests.

One forester in head office, K J Simpfendorfer, found himself on the board of the Melbourne Zoo, which drew on his considerable knowledge of the growth requirements and habits of tree and shrub species for planting in the redesigned layout of the main zoo in Parkville progressed. When his term of appointment ended he was re-appointed for a further term, the first time that had happened to a public service appointee to the board.

Another forester, a senior research administrator, F G Craig, found he was a member of the board of the Yarra Bend Park Trust, involved with two golf courses, 16 km of river frontage, and several sports grounds set in the most extensive areas of native vegetation near the centre of Melbourne. He threw himself into opportunities to contribute to the development and maintenance of the park, probably not to the detriment of his other duties but certainly of his recreation time.

The District Forester stationed at Kallista, J C Westcott, was involved with several special reserves in the Dandenongs, such as the National Rhododendron Garden. Together with Country Fire Authority brigade meetings, liaison with officers of the shires over fire protection, land planning and other issues, preparing and controlling budgets for the forest district, planning and supervision of works, and timber sales from State forest, Jim's round of duties was weighty enough. While Sherbrooke forest continued to be State forest he and his staff exercised an adapting form of urban forestry, including coping with fire protection and

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the safety of fringing residents when forest fires occurred, and the loss of lyrebirds from feral cats and other predators.

The Forests Commission managed several places which were developed as snow resorts. The State Electricity Commission had ownership of the land at Falls Creek, which first attracted interest in 1940. Before the Alpine Resorts Commission existed planning the development of the Mt Buller snowfield claimed a good deal of time and energy from within the Commission. Development of the resort called upon the services of senior foresters, the District Forester at Mansfield, engineers, surveyors and draughtspersons employed by the Forests Commission, to specify only some. A committee of management was appointed for Mt Baw Baw in 1959 under the *Forests Act*, and the Commission looked after Lake Mountain and Mt Donna Buang.

In 1985 the government established the Alpine Resorts Commission to be responsible for the resorts which had been administered separately. That Commission was abolished in 1998, and separate management boards were appointed for the snow resorts, under an umbrella called the Alpine Resorts Coordination Council.

PUBLICITY

For several decades the main avenues used by the Forests Commission to promote fire prevention, the use of Victorian timbers and tree planting were the Royal Melbourne Show and the tree nurseries at Macedon, Creswick, and Wail. District staff often put together displays at local and regional shows. Fire prevention signs were erected seasonally where roads entered State forest, and seasonal swinging gallows signs with fire prevention slogans were scattered along busy roads used by the public.

Royal Melbourne Show

Every September thousands of city and country people enjoyed the displays in the Forests Commission's permanent pavilion in the showgrounds. It was open well into the evening, and staffed by volunteers from head office, and for many years by students of the Victorian School of Forestry. There was a permanent glass-fronted bee-hive built into an inner wall of the pavilion which allowed daytime visitors to watch the coming and going of worker bees. Mervyn Bill and his co-workers came up with fresh ideas and draughted placards for displays. The focus was always on fire prevention, fire suppression, tree planting and use of native forest products.

Tree nurseries

Government tree nurseries were established to encourage reforestation and amenity tree planting. The nursery at Macedon was set up in 1872, to provide seedlings to plant on the slopes of Mt Macedon denuded by timber cutting, and to provide some employment for timber workers. A nursery was established at Creswick, a gold mining centre, in 1888, and in 1901 the State ran nurseries at Macedon, Creswick, Havelock (near Maryborough), and at Tintarra. The Wimmera Forest Nursery was established at Wail in 1948 to produce planting stock of species suited to drier climates, and to publicise their usefulness. The forester who was put in charge in 1959, Bill Middleton, showed such a flair for this and associated endeavours that he remained there until 1976.

In the early 1920s the recently-established Forests Commission promoted tree planting on farms and by country municipalities. It supported the School Endowment Plantations scheme by providing tree seedlings and fencing timbers at attractive rates. The Education Department later ran its own nursery and internal

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advisory section. Stands of eucalypts or pines were often adjacent to a rural school, providing places for nature study, pine pruning and other practical exercises, and some future revenue from timber sales. Schools established plantations distant from the school where suitable land was available.

The nurseries provided a friendly face of the Department to welcome their rural customers. The overseers and plant propagators got to know generations of farmers and through them built up an impressive knowledge of the most successful choices of species for localities throughout the State. The staff at Creswick, Macedon and Wail gave advice freely, based on this knowledge. Often farmers collected their seasonal order at the nursery, renewing acquaintances and asking questions about site preparation and care of young trees. To display a selection of planting stock locally for the convenience of customers, nursery depots were set up at Commission premises at Maffra, Merbein, and other centres.

Bill Middleton built up a very wide acquaintance with individual and corporate tree planters in the west and north of the State, as well as in South Australia and New South Wales. He became well known also for his weekly broadcasts on garden and tree topics on regional ABC radio for nearly 15 years. His stature in conservation circles was to be hugely influential when settlement of part of the Little Desert was proposed by a Minister of the Crown in 1968. His adroitness allowed him to escape the label of civic castrate bestowed on foresters by Jack Westoby in 1983 (pages 47–49).

When Jack Lambert, the senior overseer at the Creswick nursery, was within a year of retirement the District Forester tried hard to encourage him to sit down in working hours to write notes and annotate maps of western and northern Victoria which would preserve his knowledge to guide future tree planters. Jack had started work at the nursery as soon as he left school when quite young. The idea did not work out. Jack was so immersed in imperatives of his work that writing always had to wait until next week.

To accommodate the wishes of the nurserymen's association, the Commission agreed not to sell stock for planting in greater Melbourne, Geelong, and some other towns. The order form used for purchases required a resident of those places to declare that plants bought at Commission nurseries would not be used at home. This restriction could not be enforced, but the agreement served to placate the increasingly important commercial tree nursery industry. The Natural Resources Conservation League of Victoria, which had in 1951 succeeded the Save the Forests Campaign (1944), ran tree nurseries, notably for municipalities and farmers, until 2003 when it got rid of its four nurseries.

The proliferation of general and specialist private nurseries throughout Victoria changed the scene for the State nurseries, and when the Macedon nursery was burnt out in 1983 the Commission considered the case for letting that be its end, and rehabilitation of the Macedon site take another direction.

Posters

The Commission's venture into posters of State forests for sale turned out trumps. There were two photographers on the staff providing their services throughout the Department.

Noel Ryan was junior to George Self but he shone at photography for posters, encouraged by George and new Hasselblad equipment. He was puzzled when one of the senior men in his Division remarked that it had taken Noel three days to get suitable images of a certain forest, when it took less than a second to take a photo. He was puzzled that anyone should be ignorant of how movement of cloud, passage of the sun, and gusts of winds can frustrate a photographer. Also, to choose a really good camera station and clear away intruding foliage in the foreground might take an hour. To this day one may see examples of these

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forest posters on the walls of shops, bedrooms, bathrooms, and anywhere where people indoors like a glimpse of silvan serenity.

The Community Education and Information Branch

In the final years there was a vigorous Community Education and Information Branch responsible for general publications, arranging speakers requested for groups and organisations, attending to the details of calendar events, and for running a drop-in display and shop for the public. The Branch used a large ground-floor area in Forestry House, overlooking Bourke and King Streets, for displays and sales of posters, reports and other Commission publications. The activities of the Branch were curtailed overnight in 1982 when a new government was elected. The latest publication, *Woodchips – Threat or Promise?*, produced as a poster with text, was consigned from the Government Printer's works for immediate destruction by pulping of every copy. Some happened to fall from a truck and one may find a copy today if one looks in the right place.

RESEARCH

The State Forests Department ran a timber seasoning works at Newport from 1911, and the Forests Commission took over its operation in 1918. Research into methods of seasoning sawn eucalypt timber was an essential to be prosecuted, and not long after H D Tiemann made his contributions on the local scene the Commonwealth established the Division of Forest Products, relieving the Commission of actual research in that field, but allowing it to participate by providing logs, sawn timber, and use of its facilities as required.

Eucalyptus oil distillation from leaf gathered on public forest lands was a significant forest industry from the 1870s. Eucalyptus oil had been the first export from the infant colony of New South Wales in 1790 when Surgeon-General John White sent a quart of oil from 'Sydney Peppermint' to England. Joseph Bosisto, a well-known pharmacist in Melbourne, built a still on the Dandenong Creek in 1852. He did this with the encouragement of Ferdinand Von Mueller, but it was nearly 30 years before Bosisto could attract financial backing to expand production substantially. The oil industry thrived until about 1920, when prices fell drastically and it struggled along until 1939. When another war started there was renewed demand for the medicinal and industrial types of oil, and local production responded. The Forests Commission employed two young graduates, Miss Nancy Swain and Miss Nance Morsby (for a short time), at Creswick in the early 1940s to test samples of oil. When newly-appointed as Principal of the School of Forestry, E J Semmens had designed and supervised the building of an experimental oil still in 1928, and pursued his interests in the composition of various oils distilled by students from consignments of leaves gathered in the box-ironbark and from peppermint eucalypts in mixed species forests. The E J Semmens collection in the archives of The University of Melbourne includes registers of the sources of leaf samples and the results of tests on oils distilled from them from 1929 until 1945. Interest in the work at Creswick lapsed at the end of the war, although J Bosisto and Co Pty Ltd, and others, maintained testing facilities. Bosisto went into liquidation in 1956 and its assets were taken over by Drug Houses of Australia Ltd.

The label on a bottle of 'Bosisto's Eucalyptus Oil' in a supermarket today informs the customer that Felton Grimwade & Bickford Pty Ltd brought it to the shelves. It is illustrated by a colourful parrot beneath the words PARROT BRAND FIRST SINCE 1852. The website <www.fgb.com.au> is commended for its information on Joseph Bosisto, the industry, and on uses of the oil. It appears that Australia is the only country in which eucalyptus oil can be purchased in bottles over the counter. The bottle is marked 'Poison' and the directions for use exclude swallowing the oil, although inhalation is listed. Many Australians living

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today swallowed when young a sugar cube laced with two or three drops of eucalypt oil to relieve symptoms of a cold, not once but many times.

From the 1950s the Forests Commission built up a research branch with ever-expanding responsibilities. Work in the branch attracted those foresters from the general ranks who had a bent for post-graduate studies and field research investigations. Over time the Commission engaged specialists in plant pathology, ornithology and forest mammal studies. The scope of research projects in those fields and in silvics, silviculture, forest entomology, nursery practices, and seed collection and storage is documented in many research bulletins and published papers.

Significantly, fire research and the various fire schools were the responsibility of the Division of Forest Protection, because the imperative was to develop fire behaviour studies and practices for fuel reduction burning and firefighting. The Division developed the use of small fixed wing aircraft in firefighting and was in the forefront of using helicopters for dropping igniters in a specified pattern over broad areas of eucalypt forest. Where each fell into the litter when conditions of fuel and the weather were suitable for fuel reduction burning started a fire which joined up with its neighbours to form an intended pattern of patchy firing. The Forests Commission and the Forests Department in Western Australia were leaders in developing methods for broad-scale fuel reduction burning in Australian forests, to improve safety of firefighters and forest neighbours, while taking advantage of favourable conditions while they lasted. This sort of development could flourish, and be applied operationally, under the control of a statutory body free of ministerial interference.

CIVIC CASTRATES

When major restructuring of the natural resources agencies began in Victoria in 1982, the members of the forestry family were startled to find that they and their motives were regarded with suspicion by new arrivals on the scene. Ministerial advisers and members of party committees were novel, as were the non-forester senior executives who were appointed to be in charge of divisions largely concerned with forests in an amalgamated department in 1983.

Activists for single-issue causes were inspired to harry targets who were forbidden by their terms of employment in the Public Service to speak out, to explain or defend their position.

The forest family had assumed that all the world knew its members were straight in their dealings, their practices founded on forest science, and their motives were to serve the public good.

In 1983 Jack Westoby clarified the position of those who were experiencing challenge and change as never before. In his keynote address in Melbourne to the 10th Triennial Conference of the Institute of Foresters of Australia he chastised them for failure to react to general changes in society. The huge expansion in secondary and tertiary education since the war, accompanied by the expression of single-issue movements had raised a new awareness in the electorate of natural resource questions. People were increasingly suspicious of politicians and professionals who they were convinced were afflicted with daddy-knows best syndrome. It was shocking to be confronted by activists, rather than being regarded by them as allies in conservation.

The obedient silence of foresters and other departmental officers could be taken as evidence of a daddy-knows-best smugness. Of course Westoby recognised that regulations made public servants civic castrates, but argued that it was high time for them to be freed to participate in open debates of issues

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which concerned voters. He asserted that foresters should have the freedom to participate fully in civic life, in spite of being employed by public agencies.

The Forests Commission and the foresters it had recruited, trained and employed in the ranks of the State Forests Department came in for further disrespect. Until 1979 there had not been a woman forester in the Department, and this convinced the new wave of critics that there was a forestry culture nurtured behind an arrogant bastion of opposition to equal gender opportunity. The Minister and her supporters were apparently ignorant of the documented preparation for recruiting young women that led to their initial recruitment trainees in 1976. That Minister, speaking to an assembly at the Victorian School of Forestry expressed displeasure that men only had attended the School, and also that there were few women then in the forest science course at the University. In his short reply the Vice-Chancellor gently chided her, pointing out there could be no more women graduates from any course than the number of eligible students who had applied for admission.

To achieve the amalgamation of agencies to form the Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands various working parties had been formed, of officers nominated by the agencies.

Attendance at these meetings of working parties set to thrash out some question or other of organisation became tedious for the constant criticisms aimed at foresters. The only enthusiasts seemed to be new staff who thought they were participating in novel opportunities which would allow them to catch the eye of senior management.

Old attitudes also surfaced during these meetings engineered by the change-agents. The envy of some Lands Department people of the training and high morale of the foresters, the scorn of foresters as tree-butchers by wildlife staff, and the fierce resistance of some national parks staff to be dragged into association with Forests and Lands were apparent. There was a little satisfaction within the family when, eventually, all but a couple of the new Regional Manager positions in the amalgamated department were filled simultaneously by foresters from the State Forests Department.

CONCLUSION

A childless generation of a family faces the prospect of becoming but a memory. A family's days are numbered if its structure is destroyed and its members dispersed.

It will not be long before all the remnant members of the Victorian forest service will have retired from paid public service or departed the scene. Until then these veterans have good cause to reflect on treasured memories of worthy work-mates and their shared striving in the service of the people of Victoria.

New forestry families are forming, no doubt, and should in due time earn respected places in the management of the State forests.

Good fortune to them!