

Introduction to the Blue Gum Forest Oral History Project

Interviewer: Andy Macqueen
Date: 1994
Collection: Blue Gum Forest Oral History Project
Description: A compilation of outlines of 7 interviews conducted by Andy Macqueen of 'The Friends of Blue Gum Forest'.

Introduction

The community group Friends of Blue Gum Forest was formed in 1992 to provide volunteer support to the National Parks and Wildlife in its management of Blue Gum Forest in the Grose Valley, Blue Mountains. The forest became famous in 1931-32 when action by bushwalkers and others saved it from possible destruction, and has been a popular destination for walkers ever since.

The Friends recognised that some priority should be given to conducting an oral history project, focusing on the experiences of bushwalkers in the early days of Blue Gum Forest and—most particularly—the recollections of any surviving bushwalkers involved in the saving of the forest.

I volunteered to seek out likely candidates for interview and undertake the interviews. Many interviews were eventually held, of which seven were taped. The task became so absorbing that I went on to produce my book *Back from the Brink—Blue Gum Forest and the Grose Wilderness*. Some of the material in the interviews has been quoted or relied on in the book.

This document presents the transcripts of the seven taped interviews. All the interviewees were keen walkers in their time and all but one was a member of a bushwalking club. Hence the interviews tend to range over bushwalking topics beyond Blue Gum Forest. Lewis Hodgkinson, lifelong Blackheath resident, was not a club walker but tells of many of his local rambles and related Blackheath history. Unfortunately only one living person could be found who was directly involved with the 1931-32 campaign—Joe Turner. (Joe has died since the interview, as have John Wood and Tom Herbert.)

The reliability of memory is always a question when it comes to oral history. Indeed, the intellectual condition of one interviewee in this project (Tom Herbert) was so deteriorated that one might well question the value of the interview. Nevertheless, in every case a great love for Blue Gum Forest or traditional bushwalking in general shone through: it is that essential flavour that made it all worthwhile. For me, it was a great privilege to help bring their fond memories to life.

Special thanks go to my fellow Friends of Blue Gum who voluntarily assisted in the tedious process of transcribing the recordings:

- Philippa Coleman
- Aine Gliddon
- Erica Gray
- Kerry Kirk
- Gordon Limburg
- Jan Webster

Thanks are also due to Cath Ireland, untiring National Park ranger and a key person behind the Friends of Blue Gum Forest. Cath provided much encouragement throughout the project. The recordings and transcriptions of these interviews are subject to copyright. Attention is drawn to the copies of the interviewees' releases inserted at the end of each interview. I certify that each interviewee's requests in relation to the correction of transcripts have been complied with and that all corrections arising have been inserted in the transcripts (usually by a note in square brackets). As the interviewer I also have a copyright interest. However, I have no objection to any person publishing part or all of one or more interviews in either written or audio form providing –

- the provisions of the interviewees' releases are complied with
- I am acknowledged as the interviewer in each and every publication

Andy Macqueen

Springwood

April 2000

Contents

Ron Compagnoni Member of the Coast and Mountain Walkers and trustee of Blue Gum Forest

Tom Herbert Member of the Sydney Bush Walkers

John and Lawrie Wood Members of the Sydney Bush Walkers

Joe Turner Member of the Sydney Bush Walkers and of the Blue Gum Forest Committee and Trust

Lew Hodgkinson Blackheath identity

Ray Bean Member of the Sydney Bush Walkers

Jack Watson Member of the Rover Ramblers

Interview with Ronald Thomas Compagnoni

Interviewer: Andy Macqueen

Date: 4 July 1994

Place: Ron's home in Blackheath

Tapes: RC1 (sides A&B) & RC2 (side A)

Transcriber: Jan Webster (subsequently checked by A. Macqueen & R. Compagnoni)

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 nee Thomas) features in the interview too.

OUTLINE OF INTERVIEW

- How became involved in bushwalking
- Walked with friends (or solo) for years
- First bushwalked in Blue Mountains around 1934
- Became involved in Federation of Bushwalking Clubs and Coast and Mountain Walkers around
- 1946; became Secretary of Federation
- Favourite area in Mountains was Wild Dogs and Gangerang
- Naming of Compagnoni Pass
- Blue Gum Forest not a wilderness, but a playground of walkers, needing management
- First trip to Blue Gum Forest, with Greg Spencer in winter of 1935. Music of Sibelius. One of the highlights of bushwalking career. Remembers firelight lighting the trunks, like a "cathedral".
- In and out via Govetts.
- When came to live in mountains in 1972, was put off Blue Gum by the "motley hordes".
- Went in to 50th anniversary function by forest. Disheartened by what he saw at the forest then, and fact that ceremony was held on "Horderns", not "Blue Gum".

- Appointed to Blue Gum Reserve Trust around 1947, as a result of prominent position in
- Federation. Stayed on trust till wound up. However, his period on the trust post-dated the most active era of the trust, when working bees were held.
- Held gripes with the National Parks people, re lack of working bees, feral stock, erosion etc
- Went to Blue Gum with wife Olive on several occasions, taking their young children on later occasions. First such visit was Boxing Day 1935, when Ron made a Christmas pudding there.
- Shortridge Pass (Lockleys); Perry's Lookdown route (described as "hairy" in those days)
- Never walked the Grose, as not fond of river walking
- The term "hike" was a dirty word
- Gear taken on early trips. Paddy pack, tent, sleeping bag etc
- Used bracken for a bed
- Trip with Greg Spencer - walked around forest in rain in nude except for boots and hats. Later walked out to Govetts, counting leaches.
- Roy Bennet and Don Gregory key members of Trust
- Hordern only had benevolent interest in his land
- What bushwalking meant to Ron personally - nature, companionship, spiritual. Keats, Homer.
- Beauty of solo walking.
- Special memories of a hill in the snowy; and other spots.
- Experience of joy at Playground of Dingoes, with Col Gliddon etc, gives current source of happiness.

Interview with Tom Herbert, MBE

Interviewer: Andy Macqueen

Date: 7 July 1994

Place: A nursing home in Chatswood.

Tapes: TH1 (sides A&B) & TH2 (side A)

Transcriber: Gordon Limburg

Editor: Andy Macqueen

Tom Herbert was born in 1903. He died in 1994, a few weeks after this interview was conducted. He had prominent roles in the Sydney Bush Walkers and the Federation of Bushwalking clubs.

OUTLINE OF INTERVIEW

- Recollections of SBW walk to Red Hands Cave with girls from the Newman Society (connected with Sancta Sophia College, Sydney Uni). [This walk is mentioned in “The Sydney Bush Walkers - first 60 years.”]
- Career: accountancy; industrial relations; spokesman for bushwalking movement; awarded MBE for services to meat industry and community involvement.
- Poem by Clare Kinsela regarding Her-bert and Der-bert in the Sydney Bush Walkers: mighty men of action
- Along with Wally Roots and Harold Chardon (and others), was a member of Bondi Surf Life Saving Club. Long history as a swimmer but also liked walking.
- After the above joined Sydney Bush Walkers they called themselves the three “Orang Utans”, owing to their ape-like physique. The “Tigers” came about in “opposition” to the Orang Utans.
- Formed River Canoe Club. Paddled canoe from Broken Bay to Sydney.
- Involved in Federation of Bushwalking Clubs.
- First visit to Blue Gum, circa 1930: Had heard of stand of blue gums. Discovered and went down the Orang Utan Pass. Went in from Govetts. [Jim] Cleary may have been at the forest too

- [or perhaps on another occasion]. Impressed with the forest. Thinks they might then have named it the Blue Gum Forest.
- Normal route was from Govetts. Took school boy sons to Blue Gum.
- Working bee for erosion control. Stone-work diversion. A rival group from SBW undid their work!
- Rival group included Rigby.
- The campaign: horrified that owner would remove the trees to grow walnuts.
- Walked the Grose - or parts of - on various occasions. One of the toughest walks.
- Tom's nickname Mandelberg, and its derivation: he walked with gear hanging from his pack.
- Improvised their walking gear at first. Slept by the camp fire to keep warm.
- Impact of Paddy Pallin on gear.
- Favourite walking areas - south coast. Not keen on Wild Dog Mountains etc.
- Meaning of bushwalking - Comradeship, campfires, stories. Still has a love for the bush.
- Wife wasn't a keen bushwalker, but a pianist and social walker.
- Blue Gum is a citadel. Hopefully preserved in its beauty forever.

THE BLUE GUM FOREST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with John and Laurie Wood

Interviewer: Andy Macqueen

Date: 10 August 1994

Place: Kurrajong Heights

Tape: JW1 (sides A&B)

Transcriber: Philippa Coleman

John Wood was born in 1916 and died in 1998. He joined the Sydney Bush Walkers. His wife Laurie (nee Greenacre), another Sydney Bush Walker, is the sister of Enid Rigby.

OUTLINE OF INTERVIEW

- John started bushwalking aged 17, after a canoe trip, around 1934
- First walked Royal National. Joined SBW soon afterwards; most genuine people ever met
- Walked in Blue Mountains
- John met Laurie 1940
- Laurie went “hiking” Royal National etc in 30s, although main interest was riding
- Joined SBW 1939 because didn’t have a horse.
- John and Laurie met on a trip to Blue gum 1940.
- How Enid her sister came to meet Alan Rigby (husband).
- John and Laurie went walking together after marriage.
- Bushwalkers on the trains
- Walked Narrow Neck, Solitary, Kanangra, Megalong
- Didn’t go on many official SBW walks, rather walks with friends
- John first went to Blue Gum around 1937, some of his photos date from around then.
- Went to Blue Gum quite a lot then; had a great feeling for it. Mentions routes taken.
- Walked the Grose to Richmond prior to meeting Laurie
- Early walking companions. The company was everything in bushwalking

- Description of gear, tents, ferns for bedding etc
- Laurie's first visit - came from Mt Victoria on a test walk with Roley Cotter - a big party.
- Description of campfires etc
- Working bee to demolish hut
- Controversy over river-course clearing - John didn't agree with burning bark
- Pierces pass route not generally known about then, nor Byles Pass
- Stopped walking after 1947 when started building house.
- Laurie went to Blue Gum with daughters via Perry's in 1960s.
- John and Laurie flew in by helicopter to 60th anniversary
- Forest looked different with all the undergrowth
- Early Warrumbungles visits
- Kanangra to Blackheath - John walked from Cloudmaker with sprained /broken ankle.
- All walking areas have their own attraction. Blue Gum not wilderness - but a lush place; beautiful on moonlit night.
- Importance of companions
- Alan Rigby - "besotted" with bushwalking and conservation
- Joe Turner - a good speaker in the club, same intellectual class as Myles etc
- With Dorothy Laurie, "if you looked at a sapling you were doing the wrong thing".
- John and Laurie not involved in the conservation issues
- Don't know anyone like the bushwalkers - still see some of them
- Kangaroo Valley
- In praise of Parks workers

THE BLUE GUM FOREST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Joe Turner

Interviewer: Andy Macqueen

Date: 24 August 1994

Place: Narla Retirement Village, Belmont

Tapes: JT1 (sides A&B) & JT2 (side A)

Transcriber: Kerry Kirk

Joe Turner was born in 1901 and died in 1999. Becoming a law clerk, he was very active in the Sydney Bush Walkers and the Blue Gum Forest Trust until moving up-country to Armidale. Joe's (second) wife Huldah features in the interview too. At the time of the interview Joe was the only surviving member of the Blue Gum Forest Committee of 1931-32.

OUTLINE OF INTERVIEW

- First went bushwalking early 20s, sometimes solo
- Foundation member SBW (1927), now Hon Life Member
- How the SBW was formed
- How the Blue Gum issue first arose at SBW
- Names of the people on Rigby's visit [some names probably wrong]
- Hungerford "knew a thing or two"
- Joe moved the successful motion for a committee to save forest
- The Blue Gum Forest Committee
- Money borrowed from Cleary
- Lease bought and gazetted
- In recognition of enthusiasm for the walker's cause, Government reserved land beside the rivers
- Joe not present at the second meeting in the forest [error of fact]
- Fund-raising functions
- The occasion of the repayment to Cleary
- Comments on Roy Bennett, Maurie Berry, Dorothy Lawry
- Women and walking
- Praise of Myles Dunphy.

- Joe's resignation in 1941 after 10 important years in his life
- Working bees - co-operation of Blackheath council
- Carrying cross-cut saws, dynamite etc down Perry's; Exploding a log obstructing the river
- Normally approached Forest via from Govetts; some creek crossings involved
- Very little scrub or underbrush in forest; Cattle were sometimes there
- Normally camped in Blue Gum but sometimes Horderns
- Has an idea that Hordern did some clearing
- Odd that Hungerford would cut down the Blue Gums to plant walnuts
- [Break for lunch]
- Hungerford took advantage of the enthusiastic conservationists
- The Trust were very dedicated
- The Forest a delightful place etc
- Campfires in the forest; talking and singing around campfires
- People he walked with Roots, Debert, etc
- Re Dot Butler - the swimming anecdote
- Re Mouldy Harrison - polio victim
- 54 Interview with Joe Turner
- Walk from Katoomba to Camden
- No favourite walking area
- Never walked the whole Grose
- Re Lockley and his role
- Myles Dunphy and descent of Dockers Ladder
- Never took route via Lockleys or Pierces
- Perry's was a rough way in
- Forest probably got its name as a result of Rigby visit
- Wanted the forest named "The" Blue Gum Forest
- Forest probably little known before Rigby visit
- When going in via Perry's, spent Friday night at Happi Daze, a beautiful place near Hat Hill
- Early gear - the Trailers pack
- Sleeping before tents - use of groundsheet, hot rocks to warm feet etc
- The Garrawarra business and Joe's role in it; various events in that area

- Joe used to walk in Royal with (first) wife and two kids; had motorbike with side car to get there
- Andy thanks Joe for his efforts of 60 years ago; Joe responds [during this, JT1 finishes and JT2 starts]
- More about Lockley
- Members of the SBW visit Joe in Armadale in the 40s; walk at Ebor; experience at Point Lookout
- Why Joe moved to Newcastle
- Looks back very happily on bushwalking days
- Add-on after conclusion of main interview: Talks about Laz Pura and his Volga Boatman song - how he would sing it at a campfire

Interview with Lewis William Hodgkinson

Interviewer: Andy Macqueen

Date: 6 September 1994

Place: 'Eureka', Blackheath

Tapes: LH1 (sides A&B) & LH2 (side A)

Transcribers: Aine Gliddon and Andy Macqueen

Lewis Hodgkinson was born in 1915, and has been a resident of Blackheath ever since. He has undertaken many visits to Blue Gum Forest through his interest in bushwalking, mainly with family and local friends.

OUTLINE OF INTERVIEW

- Lew's background in Blackheath: Parents and grandparents lived in Blackheath; Lew bought his current property "Eureka" in 1937 and developed as dairy; later became builder.
- Lew's first Blue Gum visit 1933, with friend Donald Campbell.
- Discussion of the Perry's route and the origin of Dockers "Ladder". The upgrade of the track in the 40s.
- Impressed by park-like nature of forest, due to effects of cattle.
- Lew made several visits over the years with Don - took his father down around 1955.
- Once went down Surveyors Gully [Orang Utan Pass] and up Lockleys via an alternative route to the one taken by the track, with Don and fox-terrier, then returned via same route.
- Speculates that the Lockleys track was first put in by the army last century.
- Thinks that the Junction Rock to Blue Gum track was not constructed, but simply grew.
- Never camped in the forest, due to commitments with his dairy.
- Attitudes of locals to bushwalkers from Sydney; and to the Blue Gum campaign.
- Doubts that Hungerford ever intended to plant walnuts etc.
- Blue Gum campaign drew attention to the whole national park idea.
- Anecdote about a conditional purchase lease at Govetts.

- Lew made many trips to Blue Gum from mid 60s with wife and children.
- Forest these days is not as clear, due to wattle etc which has grown up in absence of cattle.
- Cattle and tree ferns.
- Has view that forest will not regenerate in presence of canopy.
- Thinks the trees are smaller on the Perry's side because the river has moved from that area.
- Cattle taken into the valley last century by various routes. More regular use in 1930 when local town dairies (Les Sheard, Mal Rigney, Murray) took cattle down Evans Lookout bridle track.
- Lew remembers a clearing, probably Acacia Flat, and thinks it was on a lease known as Nixon's.
- History of Happi Daze property near Hat Hill - owners E.H. Brewer, Haydt, now Richard Neville.
- The story of how Haydt bought Hordern's land at Perry's and later gave to council.
- The story of Surveyors Gully (Orang Utan Pass). Lew and Donald Campbell went down there around 1937. The pass was used regularly by Tim Wallace to get to the bottom of his flying fox, where he had a coal mine. Description of flying fox. Thinks the pass has a long history.
- Once went into the valley via Hat Hill Creek without a rope. Returned via a pass on the Blue Gum side of Mount Haystack [later confirmed with Lew as Bald Head].
- Story of the false Aboriginal ceremonial ground on Rock Hill (near Hat Hill). [End of LH1, start of LH2 during this story.]
- Walking in the Snowy.
- The Grose region as a military training ground in early days. Army may have been responsible for the Mt Hay road, or maybe the guest-house proprietors.
- Lew stumbles on a coal miner working on a prospect near Beauchamp Falls, in the 30s.

Interview with Ray Bean

Interviewer: Andy Macqueen

Date: 4 November 1994

Place: Ray's home in Terrigal

Tape: RB1, sides A & B

Transcriber: Erica Gray

Ray been was born in 1914. He joined the Sydney Bush Walkers for a while, and also the River Canoe Club. He was an accomplished professional photographer and operated a specialised photographic processing service in Sydney during the thirties. After the war he undertook outback assignments for *Walkabout* Magazine.

OUTLINE OF INTERVIEW

- Joined SBW in 1931, through friend of family Gwen Lawrie (no relation to Dorothy Lawry). Aged about 18 at the time.
- Blue Gum trip on 3-5 Oct 1931 was first serious walk with club. Went in from Mt Victoria, out to Blackheath. Gwen Lawrie was Leader.
- While in forest, heard chopping, and heard story that someone was ringbarking trees to take wood up Perry's by light railway for baker's wood.
- At least one other party in the forest that weekend.
- The forest was already referred to as Blue Gum Forest by that time.
- Equipment on that trip, included a simple tent, part of which he later used for a sail for his canoe.
- Drought conditions at the time - 'nine year drought'
- The SBW concerts and Ray's involvement - one raised money for Blue Gum.
- Was a member of SBW for only 5 or 6 years but continued bushwalking for quite a few years.
- That 1931 trip to Blue Gum was a big thing in his life because it was the occasion he discovered bushwalking - good company, non-competitive, adventurous. However, the forest itself did not grip his imagination particularly. Just a lovely place, like lots of other places. [At end of

interview] mentions that at the time the Blue Gum campaign had not assumed the significance that it has since.

- Once walked Faulconbridge to Richmond. Found the going along the river rough, with lawyer vines.
- Once set out to go to Blue Gum from Mt Victoria but after spending two days in torrential rain at the shelter shed [above Victoria Falls] he abandoned the trip. Other parties who had gone down to the Grose got caught by floods that weekend.
- Ray didn't get involved in the working bees in the forest - partly because he thought not an appropriate activity - busy bodying with nature.
- Canoeing on the Nepean, Warragamba, and Wollondilly Rivers with River Canoe Club (with Tom Herbert, Hec Carruthers, Paddy Pallin etc)
- Set up business as professional photographer.
- Epic 14 day bushwalk down the Colo River, with Ninian Melville in January 1934 - before Nin formed the CMW. The trip was 'shear bloody hell', the river partially flooded. Went out to Newnes in a hired truck, which got stuck in a creek en route; in the process of this they lost some of their food supplies and they thus ran out of food during the trip - survived by catching eels.
- Found an old surveyors track high up above the Colo at one stage. Thinks had to do with a proposed railway survey. This was somewhere near Wollemi Creek, according to one of his photos. Win Duncombe 'Dunc' was hit on the head by a rock at this stage.
- Recollection of an incident involving a can of carrots exploding in Blue Gum and spattering the trees.

THE BLUE GUM FOREST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Jack Hayward Watson, AM, ISO

Interviewer: Andy Macqueen

Date: 23 November 1994

Place: The Scottish Hospital, where Jack works voluntarily as Chairman of the Board.

Tape: HW1 (side A)

Transcriber: Andy Macqueen

Jack Watson was born on 29 November 1916. He joined the Registrar General's Office in 1933, qualified in law in 1937 and was admitted to the bar. He began military service with the 2nd AIF in September 1941 and by the end of the war was a Captain in the Australian Army Legal Service. Back in the Registrar General's Office, he was appointed Examiner of Titles in 1957, and Registrar General in 1958. He held the latter appointment for 19 years, a career described in the book *From Parchment to Passwords* by R. Cundwell, H. Golder, and R. Wood (1995); and in *Who's Who in Australia*, 1977. Meanwhile he served with distinction in various voluntary capacities including the Scout Movement.

In February 2000 Jack lived in the Presbyterian Village Paddington. He retained in his possession several journals and photo albums of his early walks in the Grose and elsewhere.

OUTLINE OF INTERVIEW

- The Rover Ramblers - formed by Paddy Pallin for Rover Scouts who wanted more
- Jack joined Cubs in 1927, then Rover Ramblers in 1934 at age of 18.
- The Grose Valley and Blue Gum was a popular area with the Rover Ramblers
- First trip to Blue Gum was with 'Gunner Anderson', one of Jack's first trips
- Perry's was a very rough route then
- Also took the Victoria Falls, Pierces Pass routes, Lockleys Pylon
- To get to Pierces Pass, walked from Bell railway station

- Description of camping in Blue Gum - like camping in a park; fraternisation at campfires; Blue
- Gum was a people place
- Travelling on the trains was part of it all
- Tents, packs, sleeping bags - made by Paddy
- Not so many trips to Blue Gum after returning from overseas war service - tended to walk in new areas
- Two attempts to scale Arathusa Canyon - the second was being successful, and was in company of other Rover Ramblers and Dot English
- The 1936 Search in the lower Grose - Jack was one of the party of bushwalkers in the search - the first search party of bushwalkers - they started at Faulconbridge and emerged at Bilpin
- Emergence of Federation of Bushwalking Clubs Search & Rescue Section and Conservation Bureau
- Involved in another search, in Royal National, starting from Heathcote end
- Trip down the Kowmung with Paddy
- Miscellaneous trips - Shoalhaven, Barrington, New Zealand etc
- Post war, walked with Bill Cosgrove et al from Sydney Bushwalkers
- Became Registrar General of NSW in 1958 which ended walking relationship with Cosgrove (who walked in same department)
- Jack's achievements in life also included Scouts, St Johns etc; role in Rabaul war trials
- Jack attributes his success to his Scouting days - he had a good Scout Leader - several of his contemporaries became achievers in life
- Returning to bushwalking after the war
- 74 Interview with Jack Watson
- Met Colonel Bob Savage during the war and did some walks with him post war
- Jack's involvement in Federation of Bushwalking Clubs was all pre-war; his brother Bill
- A weekend in Blue Gum was a time for relaxation
- A search and rescue practice in the Faulconbridge-Linden Creek area; search techniques
- The walk down the Grose from Blue Gum - little sign of old track

Copies of transcripts were lodged in April 2000 with:

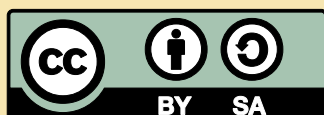
- Blue Mountains Library (Local Studies Collection)
- National Parks and Wildlife Service (Blackheath)

The original tapes of the interviews have been lodged with the Blue Mountains Library. Copies of transcripts and tapes are held by Andy Macqueen.

Citation

Macqueen, A. (2016). Introduction to the Blue Gum Forest Oral History Project. Blue Mountains Library. Retrieved from <http://library.bmcc.nsw.gov.au>

Copyright



Attribution | Share Alike | See [here](#) for further info

Contact us

Blue Mountains Library – Local Studies

Springwood Library

104 Macquarie Road | Springwood 2777

Mon- Fri 10:00am to 5:00pm

P 02 4723 5040

E bmlibrary@bmcc.nsw.gov.au

W library.bmcc.nsw.gov.au