



Bob Cutts

Interview Excerpt 17 December 2016

Oral History Project
Reliving the past: Stories from our communities

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The sawmilling and timber industries of the Pilliga Forest

Sawmilling in the Pilliga Forest started as early as the 1870s. By the 1930s it had become a thriving industry and Baradine had become the centre of the forestry industry for the region. Small but thriving communities developed as forestry men and their families lived and worked at the remote sawmill sites. In this interview Bob Cutts recalls his stories of growing up and working at the Rocky Creek Sawmill.

This recording created on 17 December 2016 is part of Macquarie Regional Library's oral history project, "Reliving the past: stories from our communities". Each recording contributes to the developing story of life in the [Baradine] area.

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(I): Ok, thanks Bob. OK, so we are going to talk a bit about your early life. You've lived in the Baradine district off and on most of your life, especially when you were younger?

(S): Yes.

(I): Right, so I am particularly interested in talking about your life out at the Rocky Creek sawmill and telling me a little bit about the sawmilling industries and history. So would you like to start by talking about when you were young? How old you were - can you remember when you first went out to Rocky Creek and why?

(S): I was thirteen years of age. Dad got the job as engine driver at Rocky Creek and we moved out there to live and stayed on there. We had correspondence for school; there was no school or nothing there. It was quite a pleasant place and in those days Rocky Creek had a good heap of people. Do you want me to name them?

(I): Yes, if you've got names and remember how many, that would be wonderful.

(S): Yeah, well in those days my dad was the engine driver. Henry Schwagger was the manager of the sawmill, Steve Jack was the foreman of the mill, Bert Ruttley spent most of his life at Rocky Creek; he used to do a lot of the stacking out and checking the logs when they came in on the trucks. They had to take the numbers down that the cutters had marked on so they could be paid for that amount. And ah, we had working on the dump at that time a little bloke called Harry Martin, who later cut his hand off on the breaking down bench. Harry, yeah, well, most of his hand, like all his fingers and that went. A New Zealand bloke, came there riding a pushbike and after he lost his hand, Tony [Bob's brother] bought his pushbike off him because he couldn't ride it any more.

And then we had Arthur Wadley and Tom Sutherland, the two log cutters. Tommy Burrows and Walter McCullum. Tommy was a benchman and Walter was a tailer-out - - Tom was also the local bookmaker. And then we had Aub [Bob's brother] was on the scantlings, where they

had to get rid of the waste; the wastage from the timber, and Snowy Gesla¹ and Les Hitchin, they both worked on the dump on and off. Old Mr White, Jimmy White as we called him, old Jim, he was a snigger - that used to snig the logs to be carted in. He used to come from Kenebri out in his dray, he had a horse called Robbin and he used to drive her in and out on the dray at weekends and he would take her out of the dray and use her for snigging all the week and then take her back into town. And then, as I said, we had Bert who was a stacker-out with the timber on it and then we had Yabby Taylor, he worked as a docker. The dock was the one who cut the lengths on the timber....Keith Davis used to cart the timber from the mill into the stack at the railway and put it on the trucks at Kenebri to be carted away.

And, as I said, Les and Mary (Hitchin) they lived there at Rocky Creek. Next to them was Arthur Clark. Arthur was a bit of a handyman and they put him out bush cutting logs or put him on the mill; yeah working on the mill and that sort of thing. And, oh we had Yabby Taylor – Yabby used to come up and give a bit of a hand on the stacking and docking and that, but it was quite a pleasant place, those days everybody knew each other and we all mixed in together. George Ruttley; he used to work in the bush log cutting and he also worked on the mill. George, young George, his family were reared there on the mill. As I said, Steve was the foreman and Isabelle his wife and they had the two kids there.

We had no schooling, the only schooling we had was at the correspondence, you know, at the time. Tony and I and Garry (another brother) we worked in the forest cutting logs. I was just turning fourteen and Tony and Garry were just thirteen and we went out, we were cutting logs for a while and then we were put out of the scrub because we were too young and they threatened to take Jack Underwood's licence off him, if he kept us in the scrub cutting logs. So Jack then gave us the job on weekends cleaning the sawmill; we used to get two pound to get rid of all the sawdust and scrap and everything from the mill over the weekend and have it ready for the Monday morning on the thing, you know, yeah.

The shower at the mill, they had the shower. The tank stand was done in and the shower was on the mill and most of the people used hot water from the steam. Dad used to pump from

¹ The spelling of this surname may be incorrect.

the engine, dad had the hot water running from there and that was when most of us showered in the evening because most the houses didn't have bathrooms or anything like that; you just had a big tub to wash in.