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Blue Gum Forest Oral History 001

Transcript of Interview with Ron Campagnoni by Andy Macqueen

Interviewee:	Ron Campagnoni & Olive Campagnoni
Interviewer:	Andy Macqueen
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Transcript:	Jan Webster
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Description:	Ron Compagnoni was born in 1911. Employed with the Public Trustee, he started bushwalking outside the club system but later joined the Coast and Mountain Walkers, and became secretary of the Federation of Bushwalking Clubs and a trustee of Blue Gum Forest. Ron's wife Olive (Olivia née Thomas) features in the interview too.

Andy: Ron, perhaps if we could just start with some general questions about bushwalking - can you tell me when you first became involved in bushwalking?

Ron: Well, firstly, the question - the word 'involved' - is difficult in this circumstance, because I have been interested in walking, probably bushwalking for close on 80 years. My parents used to take me for a walk over the river which was from Wardell Road up to the present site of Earlwood and I have walked alone or in company ever since. I would suggest that I became interested in individual walking in about my 15th or 16th year. Now to explain my slight concern about 'involved' will come later because I was always, up to that date, an individual and I didn't become involved in organised walking which is under the rules and concepts of the then Federation of Bushwalking Clubs till about 1946 or 47.

As late as that.

Yes. So all my early experiences of the Wild Dogs, Gangerangs, Blue Gum Forest were as an individual, who led small groups of his friends, or even walked on his own.

Yes, and so that would have been back in the 30's and maybe even the 20's when you were in the Wild Dogs?

No. I didn't venture into the Mountains until approximately 1933 or 34 when I was taken out into the Wild Dogs, by a Dr. Arthur Chaffer, Fraser Chaffer as he was then known, and after an introduction by a mutual friend, he took me over the Blue Dog Range and that really started me, but I had walked quite a lot before that in the Garrawarra area, Burning Palms, I had walked around Turramurra and Ku-ring-gai Chase, around Lane Cove and I have been a walker ever since. I used to walk backwards and forwards to school from Marrickville to Petersham in preference to catching free transport.

So really, it started with an interest that your parents encouraged?

Yes.

So you became involved in organised clubs in the 40's - how did that come about, Ron?

I can't recall the exact circumstances, but my brother Ken and I, Ken being younger by seven years, had some interest or problem in respect of which we felt

concern to write to the Federation of Bushwalking Clubs. Now by some adept political activity on behalf of the Federation members whom we were invited to address, I came out of that meeting as Honorary Secretary of the Federation. When I say political, I don't mean party political, I mean politics as the art of arranging things satisfactorily and these people who were then short of a Secretary following the resignation of Marie Byles said this fellow talks a bit, we'll talk him into it, so then I was into organised bushwalking.

Do you remember what the issue was?

No, I can't recall, I tried to recall what the issue was, but I can't remember.

Sure. Was it about that time that you became involved in the CMW?

It was shortly after that period I became involved in CMW, yes. And as I recorded for the club's history, it was because of my friendship and appreciation of the qualities of some of the CMW members at the time. I knew Daphne Ball, I had known her for many years and I had a great appreciation of her sterling qualities ever since. I knew Bill Holesgrove, Charlie Roberts had been over the Gangerangs with me so Charlie Roberts introduced me to Stan Cottier so there was no question of what club I would seek membership from.

Yes. Well, in those years then you were walking all over the Blue Mountains?

In those years, yes, I was walking all over the Blue Mountains and after Dr Chaffer had taken me over Blue Dog, and I obtained a copy of the very early Blue Mountains and Burragorang tourist map, I was hooked, to use a current expression, and I set out I think to walk over all the Dogs ... and the Cox's River I suppose from Blue Dog, no not Blue Dog, from the Six Foot Track, all the way down to the confluence of Kedumba Creek.

Kedumba? Yes. That's a little bit under water now.

So I believe. There are prospects of further water coming up.

Indeed there is.

But I'm not becoming involved in that.

Yes. And of course there's a pass that takes your name over on the Gangerang.

Well, that pass resulted from reading an article in 'The Bushwalker' magazine about a dash over the Gangerangs by a party led by the late Gordon Smith. I'd looked at the Gangerangs – the Gangerangs are very fantastic looking, come-hithering things from various viewpoints in the Wild Dogs - and by way of preparing for this trip I wrote to Miles Dunphy. I don't know if that was my first contact, no it wasn't my first contact with Dunphy, I'd known him before, but Dunphy prepared for me a beautiful sketch map, it was on cheese paper, not cheese paper, transparent paper they wrap things up in and they had to have a white sheet underneath to read it, but Dunphy gave me the complete story and route over the Gangerang. Now in those days there had been plenty of people over there before me and it was customary to, if approaching from the Kowmung side ...

This is the Ti Willa Plateau?

Yes. ...if approaching from the Kowmung side to climb onto Ti Willa Plateau, now one climbed up the Ti Willa buttress and came to the end rocks which apparently deterred some people and walk round the northern face and climb up through a cleft which was marked on Dunphy's map. Now on this particular day, five of us had spent the night at Bran Jan which is also known as Butler's Hut, but the then owners insisted this is Bran Jan, so we walked down the Cedar Road which practically got us to the foothills of Ti Willa Buttress. So we set off up the steep buttress, Ken my brother and I kept plodding away and plodding away till we got to the steep talus and then our party split up a little because, not badly because we didn't want split parties, but Ken and I made the top of the talus and at the foot of this hitherto unpassed cliff before our friends – our friends were Charles Roberts, Charles Culberg and Stephen McCullagh. They were all very close friends of mine and two of them, Charles Roberts and Stephen McCullagh didn't survive the War. Ken and I sat there for a while resting, waiting for the others to catch up with us and we looked at this rock and we came to more or less the simultaneous conclusion that we could climb the rock so we climbed it ...

Why not?

... and that put us right on the south east point of the Ti Willa Plateau. All right we just went on

in accordance with Miles' directions and following the route the Tiger's Party had done. That was all right and a real good bushwalk. We walked over the top, we went down Moorilla Range to Kanangaroo.

Kanangaroo.

Well since then there's been some chains and spikes put there, but of course they were nothing to do with you.

Well on returning to Sydney we reported that to Miles. 'Oh', said Miles, then after a while he said 'Keep this under your hat for the time being but I think I'll call that Compagnoni's Pass'. He explained that there are no surnames of walkers on the Gangerang Massif except for the two people who had found other passes to climb onto there, and they were Gordon Smith and Max Gentle so he had those 3 names, the only names to applied there and subsequently Miles talked, recorded and was heard unto and Compagnoni Pass went onto the Map. It was originally a Miles' idea Compagnoni's Pass and it's now officially Compagnoni Pass, and that's the story, which I tell with some happiness of course.

Of course, yes. It was only last year that I went down that way for the first time myself.

Yes, as you recorded there were no spikes then and Ken and I didn't have anything to do with the spikes, we didn't altogether approve of them.

No. All right, so, moving over to the other side of the Mountains, we have Blue Gum Forest and I don't suppose Blue Gum means quite the same sort of thing to you as say as the Wild Dogs or the Gangerang, it's a different sort of place isn't it?

It is precisely that because I have always looked forward to walking in the hills where the winds blew and you saw things, you had the prospect, I thought that was mountain walking, or hill walking as the case may be, whereas to get to Blue Gum you climb down a delightful pass, you walk along a valley for a couple of hours and you're in Blue Gum, well that was not as you suggest the kind of walking I like very much. To go through them in transit, yes, a wonderful place, but no, it wasn't the hills that I like walking in.

And yet it's a place that has a lot of attraction for many, many people isn't it?

It is, but as I pointed out to the Blue Mountains National Park Advisory Committee, it was not a wilderness. It was practically a picnic ground and needed to be treated as such. If I've given you a copy of my original letter which was 1982 I think, to the Advisory Committee I find that there were many reservations which included providing tracks and preserving the steep banks of the river and regarding the place as a kind of a day walker's playground.

A place that has to be managed.

A place that has to be managed, yes, no longer a wilderness.

Can you remember your first trip to Blue Gum, Ron?

I will never forget that. I recorded that briefly in the letter I mentioned to you earlier to Col Halpin but I was taken down there by a very close friend, Greg Spencer. Now Greg was a wonderful personality who has been gone for many years. Greg would talk to me over coffee in Repin's little shop in upper King Street and we would talk bushwalking and we would talk music and we would talk poetry, particularly the poetry of Rupert Brooke and Greg was a bushwalker too, Greg who first took me to Kanangra and he took me to Blue Gum Forest. Now that was one of the highlights of my bushwalking or nature loving careers. Greg worked on Saturday mornings, he sold books in the old Angus and Robertson's and I have a small copy of Rupert Brooke's poems given to me by Greg and annotated very briefly with, I think Clear Hill, Blue Gum.

We walked happily down the pass from Govett's Leap and were making the four crossings of the creek which then existed on the way to Blue Gum, and the sun shone gold on the cliffs, I suppose they were the cliffs east of Mount Banks and the cliffs leading out towards Lockley Pylon and Mt. Hay. The sun shone glorious gold on those cliffs and late afternoons with low angle sun and as I said, Greg and I were both interested in music and those cliffs kind of sang to us with the brass notes that Sibelius put into his Finlandia. There was no relation of course between Finlandia and the Blue Gum Forest and the Blue Mountains cliffs but that's how they affected us.

We wandered into Blue Gum in the dark and my first sight of Blue Gum Forest was when the campfire lit up the great trunks of the trees, and as I said to a friend, I couldn't help a cliché then. I said 'This is like a cathedral'. With a kind of introduction like that to Blue Gum you don't forget it, so the Blue Gum has

had an abiding interest for me, but I am also a cynic and when Olive and I came to live in the Blue Mountains in Blackheath in 1972 and we saw the motley hordes going backwards and forwards on Govett's Leap Road, we said, I'm afraid Blue Gum's had it for us, we won't go down again.

Olive has stuck to her word but I got taken down there again by walkers from the Upper Blue Mountains Conservation Society and I became interested and I took 3 friends, two of whom have become my closest walking friends in the last 10 or 15 years, Val Boyan and Janet Aitken with another close friend Will Glynn, down to the forest.

Now Will was a very interesting fellow, he wanted to know 'when did this forest come into public ownership?'. So I started to look into that and I realised that we were almost 50 years to the week from Blue Gum's dedication. So I shot up to National Parks Office and talked to Jim Govern and I was invited to travel down by helicopter to the 50th anniversary party.

So the party was already organised.

The party was already organised, yes. Anyhow I arrived down there in the helicopter, and through the Plexiglass standing at the side of the landing strip was Paddy Pallin. I've been a friend of Paddy's since very early in the 1930's and I went over and - I'll be frank - I gave Paddy a great big hug.

Why not.

And I think I possibly embarrassed him. But anyhow there was Paddy. Now we had our little gathering down there which the girls had very wonderfully arranged and two of the Trustees, and possibly Paddy were invited to speak. Maurie Berry, then in his 80's spoke, his wife Doreen was with him and I spoke.

Well, I had become shocked at the condition of the Forest, I had become a little indignant that the celebration was not being held in the Forest as I knew it, but in Horderns, and that there were signs of 'over-loving' you might say, in the Forest. So I wrote a long letter to the Advisory Committee which they proceeded to ignore or lose and they proceeded to ignore my several reminders and I got nowhere.

But that particular visit, coming down onto the Forest and seeing the Grose River 3 times as wide as I seem to remember it, had really stirred me. I pursued a

campaign for about 6 or 7 years trying to get something done there. But I really think I was treated as a naughty little boy who, if we ignore him may go away. As things happen I had to go away.

All right. Can we return to that first trip.

Yes.

The next morning, did you walk back out the same way?

Yes, we walked back out the same way next morning, Sunday morning, because we only had the weekend down there.

So you had the opportunity of walking around in the daylight the next morning taking it all in.

Yes.

And of course you would have camped in the actual Blue Gum.

We camped in the actual Blue Gum, yes.

Yes, the reserve. And that was in the early 30's I think?

It must have been in mid-winter, perhaps late winter, 1935.

So that was probably three years after the reserve was created.

That was three years after the reserve was created yes, in 1932. But I was not concerned with organised bushwalking and I had no appreciation of the work which others had put into the preservation and purchase - dedication - of that wonderful Forest.

Yes. So in later years of course, you became involved in the Trust.

In later years I became involved in the Trust, and no doubt I was selected by the Trustees or whoever did the selection because of my prominent position in the Federation then and because I was known to have visited the Forest quite a bit and talked a bit, I have always been a bit of a talker. So then, of course I saw that there was good reason for a federation of bushwalking clubs, that the bushwalking movement was a sufficient size and it had to have certain recorded ethics and ability to do things, so I became quite keenly involved in it.

And I think you were appointed to the Trust in 1947, is that right?

It must have been about 1947, yes.

And you remained with the Trust till it was wound up?

Yes. But as I recorded in a letter to Gibson, no not Gibson, Halpin, I was not on the Trust in its active period when it held working bees and in any representation which I made after appointment -well after appointment, after I had come to Blackheath - to the National Parks and Wildlife Service which claimed that it had no money and no staff to look after Blue Gum Forest, would then bring up the question of working bees by bushwalkers, but the National Parks Service didn't want to look at it that way. They wanted to run the show themselves, presumably, and the poor old Forest was left to have token attention on a restricted financial basis. One of the real peculiarities about the situation is that a lot of the damage to Blue Gum, and I'm speaking generally of the consolidated Blue Gum now, is from feral stock and I advocated quite openly that the stock should be destroyed because there wasn't a great amount of stock there, there were one or two stallions and mares and the stallions' stamping ground or standing ground or service area was quite well marked by great hordes of manure. There were also cattle of some kind down there who would break down the banks and eat the foliage and I thought it very peculiar and recorded it that humans, bushwalkers, were not allowed to camp in Blue Gum Forest but feral stock was.

Now I even went so far as to suggest we should have tree guards around the young blue gums to give the Forest a chance of regeneration. Generally speaking the idea of destroying the stock was abhorrent to me and to the National Parks people. But I've since noticed two very interesting things - firstly their spokesman, a fellow who comes on ABC from time to time, he's their general spokesman on matters natural, birds and bees and flowers.

Dengate.

Yes. Dengate - whom I have never met - was involved and shown on the Sydney Morning Herald in photos, in the destruction of feral goats in the Ku-ring-gai Chase and also after disastrous fires in the National Park. The National Parks and Wildlife Service or one of its representatives, advocated destruction of deer. Why can they do those things? [tape ran out]

Just to summarise the last point, you're saying if they can get rid of deer in the Royal National, they should be able to get rid of stock in Blue Gum.

Indeed. Which would make a great difference. Now the stock in Blue Gum both eat little plants and they spread seeds of various non-native plants, but why they won't do that I do not know.

Well, they are making an effort now, they're shooting stock but I don't know if they've got rid of them all yet.

I'm glad to hear it, much as I regret destruction of any natural life.

Yes, Yes. Ron, you mentioned to me once that you went down there with Olive.

Ah yes. Olive has been to the Forest many many times. She was with quite a party, she went down when my brother Ken and I carried our young children down. I think Anne and Peter must have been nearly three and two. Olive has been down to the Forest a lot. In fact Olive did one of her test walks into the CMW to the Forest.

And is it true that you once both spent Christmas there?

Oh yes. It is true and I made, sorry on Boxing Day, and I made a Christmas Pudding there, yes.

You made the Christmas pudding in Blue Gum?

I made a Christmas pudding in Blue Gum, and as we're on reminiscences, I had practised making the Christmas pudding at North Era. Having been successful there and nobody ever died from eating it, I then made it in the Blue Gum Forest...

Wonderful. And that was around 1936, was it?

That was the Christmas thirty five.

Thirty five. Right. And you would have been in your early 20's, then, wouldn't you.

Twenty-three.

Tell me, did you normally always walk in from Govett's Leap or did you use some of the other mountain passes.

No. Fairly early it became evident that you could walk in or out via Shortridge Pass which is a climb up to Lockley Pylon and that rather fascinated me because,

as we have discussed earlier that was a delightful vista along a ridge where the views are so superb and there was that romantic spot at the end of it. Three Knob Hill, now known as the Pinnacles.

Ah, yes that was interesting because a couple of friends of mine had failed to find the way down there and it interested me too but on this very early trip in the Christmas holiday period of 1935, a friend and I, Jack Chritchley and I had gone for a ramble and we ended walking up Shortridge Pass and we were both surprised to know the well-constructed pass right up to the top of the cliffs. So that was one of the ways I went down there. I don't know when I first went down Perry's Lookdown, but that was hairy in those days.

Was it?

Oh yes.

Olive Compagnoni: Ron - I think was when you went with Bill Holesgrove and wasn't it because someone carried Bill's son up Perry's and we had to get a taxi out to Perry's.

Ron: Yes. We got a taxi out to Perry's with Harry Whaite, his Olive and one of their children, their oldest child Jenny and we came down Perry's and next day I walked from Blue Gum with an empty rucksack and we picked up Bill and Agnes Holesgrove and their son, Rod. And against his objections, I picked up Rod and sat him on a sleeping bag in my rucksack and carried him down.Bill and Agnes Holesgrove - she was Agnes Millar - were a couple of very active people in the CMW and the Federation and were great old friends of ours who have since gone on, but I remember I took a picture of Rod Holesgrove and Jenny Whaite (about this tall) walking hand in hand under the blue gums. I didn't see Rod for another 40 years - I reminded him about it.

And did you ever walk on down the Grose?

No. As I said before, I was never a river walker. You couldn't see anything much while walking down the Grose. I walked up and down the Cox's because that was a necessary route to and from the Wild Dogs. You left Katoomba on the Friday night and made Corral Swamp or Glenraphael, then you did a Wild Dog, then you walked up or down the Cox's, either up and down through Carlon's (and I met Norbert Carlon very early through Dr. Chaffer) and home to Katoomba or Blackheath, and that filled in your day.

It’s a funny thing when you talk about the walk home through Katoomba or Blackheath because you were saying how long had I been a bushwalker. Well both my dad and Olive’s dad used to bring their children walking through the hills in Katoomba. Now Nellie’s Glen and Devil’s Hole were both known to Olive and me when we were probably pre-teens. But I’d never met that kid Olive up in the mountains. I met her elsewhere. But she and I each walking in the mountains from our very earliest days.

There must be something about that because I had the same experience.

Did you?

Well, yes, my parents were very keen on going on little hikes in the Mountains.

Yes.

I guess that was what kindled it in me as well.

I’ll take you up on a very interesting point. The term ‘hikes’ was a dirty word because there were organised in those days (with the help of my old friend, Horace Salmon), mystery hikes and they consisted of loading literally a railway train full of interested people who were led on long road walks, either to Bobbin Head or to the National Park or to some similar place and of course they were - to the bona fide walker, who we considered ourselves to be - they were largely rag, tag and bobtail so we would never call ourselves hikers. We were bushwalkers and the term hike of course, literally covers what we did.

I think it’s still a slightly derogatory term to most ardent bushwalkers.

Yes. But, however get on with the important business.

Yes, yes. Getting back to your early trips to Blue Gum, you mentioned you had a pack, what sort of gear would you have taken down there, what would the pack have been like, to start with?

I’ve always been interested in the right gear for the right place. Now I had a Paddy made steel framed rucksack which cost me £3.

Would that have been one of the A-frame type or was that before that?

No, that was a steel frame A frame type and I still have the frame hanging up in my workshop and I wore it on my last trip. I had a Paddy-made tent, that cost me

about £3, and a Paddy-made sleeping bag which cost me £2.10.0. So there I was, I was very formal in respect of my gear.

Yes.

Olive Compagnoni: What were the other things in the pack, Ron? What else did you carry in the pack?

Ron: What I carried in the pack was a groundsheet, a Paddy-made groundsheet, I carried a delightful jacket, lumber jacket which my mother had made me and I carried a cable-knit sweater which Olive had knitted for me. I was bushwalking before I formally met Olive.

Olive: Ron, these weren't things you carried on your long trips - they were too bulky.

Ron: No, no. I carried those things Olive, and I carried a first aid kit, a pair of sandshoes to spare, billies, waterbags and billy hooks and a pair of milliner's pliers. They were to lift the billies off the fire. We made our fires with two fork sticks and a cross wire. We rarely cooked on rock made fires because we had always been taught in the Paddy Pallin bible, what Fraser Chaffer taught me, river rocks could explode and they jolly well can explode if you left them in the fire.

My word.

And we were formally informal - we preserved, we loved our independence, that's why my friends and I had never joined the clubs.

Yes. So you'd be camped down there in the forest ... how do you think the forest, I mean you've mentioned the river and the erosion before, the forest itself might have been a little different in those days compared with today?

Well, I'm delighted to recall and delighted you should ask me this because the forest was a wonderful thing. My friend Charles Culberg, whom I've mentioned earlier, once complained that he had to walk 5 yards from his tent to find firewood. But, on another occasion when we were camped down there with our children, there was a slow burning fire came through the forest and we had to be very careful of that.

Now on the bright side, when I returned to the forest in the late 70's or early 80's, I was delighted to find a wonderful stand of gums (Eucalyptus deanei aren't they) stretch back from Acacia Flat right through into the Hordern block and over onto the original Blue Gum forest. But the banks had widened, but the forest I found really in better condition as a tree growing area than it had been in the early days when I first knew it.

Do you think there's more understorey now?

Yes. But not a good understorey. The understorey of wattles which is probably not too bad, of blackberries and of bracken. The first thing you did after pitching your tent on the original Blue Gum was to literally fill it with bracken and it made a wonderful bed, and the last thing you did, before putting the fire out, was to burn the bracken.

Yes. So the impression I have of the forest is essentially the trees with grass and bracken.

The trees with grass and bracken. Olive, could you pick up that picture we have on the sideboard which I think will show what the understorey was in those days.

My first trip there was in the mid 60's and that's the way I remember it even in the mid 60's when you were still allowed to camp in the forest.

That photo was probably taken in the Hordern block.

It looks like near the start of the Perry's Track on the Hordern block. Who are those people?

Olive Compagnoni: Me, in the middle, daughter Anne and son Peter.

So that's Peter on the left.

Olive: Yes, Anne must have been about 11. Peter was about 9.

You mentioned to me another trip down there once involving some pouring rain and some leeches. Are you prepared to relay that tale again?

Ron: Yes. The tale doesn't reflect to my credit at all because it was pouring rain and I was down there with Greg Spencer and among other things Greg was a delightful bohemian and we were having a stew for lunch and the rain was pouring down, so we put the stew on the fire, we took off our wet, dripping

clothes and we walked around the forest, otherwise empty forest, happily in boots and hats. We came back, we had our stew and we dressed, other than boots and socks and we walked from the forest, back along the creek and up to the pass from Junction Rock to Govetts Leap happily counting the leaches that came up to our legs and I think Greg won by about 33 to 31.

Right we'll stop now if you like. Let's have a cuppa.

.....

We're racing again. Ron, I wanted to ask you a little about Roy Bennett, who I believe was involved with the Trust all the way through its existence and even before that he was involved in the campaign.

Roy was President of the Wildlife Preservation Society. I know little about the Society other than its name.

And was he also a bushwalker?

I had never known Roy as a bushwalker. I only knew him as a fellow Trustee but he was a man of considerable drive and persuasive powers. He was a returned soldier, an officer of the Australian Army who was invalided home and subsequently became a TPI. I know him to have been Secretary, I think, of the Millions Club and possibly from there on he had a lot of contacts, but he was a man who would make contacts when necessary for Blue Gum. I remember one peculiar little contact he made which is not of great importance: there was a meeting of the Trustees to be held in the forest and Roy contacted the then Mayor of the Blue Mountains and arranged for the road to be graded up to Perry's Lookdown so the road was graded and we had a more comfortable journey, but that was Roy, he would arrange things, he was a great talker.

This was the First World War he was in?

Yes.

So he was a fairly senior person?

Him, oh yes indeed. For the years in which I knew he, he lived in retirement at Cattai and he grew fruit and he worked very well in cut sandstone from his own property and grew, cultivated or whatever one does with bees. He was very generous with his produce too, very nice fellow Roy.

So the Wildlife Preservation Society therefore had some involvement .

Ah they had some involvement and the Boy Scouts Association had considerable involvement too, yes.

I guess over the years many Scouts have camped there.

Oh yes indeed, many Scouts have camped there, yes

Myself included.

Oh yes.

I believe, back during the campaign where there was some involvement even then, they published a book on hiking. What was the name of the chap in the Trust who represented the Scouts?

Oh his name escapes me now. I don't know why, I knew it half an hour ago but...

Don Gregory?

Don Gregory was the fellow, yes.

But he was involved at the time you were

He was a member of the Trust for the whole of the period in which I was a member, yes.

Right, yes. How often did the Trust meet, was it an annual affair?

Every so often, let me put it this way, every time it appeared that something should be done, or that a meeting should be held.

Yes, and during the 50's there were some working bees held.

During the 50's there were working bees of which I have little knowledge because, no not during the 50's, sorry, during the 40's because there were never working bees during my membership of the Trust, but there were apparently, very active working bees when efforts were made to divert the confluence of Govetts Leap Creek and Grose River.

And were those working bees under the guidance and approval of the Trust?

Yes they were.

Tell me, the Hordern block, did Horderns ever actually occupy it or develop it in any way?

I have no knowledge at all but I can say that I have no recollection of Hordern ever having other than a benevolent interest towards bushwalkers and towards the Blue Gum Forest but I think that his attitude was 'it's mine, I'll preserve it'. So that was that. Yes.

Just to wind up Ron, I'd like to sound you out on your feelings about bushwalking. You made a comment to me once before that 'bushwalking was a terminal disease' was your expression, but I think it does hook a lot of us, doesn't it?

Indeed it does, yes.

Can you define what it is about bushwalking that hooked you?

Oh, I don't know exactly, if I could define it in a very proper fashion - it's just to be there within nature, see the plants growing, the trees growing, and the birds and bees and generally speaking, it has attracted the kind of person to whom I have enjoyed being attracted.

So there's a companionship.

A companionship, yes. Whether the companionship, yes the companionship comes from people who like the same things, I suppose. But so many of my early bushwalking companions (and I particularly instance Greg Spencer, Stephen McCullagh), loved and talked about the things that I loved and talked about.

Would you say there was a spiritual element about that?

Undoubtedly. I am not prepared to get into any discussion of the spirit from a religious point of view, but generally speaking, it is spiritual, that is how it affects you. It lives with you. I mean, you love the bush, it is something sacred.

Yes. Whether it be standing on a hill in the Wild Dogs or looking at the Cathedral of the Gum Trees by the firelight.

Well, you can go back to Keats, and to Homer and Columbus. Yes, it's like that. I mean it's a wonderful thing to labour with a great heavy rucksack, and you get to the top of a peak, take the rucksack off and just sit looking at something. Some of the loveliest moments of bushwalking have been rash because I've

bushwalked on my own. I have not done much of that any of that - in the Blue Mountains since I came back, but I have done some of it in the Snowy Mountains, but then I've felt a moral obligation to my fellow man to leave details of where I am going, not to have strayed from those details. But it is a wonderful thing to sit alone. I've sat alone on Mount Murray, in the Capital Territory, on Townsend, on Carruthers, on Ramshead. And it's a wonderful thing.

Now I've tried to talk to myself and have been asked by my doctor, my general practitioner, Alan Mathus, what I remember of bushwalking and it's sitting on one of these peaks to which I was misdirected by an enthusiast. It always comes back to me. It's a little green hill behind the Chalet near Charlottes Pass, and I call it Windy Hill. I was trying to follow a track from the Chalet back to Perisher over the hills - this is summer walking of course.

I went up to a little dam, I climbed a winding hill through the snow gums, with scarlet-crested robins, and I got onto a bare hill with only the relics of a former ski lift. And that hill, Windy Hill has lived with me. It could have been because I was there on my own, it could have been because a flight of swifts came across without landing - that has a spiritual recollection - influence on - me.

There have been some hills like that. There is another hill we climbed in the Capital Territory, we called it Mt X because it didn't have a name . There are the Antarctic Beeches up on one of the lesser hills outlying from Airey's Peak. Where the Antarctic Beeches grow, that's a lovely, lovely spot.

But, no it's being in the hills, somewhere. There is a little hill down at a campsite, down from Evans Lookout which the CMW used to love, it was called Syncarpia, for obvious reasons, and that was a lovely peaceful spot. I can remember camping there with a party including my late dear friend, Daphne Ball. I remember being on Pigeon House.

These recollections have been wonderful things in my last 6 years of decrepitude, one would say, but possibly the happiest place of all my mountain walking - I've already defined that I suppose, but this is another one of them - is, it has a name something like the place where the dingoes play.

There's a place called the Playground of the Dingoes.

Playground of the Dingoes on Merrimerrigal. Now, I was taken up there by a party led by Colin Gliddon. And he led us along, down the slope on the south of

the rockfall and the rockclimb at the bottom of the south end of Mt. Warrigal, along the side of Merrimerrigal and I remember showing the party then this little faint track up onto Merrigal. We went up there, we went past the flat area where the dingoes were, or where Miles thought the dingos were, and we just commenced to go down the little gully. We were approaching Mount. Dingo. At that occasion I just felt a period of extreme joy and happiness and I think quite apart from anyone else in the party, I just started to hum to myself the theme of the quartet from the First Act of Fidelio. [tape interruption]

You were saying that you started to hum the music from Fidelio.

I started to hum the music from the quartet from the First Act of Fidelio. It has been some slight source of happiness to me to know that the last camp I have been able to make in my bushwalking career was adjacent to this spot.

Thanks, Andy.

Thanks very much Ron.

END

POSTSCRIPT — by Andy: After the interview Ron dug out a favourite quotation which he wanted to share with me. It is taken from a letter written by Beethoven to Malfatti:

No-one, can love the country as much as I do.

For surely words, trees and rocks produce the echo which man desires to hear.

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