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Does reminiscence have a role in history? A human dimension

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Introduction

In their recent book *What's wrong with Anzac?* Reynolds and Lake succinctly wrote 'History runs counter to myth making' (Reynolds et al. 2010)—but sceptics may ask, in so doing does history sometimes create myths of its own? David Potts (2009) thinks it can, claiming that 'Historians can build meaning into people's lives that the people never experienced. They can give life order it never had.'

The formal way of writing social history is to 'select material from diverse sources and re-arrang[e] it under pre-selected themes' (Potts 2009). This thematic approach provides order and thus the comprehension that generates meaning from the chaos of life. However, the methodology weakens the chance of understanding particular lives. For example, Oscar Lewis defines seventy attributes of the 'poor' (Lewis 1966, cited in Potts 2009). But 'the picture is worse than the reality of each individual life within it because the usual mixture of good and bad that is experienced by individuals throughout their lives gives other insights' (Lewis 1966, cited in Potts 2009). Thus, the understanding of history is dependant on appreciation of context. Can reminiscence contribute to this understanding?

Reminiscence is a personal and therefore subjective journey. From

the uncertainty arising from the capacity of reminiscence to create myth, the challenge of 'trusting the truth' of personal comment is crucial to determining the contribution of reminiscence to history.

Whilst my motivation for recording reminiscence was personal therapy, I now realise that reminiscences I have written contribute context to the history of some Australian forests.

Many sources of information enable historians to identify points of intersection, thus giving sufficient certainty to historical facts and to their interpretation. By cross reference and appropriate rearrangement under themes, the contents of reminiscences can be subjected to normal historical discipline. Consequently, by applying this form of audit, reminiscences can provide information directly from those involved.

Features of reminiscence

The historical worth of information varies with a multitude of considerations, but especially its veracity. Because reminiscences are the writer's personal experience, their value to history merits critical review.

Personal therapy: Fertile pasture

Was it George Eliot who described reminiscence as 'a fertile pasture of understanding'? (Eliot 2000). If so, she appreciated their therapeutic value because reminiscence brings a degree of personal understanding that helps us to bring order to the chaos of life. Consequently, my motivation to write arose from family fracture and divorce.

Distinction from other personal modes of communication

Reminiscence has many overlapping features in common with other modes of personal communication such as memoirs, diaries, oral history, biography, creative non-fiction and historical novels. It is worth explaining the difference between these seven very personal modes of communication.

I chose to use 'reminiscence' rather than 'memoir,' because reminiscence is the *act of recalling and narrating past experiences* which is based on recall. Reminiscence is directed primarily towards oneself; the author is also the primary audience. This differentiates

it from memoir, which is a *biographical historical account written from personal memory*—an activity designed to provide a considered contribution to the structured historical record. However, the two concepts overlap.

Diaries are personal records of events which are references often accepted by historians as well as the judiciary. Both reminiscence and diary recall the past, but over very different time frames, which range from 'today', in the case of diaries, to a 'life time', in the case of reminiscence. The power of a diary is the credibility gained by the immediacy of recording fact; the strength of reminiscence is the perspective arising from reflection.

Oral history also provides strong elements of context. It is a response to an historian's questioning, designed to give structure and historical purpose to the interview. However, on reflection, many people, having responded to this process, feel they could have contributed more but the 'interrogation' edited it out.

Biographies report events in a structured manner about a particular life. Creative non-fiction increasingly is used as a medium to inform via writing stories. Further, historical novels (and films) often add a social and psychological dimension to biographical facts, including spiritual aspects. Both creative non-fiction and historical novels are diminished when seen to depart from biographical fact, but are enhanced when the reader embraces the authors' interpretations. Thus at age fifteen I was enthralled when reading *The Term of his Natural Life*, but I am apprehensive about my experience if I re-read Marcus Clarke's novel now (63 years later).

It is clear that the factual, contextual and cultural aspects of history all profit from the combined contribution of each of these seven very personal sources of information. But how do they confront the demands of credibility?

Credibility

Reminiscences have four important challenges to their credibility: pressure of ageing, expurgation, independence and truthfulness.

First, the personal conflict of the pressure of ageing needs to be recognised. By its nature, reminiscence becomes more frequent and compelling with ageing; indeed, its intensity often interferes with

sleep patterns. The haste generated by the pressure of ageing generates anxiety, an emotion which often jeopardises judgement.

Secondly, expurgation, or the tendency for writers to cleanse their reminiscences by leaving out difficult matters, is a constant challenge between truth and discretion. I believe all reminiscences inevitably expurgate in order to respect the privacy of those involved. More poignantly, the act of writing forces consideration of those memories and thoughts that one feels it is not prudent to record. But it is via consideration of these concealed matters that therapy is achieved. Thus, whilst our brain releases secreted memories and thoughts, it is our heart that decides what the hand will write. The lucid tears of remembrance dictate that some things are not meant to be said.

Thirdly, subjectivity within reminiscences generates the quandary of bias arising from 'narrowness of their independence'. However, when assessing this trait, one should also consider that frequently the primary motivation for reminiscence is personal therapy. Thus, conversely, this feature enables reminiscence to provide a significant degree of 'independence of purpose'.

Finally, for reminiscences to be useful, the writer must accept the challenge of truth in order to establish his own trust in his own stories. Therefore, reminiscence presents significant ethical considerations. When writing them, one writes to oneself, letting memories come as they may. Thus their structure is not life's events presented sequentially—rather, they reflect the fragmentation of life as we strive for the best choices to guide us through the complexity that fortune presents. Consequently, if reminiscences are to be worthwhile, the writer must accept the discipline of a process where truth is reliant on the writer gaining not only the reader's trust, but also his own.

Let us consider *truth*, because it is the very soul of reminiscence and it constantly challenges writers with its tortuous demands. By its magnitude, absolute truth is an impossible mission. The infeasibility of 'telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth', is so powerful that its acceptance tempts us towards misrepresentation. It allows selective omission to become a most convincing mechanism for deception. Also, at the emotional level, presenting absolute truth is an intrusion on discretion and thus may attack the heart of personal relationships. Further, the dark art of presenting facts out of context is a most potent form of misrepresentation that is often

expertly manipulated, especially in business and politics, as well as by barristers, journalists and advocates of 'causes'. However, on a more positive note, in telling stories one can certainly commit to not telling specific untruths, both by respecting facts, and especially by providing appropriate context. Clive James has observed that there is something banal about raw truth expressed without context—'there is something ungracious in the exhibition of naked truth'—because it is context that gives facts the heart that creates history.

But ultimately we enact truth through trust. Thus, trust is the medium by which confidence is given to our listeners. What better illustration than the story referred to by Orlando Figes in *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* (Jeffrey 2008). Figes tells us that Stalin, from his office in the Kremlin, had a view of the building ('The House') where the elite of his political staff lived. During the purges, if the lights of their apartment burned late at night he would phone them. As the hapless tenant picked up the receiver, all he heard was Stalin's Georgian accent saying 'I didn't know you were still alive'; then a *click!* as the smiling tyrant replaced the receiver. Credibility of this story is dependant on its intersection with so many other tales and events regarding Stalin, especially the trust arising from those stories that are verifiable.

Thus historical truth is the trust generated by the bonding of fact with context.

When discussing contentious issues, we frequently identify the *predisposition* that opponents bring to the debate, but mostly deny that we ourselves do likewise. And predisposition is so often the compass with which we orient our thoughts.

To sum up, in a television interview with psychologist Dr Pamela Stevenson, an abstainer once observed that the essential prelude towards his non-drinking was his recognition that he is an alcoholic. He went further, saying that humans tend to be consummate liars who view the past as they wish it had been. Poignantly, he then claimed that our recognition of being drawn towards lying is the first step towards telling the truth. His point is relevant to reminiscences, because writing them is a contest between fantasy and reality. This is why reminiscence provides a level of understanding that is useful for therapy—but it is by their recording that reminiscence gains the discipline that makes it also a worthwhile contributor to history.

Historically, *context* is the relationship of individuals to the externalities of the world—the time, the deeds and the causes leading to the outcomes which are being examined (Tolstoy 1982). However, all sources of information contribute to historians identifying points of intersection, thus giving the degree of certainty that is reasonably attributable to historical facts and to their interpretation. By cross-referencing with other sources and appropriate rearrangement under themes, the truth of reminiscences can be subjected to normal historical discipline. Consequently, reminiscence has a responsibility to truth that is essentially not different from other forms of historical documentation.

Thus, whilst not being my motivation for writing, I now realise that my reminiscences can very modestly contribute to the context of the history of Australia's forests by contributing to 'a human dimension of the past' (Cochrane 2010).

My concluding reflection also comes from Tolstoy, who explained that 'the purpose of the science of history is to teach humanity to know itself' (Tolstoy 1982). Concurrently, the purpose of reminiscence is to teach individuals to know themselves. The parallels are clear.

Attached to this paper are two stories from my reminiscences of working in the forests of the upper Richmond River in New South Wales—forests with proximity and relevance to the 8th Conference of the Australian Forest History Society. They are stories written within the genre of 'creative non-fiction', about my work as a forester in the Border Rangers and titled 'Working With Real Men' (in the mid-1950s), and 'Clouds of Forest Wars' (in the mid-1970s).

Arising from these two stories, I have identified twelve subjects that provide context to understanding the history of forests of the Border Ranges. I have summarised them below. To provide perspective, I have outlined the periods of 'management' that have strongly influenced Australia's forests.

Australian Forestry Periods

Eras

1. Pre-aboriginal
2. Aboriginal
3. European

Phases

3.1 Pre-institutional ('Foris'—outside; in this context outside the authority of government)

3.2 Institutional (Social involvement that included organised action by government)

Stages

3.2.1 Forestry as a dedicated land use (in NSW exemplified by Parkes and Kendall in the late 19th century)

3.2.2 Regulated forest operations (codified by the 1916 Forestry Act)

3.2.3 Scientific production forestry (Forestry Science degrees at Australian universities commencing in the late 1920s)

3.2.4 Spiritual environmental forestry (extensive creation of National Parks—from late 1980s)

The first story relates to the interface of change where emphasis was on establishing regulatory protocols in NSW forests, and the second where emphasis on production forestry was challenged by emphasis on the spirit of nature. The following indicates examples of context from these stories, which I think cast some light on the context of stages in the management of the Border Ranges forests.

Examples of Context

Forestry Science

1945 thru 1975: emphasis on silviculture and sustainable log yields.

1. Inspections of sawmillers' log records.
2. Visit to McGuire sawmill.
3. Forestry Commission Office in Court House and adjacent to Police Compound.
4. My letter to Jack Henry for alternative work.
5. Discussions with other Forestry Commission foresters.

Environmentalism

1975 thru to present: emphasis on environment, especially its 'spiritual' aspects.

1. Working discomforts in North Coast forests—road location
2. Magnificence of scenery and forest environment.
3. Discussions with David Hind and John van Pelt.
4. Why was Wiangaree State Forest a late-starter on the priority list for national parks?
5. Border Rangers became a National Park and then World Heritage listed after one (and up to three) cutting cycles.
6. Uses made of rain forest timbers.
7. Impact of environmentalism on professional managers.
8 Parallels with Vietnam conscripts.
9. The politics of environmentalism—my relationship with Geoff Mosley and initiation into the politics of activism.
10. Ethics of politics.
11 Fashions in science: biodiversity and Professor Jiro Kikkawa.

Pacific Highway

The highway's influence on forests arising from the impact of transport on economy and sociology of the north coast.

1. Two days to travel by motor bike from Sydney to Kyogle.
2. Crossing rivers by punt, and pot-holed gravel surface.
3. Highway's contribution to the relative isolation of North Coast society in mid-1950s.
4. Highlights the considerable investment in the last 50 years in this road.
5. Its continuing inadequacy reflects the exponential rate of change of social needs.
6. The road's impact on forest commercial and environmental values.

Sawmill Industry

Stratification of sawmills into:

1. Crown licence (Standard Sawmills and Munro & Lever), which provided a secure log supply.
2. Private Property licence (McGuire), which restricted log supply to come from private forests only.
3. Small scale of sawmilling, especially private licensees.

Influence of the Second World War

1. The acute housing shortage.
2. The effect of war on ex-servicemen—the stories depict their attitudes and behaviour which remained evident a decade after war's end.

The influence of the depression

1. The depression continued to strongly influence people twenty years later.

Bonding in rural communities

1. In rural communities in 1950s, social connection was the social norm despite class (wealth) disparities.
2. Social connection diminished between the mid-1950s and mid-1970s with bourgeois intellectual 'invasion' incorporating a new social layer.

Racism and aborigines

1 Although we talked closely, including about his war experiences, why did I not raise Earl's aboriginality with him?
2. Indeed, why did he not raise it with me?
3. Court House and surrounds cleaned each Monday by 'detained' aborigines.

Land use—marginal agriculture on cleared rainforest

1. Slope of terrain.
2. Primary species accession of regenerating eucalypt forest on cleared farmland.
3. Economic use of accession forest.
4. Uneconomic scale of agriculture and sawmilling.
5. 'Drift to the city'.

Work ethic tensions

1. Phil Dalton's cynicism.
2. Earl Wright's contentment.
3. Clarrie Hoskins's acceptance.
4. Unumgar log fallers' commitment to hard work.
5. Relationships across professions and occupations.

Technological change

1. Chain saws—an example of the importance of technology as a force that determines human history.
2. The effect on the Unumgar tree fallers.
3. Pre-war selective logging based on economic rather than silvicultural choice.

Level of professionalism of post war Forestry

1. Tensions between graduate and non-graduate foresters.
2. Insights into the varying levels of professionalism of Forestry Commission staff.

The bonding of fact with context enables stories we call history to be written. But we read differing tales because the detail we see within these stories is specific and individual to each of us. Reminiscence contributes to diminishing these differences.

Working With Real Men

With my nascent personal and social values subliminally tucked away in my being, for two days in February 1955 I road my motor bike north along the mostly unsealed and pot-holed North Coast Pacific Highway, including punts over two river crossings. I was to commence work on the Queensland border as Assistant Forester in the Kyogle Sub-District. Having just turned 22, and after four academic years plus almost two years field work, I was at last ready to work professionally with the real men of life.

My wife Lois had preceded me, commencing teaching at Kyogle High School. She obtained accommodation on the veranda with glass louvres of a house owned by an ex-digger, Mick Smyth, with his wife with six children. Clustered together we were to develop into a compatible group that accepted the housing shortage as an unfortunate consequence of the last 15 years of depression and war. The children's concern that a school teacher was living in their house, plus Mick's not infrequent depression from his war experiences, became matters of bonding rather than tensions as we all, in our own often bungling way, dealt with the issues. That Lois won the respect of her work peers, pupils and their parents, added to our mutual self esteem. Mick liked

Rugby League, watching and intelligently commenting on every game I played, at the time of life when I know from within myself, as well as the response of my rugby peers and the local media, that I played at my best. However, he was disappointed that I refused to join in the boxing which he refereed each Friday night in the town's hall.

I had not by then read George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, nonetheless apprehension that 'we begin by knowing little and believing much and sometimes end by inverting these qualities' dominated as I first entered the Forestry office located in the stuffy atmosphere of the Kyogle Court House. My boss, Phil Dalton, was a non-graduate forester, as were those he reported to in the Casino District office. This was not then an unusual situation, as most foresters were non-graduates recruited to the General Division of the NSW public service. Similarly to inspectors in the lands and fishery departments, they were given no independent formal training. They qualified by appropriate work experience supported by departmentally composed notes, mailed to them before sitting exams that were held annually. That many of these officers performed with excellence arose from their life's experiences and personal attributes rather than the Public Service educational processes. Unfortunately, others contributed more modestly. Especially from the latter, there was a degree of tension between the older non-graduates and the young inexperienced aspirants from university.

The forester I reported to certainly lacked excellence in forestry but was well versed in dodging life's difficulties. Conscripted into the army for four years during the war, he proudly told me how he 'wormed his way into becoming a dental nurse'. Daily he applied the same techniques to managing forests. He advised, 'Curly, always take the easy option'. 'Why?' 'Because then you are always taking the easiest option'. 'Won't that land you in the shit?' 'Hasn't so far', he smiled with a goodly degree of confident pride. So he ran an administration that never departed from procedures dictated from above, but only to the minimum required. Any fall down from me would bring admonishment; any additions or suggestions for improvement engendered anger.

Hours of work were nine to five without variation. With news of each retirement, resignation or death of a forester, Phil would reach into the top left hand drawer of his desk and bring out the Seniority List as a prelude to ponderous perusal and prediction of who would soon occupy which desk and where. Despite the wondrous beauty of

working in the Border Ranges rainforests, I soon decided to 'worm' my way into a transfer.

The Kyogle forestry office was located in the Court House, a situation not then uncommon. One Monday morning Phil complained to the police sergeant that the toilets we shared with the police and the Clerk of Petty Sessions were dirty. The Sergeant explained that his new probationary constable had been left in charge for the weekend and had failed to arrest any 'abos for D&D' (drunk and disorderly). By this practice, the town's law buildings and surrounds were cleaned each Monday. The new constable, with whom I developed affinity as he also was a recent 'outsider' to the Kyogle Rugby League team, explained to me that he responded to the sergeant's displeasure by explaining that he hadn't encountered any 'D&D abos'. The Sergeant exploded, 'Christ son, do you have to be told every thing! Just learn by keeping your eyes open.' During the rest of my time at Kyogle the buildings and surrounds were well kept.

Earl Wright laboured in the hoop pine nursery, which was an area of my responsibility. But Earl had attributes that far exceeded those required for labouring. During the war he was an aircraft mechanic maintaining fighter planes in New Guinea. He talked of the one-on-one relationship he had with the planes and the pilots who flew them. This relationship was close to the extent that after each service the mechanic was required to guarantee the thoroughness of his work by first flying the fighter himself. With a smile of mischievous contentment, Earl said that he was disciplined several times for flying longer than needed to verify the quality of his work. However, his voice was faint when he spoke of pilots who did not return as he waited on the air-strip to care for their planes.

When repatriated, Earl put aside his expertise and took work with the Forestry Commission because before the war they had employed him when work was scarce. Earl saw it as his expression of appreciation and loyalty. However, his affinity with things mechanical continued. Because of his skills, he drove and maintained the fire tanker to perfection. Many years before they became common-place, he built from scrap metal a rotary lawn mower with which he maintained the nursery grounds immaculately. He also designed and constructed a small aeroplane that he tentatively flew until 'Authority' descended with threatening wrath. We related well and I used him to assist my

field work beyond the bounds of need. Our long discussions on all matters certainly interrupted productivity, but increased enjoyment and understanding of living. I sorrow still, however, about my continuing feeling of guilt—one matter never raised was Earl's 'taint of the tar brush'—the hushed references in his absence, to the degree of his Aboriginality.

Clarrie Hoskins was foreman at Toonumbar hoop pine plantation, and his daughter was the office secretary. He was a devout protestant who exuded rural honesty and companionship. Devoid of malice, he accepted adversity as normality and a measure by which we are judged. During the depression he worked a banana farm with his brother. Unable to sell their fruit, they lived on bananas, eating them raw, fried, grilled, baked and even boiled. After twenty years he claimed bananas still made his stomach retch.

Each month Clarrie and I planned the work for the plantation gang of eight labourers which he confidently supervised. Each fortnight, after I delivered the men's pay cheques, Clarrie and I would inspect what had been done and what was still to be achieved. I soon realised who was the leader in these practical matters, and thus appreciated the comfort of the informality of the reversed hierarchy.

At Unumgar State Forest, two Forestry Commission log cutters felled eucalypt logs working for wages, as I did with Boxer in my student field year. It was called 'direct conversion' and referred to by the initials DC. But unlike Boxer, the tree-felling mentor of my student field days who cut his darg and then rested, these two mid-fifty year old men worked continually, using axe and cross-cut saw to make handsome profit for the Forestry Commission. When I delivered their pay each fortnight, they would proudly review the profitability of their productivity. In company with Ray Titmarsh, Munro and Lever's bush boss, they would show where they had worked and we would all discuss where they would fell next. At times, when it was too wet to work, we would walk the old snig tracks and inspect the regeneration resulting from previous logging. Thus we bonded through a sense of mutual achievement.

Two years after I left Kyogle, Head Office stopped DC logging in coastal hardwood forests, because it was unprofitable overall. With a circular to all Districts, the bad and the good suffered the same fate without discrimination. I heard that the Unumgar fallers were cruelly

upset that their productivity was not taken into account, and that they were demoted to general forest labourers. On enquiry to some of the head office personnel involved, I found that the decision was many facetted. Apart from the overall financial losses, it was also a response to the emerging flood of chain saws into the forest, inducing the Commission to decide the level of its involvement in the new technology. They concluded that for North Coast native forests it was better for the Commission to stand back and apply its regulatory powers through licensees (sawmillers), rather than to be directly involved.

Time's irony withheld her sword to later swipe a similar swath through many Forestry Commission professionals, as new management concepts were adopted from time to time, for both good and bad reasons. Forty-five years later, the Forestry Commission reintroduced employment of loggers in forests, but on a productivity-based payment system through contractors rather than via the wood processing licensees—all too late for the Unumgar fallers whose self-esteem had been blunted by the quickening of life's constant change.

Illegal logging is frequently mentioned when South East Asian logging is the topic. My work experience is that this could only be a significant problem where regulation is corrupt. After the formation of the Forestry Commission of NSW in 1916, illegal logging was quickly reduced to nuisance proportions by the application of well-developed procedures. When I commenced work the procedures used so effectively over the previous 40 years were still rigidly in place and applied. Proud of their achievements, the 'old-guard' was apprehensive that theft of trees would recur if these precautions were modified, let alone dismantled. Thus, each sawmill was required to record all logs in an official log book in quadruplicate, showing the date of delivery, their numerical sequence, dimensions, species and the property from which they were obtained. This was to be carried out immediately logs were unloaded in the mill yard. The dockets were sent to the local forestry office each month to become the base data for 'Junior Detective Humphreys' to mark on a map the location of all logging in the district. They were a basis of audit to show forestry inspectors that all was well.

Where these operations were adjacent to Crown lands I would make an inspection and determine in the field if the Crown's boundary had been transgressed. Once every few months one would hear of minor violations regarding a few trees in other districts and these were mostly

resolved by the forester estimating the size of the log taken 'by mistake'. By assuming zero defect deductions in the log (because none could be observed in a log long since sawn-up), this use of arbitrary penalty for charging for logs provided sufficient deterrent and avoided the tedium of prosecution. But 'Junior Detective Humphreys' was not called upon to use this unauthorised device, because despite his anticipation, he found no breaches. Thus his initial enthusiasm eventually diminished, as it does in a fisherman whose hook remains baited.

The procedure included unscheduled inspections of sawmill records each three months and the results of these audits were forwarded to head office. Reasons for non-inspections were also to be provided, and two non-inspections in sequence would lead to unspeakable consequences whose nature I didn't discover because I made sure it never occurred. However, the bright side to this regulation was consequential to the main purpose—foresters got to know the countryside, private native forests, and forest boundaries. Also, because there were many small sawmills operating only in private native forests, we also met sawmillers who did not have a commercial relationship with the Forestry Commission. When I questioned the apparent ineffectiveness of all this work with my boss Phil, he talked of the need for deterrents. 'You don't want to catch the bastards—that's too much work. Just ensure they think you will, if they do.'

One small bush mill was contiguous with a boundary of Wiangaree State Forest. My FJ Holden utility could barely negotiate the steep bush track which ended at a poor bush house clustered alongside a small dairy (for milking only 12 cows) and a miniature sawmill being operated by two men. Above the noise of the working mill I was greeted with 'Go and see the wife, I'm too fucking busy to waste time with your bullshit.' He was one of Wiangaree's stronger Rugby League forwards that I had played against some weeks previously, but he gave me no recognition. On completing the log inspection I returned to the house to tell 'the wife' that all logs were not entered into the book and I would need to examine the forest boundary to ensure it had not been transgressed. Some hours later, after seeing that the boundary had not been crossed, I was offered a cup of tea. To my surprise, as I drank I was given a lecture that made me uncomfortable. 'My husband works his butt off to pay taxes for people like you to travel the countryside to spy on honest workers...'. My problem was that in relation to what I

was doing that day, I agreed with her—but I felt the need to keep my silence.

Nascent insight explained why the forestry office was located in the Kyogle Court House and next to the police station. I realised I was straddling the dying era of establishing law and order in forests, and the new era of forestry science.

A few weeks later we played Wiangaree once more and I saw Mrs McGuire in the small group of spectators. As I lowered my gaze she waved and I was obliged to approach to her. She apologised for her 'little outburst', but 'dairying and timber were not easy businesses'. I played that game with apprehension, wondering what McGuire would do if he caught me with (or without) the ball. Other than play well, he did nothing. After the game we talked, including how tough dairying and timber were and that life was easier in cities. He sighed; 'My brother at BHP in Newcastle does bugger-all; just punches the bundy and collects his pay. Doesn't even know the name of his boss, or even if he has one.'

The next inspection of the McGuire mill was cancelled because of rain and soon after I was notified of the sawmill's closure. In the office as he read the local paper, Phil observed that the McGuire property was for sale; 'Christ! Who would buy that God-forsaken bit of dirt? They tell me McGuire has shifted to Newcastle. Well at least he is out of the fire into the frying pan. That's better than the reverse'. 'Time for morning tea' he concluded with a pessimistic sigh as he folded the newspaper.

But I concluded it was time to send my note to Jack Henry in Head Office seeking work preparing forest management plans. When I told Phil, he exclaimed this was indeed 'out of the pan into the fire!'—a negative act detrimental to career development. Assertively placing his cup back onto its saucer, he glared. 'What! Walking through the bush *all* day!' Yes, I dreamed in response—one that concealed a contented smile.

Clouds of Forest War

Some years before I arrived in Kyogle, a logging road had been surveyed from Lynch's Creek near the village of Wiangaree into Wiangaree State Forest. Growing on rich volcanic soils, at elevations up to one

thousand metres, and with a rainfall over three thousand millimetres, this forest contained the most luxuriant and spectacular rainforest in New South Wales. The sub-tropical rainforests of the Border Ranges dominate the landscape; they contain species that linked Australia botanically with the tropical north when oceans were lower. Adding intriguing diversity, small remnants of Antarctic rainforest grow at its highest altitudes with species common to Tasmania; as they also do to our north in New Guinea's highest altitudes. However, unlike Tasmania, in their isolation these scientific curiosities had miniscule timber value. Wiangaree State Forest covered the Tweed Range which is the western rim of the Mount Warning caldera, a 30-kilometre diameter remnant of a huge volcano that was active twenty million years ago. Rich in diversity, it is one of Australia's most beautiful landscapes.

As a prelude to other activities required to plan to log a 'virgin' forest, in 1955 I had the task with two other employees of relocating the road's route. The discomfort of mosquitoes, ticks and leeches, exacerbated by the hurt to hands, arms and face of formic acid from stinging-tree leaves, did not diminish our enthusiasm for the new endeavour. Further, to someone living with his wife on a veranda, sharing with ten inhabitants a house that was unsewered, the idea that Australian forests should not be logged to build Australian houses did not come to mind. New attitudes to land use and forest management were to awaken elsewhere to deny these presumptions, and grew to be socially and politically very significant.

Twenty years later when I was working from the Casino Office, I recall a discussion held in the forest with my peers, Dave Hind and John van Pelt. It commenced with our concern that more of the logs should be used for higher value in furniture rather than building construction. We reflected that the housing shortage, although by then overcome, was still determining forestry planning. Indeed, policy is so often driven by the inertia of established practice. However, some excellent examples of higher end-use did exist. I see a coffee table in my study supporting my computer printer. Its top is a solid bark to bark slab of pigeonberry ash *(Cryptocarya obovata)* measuring one metre by half a metre. The juxtaposition of the old technology of craft furniture supporting the modern technology suits my vision of reality. When I left Casino to work in Sydney, it was presented to me by John

McGregor-Skinner, the production manager of Standard Sawmills, on behalf of the Northern Rivers Branch of the Country Sawmillers' Association. It reflected the respect that arises when 'opposites' work co-operatively—a gesture that no doubt would be unacceptable today. Although symbolic, this anachronism is inconsequential to what was about to be unleashed.

My discussion with David and John shifted to the alternative of all of Wiangaree State Forest being a nature reserve rather than a production forest. We were well aware of several proposals for additional national parks elsewhere in the state, many of which would be in forests then managed primarily for log production by the Forestry Commission. We wondered why Wiangaree State Forest was not included in these proposals. Through our involvement, we were well aware of the very significant contribution their logging made to the Tweed and Upper Richmond River economies. Further, we were very satisfied that the Commission's (and therefore our) management of the forest was sound.

In summary, logging was by single tree selection, retaining 50 per cent canopy cover. Where natural regeneration was inadequate, plantings of local rainforest seedlings were made. The logging crews and mill management understood these concepts, and were involved in the planning and control of operations. Further, the full catchment of Grady's Creek was a Flora Reserve, providing a large-scale base for verification of the effectiveness of the forest management strategy and logging operations. Additionally, in 1964 research plots demonstrating different intensities of harvesting, ranging from clear fall to selection cutting and including no logging, were designed and established by the Commission's Chief Silvicultural Research Scientist, George Baur, and Professor Jiro Kikkawa of the University of Queensland. These monitored the effect of twelve harvesting regimes on biodiversity.

In this magnificent forest, through our professional competence we embraced the esteem of managerial power. Was it because this embrace often leads to hubris, that I felt unease that we were indeed sitting on the edge of a very significant 'volcano'?

However, little did I realise that we would be seen by many to be irresponsible vandals, even though we conscientiously carried out the NSW Government's intentions of sound silvicultural management through the Forestry Act, and the specific procedures of Ministerial

approvals of expenditure and management. We were comfortably-paid public servants concerned with the implementation of higher standards of scientific forest management. Prosperity embraced our generation; and when freed of material need, we are free to feel 'the loss of nature'.

Criticism was mainly directed from a section of society similarly enjoying the comforts of financial prosperity and social privilege—including sharing the Premier's pillow. It was ironic, because if our circumstances were different, we three may well have agreed with their views. But the public and political debate that arose had a rancour that precluded us from membership. This must have been additionally stressful for John van Pelt, a returned conscript from Vietnam, who was subjected to similar social stain from left wing elitists because of the role Fortune had dealt him during the Cold War.

In 1972, Head Office informed me that Dr Geoff Mosley, the chief executive of the Australian Conservation Foundation, was visiting the Northern Rivers and I was to meet him and discuss our rainforest management. 'An hour or so in the office will suffice.' Replacing the receiver I thought, 'bugger that, he can get that in Sydney!' When he arrived I invited him to visit rainforest logging in Wiangaree State Forest on the Border Ranges. It was a pleasant and rewarding trip and as a geographer he fully comprehended my explanations and values. In order to demonstrate my understanding of his position, I also spoke of my bush-walking experiences with Allan Strom and the National Parks Association, as well as the Flora Reserves I contributed to establishing at Coffs Harbour. He joined my family in a pleasant dinner at home and as he left undertook to send me copy of his report, especially to 'ensure accuracy and thus its credibility'. Next morning I phoned Head Office and, with a degree of pride, reported the constructive interaction of the previous day. 'Oh! You spent all day—a bit over the top!' was the comment of a rather surprised but otherwise appreciative Head Office.

But, a few days later, Head Office rang again. The voice spoke with words that were civil but with a tone of concern; to cut matters short, the effective message was 'What went on! We'll send you a copy o*f The Age*—and this time please tell us the full story!'

The Age's report was the usual journalistic sensationalism of forest devastation and finger-pointing innuendo directed towards

foresters such as myself. The journalist used his right of free speech to denigrate the sincere work of others. He left room neither for context, nor the evolution of changing social values, nor toleration of differing perspectives in a democratic society. Emotionally I was disoriented and depressed. After all, it was my first real life encounter with the political ethics of activism. I don't know precisely the role Dr Geoff Mosley had in this, but he did phone with a 'you know how hard it is to control the press' excuse. If he attempted to modify *The Age's* fabrication, he didn't send me verification. Some time later, I received his report—a factual statement of what I told and showed him. I recovered my perspective when I adopted the feelings of a Rugby player who is punched in the very first ruck—he immediately knows the intentions of his opponents.

On reflection, two aspects arise. Firstly, in an attempt to inform and guide opinion, I had naively and indirectly cooperated with malevolent environmental journalism. Many years later it was better expressed by Clive James—'we are indebted to the free press shielding us from bad practice, but it steadily comes to exercise a tyranny of its own'.

Secondly, society resolves the vast majority of its conflicts through the constant interaction of people using a vast array of formal and informal social procedures. Important conflicts which they fail to resolve move to the political level for resolution. To be successful, politicians must use procedures different from those applied by the populace. That politics is the craft of lying, is explained by one of history's greatest politicians, Queen Elizabeth I. In an age when political consequences often involved the death of participants, she perceptively wrote:

> I grieve, and dare not show my discontent;
> I love, and yet am forc'd to seem to hate;
> I do, yet dare not say I ever meant;
> I seem stark mute, but inwardly do prate.

Frequently I recall a day when working alone in the forest I rested by a creek for water and a snack. In the warm humid silence of noon, I gazed at a green frog on the opposite bank, but its eyes did not reply to mine. Its gaze was consumed in the hypnotic approach of a red belly black snake that smoothly moved towards its prey. Silently, with an electric thrust it swallowed the frog. Alas, nature is the devil's

playground. It seduces with a beauty and mystique that is neutralised by its cruelty. Thus it arrives at a moral void—and significantly it is the milieu of human evolution.

My involvement in the Border Ranges ceased in 1974 when I transferred to Sydney. Over the next six years environmentalists won their objective and at the end of the first harvesting cycle on Wiangaree in 1979, the Border Ranges National Park was gazetted by Neville Wran's government. Further, in 1986 Wiangaree State Forest was given its rightful rank of World Heritage status as part of the Central Eastern Rainforest Reserve of Australia. Dr Nigel Turvey, in *Terania Creek Rainforest Wars*, wrote that the timber industry consider this to be a recognition of the quality of the work of generations of forest workers—'an award more lasting than a medal.' I agree; but despite its logic, not many would hold this view.

However, few raise the results of the Wiangaree rainforest silvicultural trials established in 1964 with Professor Jiro Kikkawa of the University of Queensland. Posters displayed in 2000 at the Conference of the Australian Forest Development Institute in Cairns showed that data from the plots counter conventional attitudes towards forests. After almost 40 years there was more biodiversity in the selectively logged 50 per cent crown retention area than any other, including the unlogged area. 'It's to do with variation in habitat arising from selection logging maximising the micro-environmental interface, which is where life often thrives', whisper a few ecologists.

This is supported by studies in the Amazon rainforest where Geoffrey Blainey (2001) observed that 'curiously the biological diversity is usually the most impressive, not in the untouched rainforest, but in the areas which were cultivated by the pioneering Amazonian gardeners and now are camouflaged by new growth'.

All parties need to come to terms with the situation—in response to the fear of the loss of nature, a basic rationale regarding biodiversity in the Border Ranges World Heritage Area lacks full scientific support. Indeed, to the embarrassment of most, science often challenges society's fashionable perceptions, including the fashions in science.

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