Stories of the Pallinup River and Beaufort Inlet

-transcribed interviews-

Collected by Angela Sanders on behalf of the Wellstead Land Conservation District Commit
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Interview with Aiden Eades in Albany on 14 June 2001

AS
Aiden can you tell me when and where you were born.

AIDEN
I was born at Gnowangerup on the United Aborigines Mission in 1939.

AS
And where have you lived since then.

AIDEN
I’ve lived from Bridgetown right through to Esperance, and many towns inbetween. But mostly around Katanning. In my early childhood days a lot of that was spent around Kojonup, Boyup Brook and Katanning. Dad was a shearing contractor so we moved around quite a bit, even out as far Kukerin and Dumbleyung, they had a shearing run right out to there, so we moved around quite a bit yes.

AS
You were saying you lived in Jerramungup in the 60s.

AIDEN
I lived in Jerramungup in the 70s actually. Yes Jerramungup was where my family originated from on my mum’s side of the family, my great grandfather was born at Jerramungup. It was good to back. I was at Jerramungup before there was a town there, I used to work there before there was a town established. I used to work at Southern Transport carting super out to all the soldier settlement blocks. Before it was bitumised you know, the Hassell Highway, it was a sandy track in places. I know the area fairly well.

AS
So you would have been out there when all the land was being cleared.

AIDEN
Yes, yes. They just went in and rolled everything, took everything, they cleared too much. There were heaps of Italians out there picking mallee roots and stacking them and burning them. There were a lot of Nyungars went out that way too but there was more Italians and other people out there doing that sort of work than the Nyungars at that time.

AS
You were telling me that the Pallinup River is part of your country and you know quite a bit about the Aboriginal use of the area.

AIDEN
Yes my old people used to tell me that the Pallinup was a special river. People used to travel from Broomehill to the old Pallinup Homestead that still exists today and get down on the waterways and hunt and just live along the rivers. And the Pallinup, being the longest river we have in our region, was a very popular one, it supported everybody. They’d travel and camp all along the river as I said from the old Pallinup Homestead down through Kybelup, just south of Gnowangerup, even go into Gnowangerup I guess and along to some of those old farms. The one I’m thinking of is owned by a farmer by the name of Alan Stone, his farm was on the river, that’s Glenisla, that’s just west of Borden. Maileep of course was a neighboring property, that was a very old established farm where Nyungars lived there, it was a traditional area for Nyungars going way back. Then they went from there to Magitup, the old Magitup Homestead and from Magitup they went on to Salt River which is just a little bit off that particular line of the river, but they cut across to there. Either side of the river they’d hunt and camp wherever. And from the Salt River there was the White Dam Reserve which was nearby another old farm, Moana owned by one of the Millan? Brothers, Mick Millan I think was his name. Some of them went from there across to Mourocurup which was owned then by Frank O’Meehan. Then they came back to this other place, Woolaganup, that was the name of that Moir’s property, near Amelup. then on to Sandalwood. And of course Mongup too from Mourocurup. Mongup was just a branch off that again that flowed into the Pallinup. So people used to come in through there. From Sandalwood they’d go on to another place called Callinup, that’s the Nyungars name for it, that farm was owned then by Andrew Wellstead. And then of course they went on to another place called Round Pool. There would have been a place but I can’t think of it between Round
Pool and Chilliup. And of course once at Chilliup well then they stayed around the farm longer than they would anywhere else along the river. Moirs owned that farm too.

Some would branch off from there to go to Cape Riche or Boat Harbour or in the area and others would continue on to Boxwood Hills. The old road used to cut off at Boxwood there as you get down where the river is, the furthest crossing is where the road used to turn off and go through the bush there and used to come out at Marra. There was an old track that left east of the existing bridge that went straight across into plains country and either to the mouth of the Pallinup or around to Boat Harbour and other spots along the coast.

A lot of these people were coast people too see and they’d go both ways. They’d travel a certain time one way and then they’d travel back at a different time of the year. Hunting, living off the land, gathering kangaroo skins, just hunting and collecting skins. They’d do their trip and they’d come back with a bundle of skins. Back then they were telling me that when they were selling skins back in those very early days they got a pound a pound. So that was good money if you had enough skins. But not only that they used to hunt possum skins, caught possums.

AS
What about wallabies, did they use to get wallaby skins.

AIDEN
Yes, like the whole lot. The kangaroo and the other one that they hunted a bit was that brush-tailed possum. His Nyungar name is? I’m not sure what non-aboriginal people call them but...

AS
Brush-tailed possums I think.

AIDEN
He’s got like a brush on the end and he’s smaller, he’s something like the rock wallabies but he’s smaller.

AS
Yes the brush-tailed or black-gloved wallaby some people call it.

AIDEN
Some people call it yes. But he’s not good to eat, a lot of people did eat them but they had a distinct taste, not too many people took to them. Although I know that many people used to eat them, even in my time, but I didn’t like it. Kangaroo yes, no problems.

But they would travel right down along the coast there. Like I mentioned before all of these properties all had permanent fresh water. That’s why they built along there, because it was pretty arid country in those days and I guess the rivers would have been fresh in those very early settlement days too. But they went along the coast and would go so far, the different groups. The Pallinup River mob, the Beaufort Inlet mob there was a traditional camp site there and there was many families lived there all year round in the past. And of course people had their own locations right along the coast and they would always visit each other from time to time. There was always that sort of interaction right through and I guess that’s how everybody got married in the end I suppose (laughs). They tell me that the Bremer Bay tribe was one of the biggest tribes around, the Gairdner River mob was the other very large tribe as well. All of these people at different times would have gone into Jerramungup Homestead once that became established. So you’d get one or two people working there and you’d have fifty or sixty just hanging on there (laughter) having a free ride. They’d have to find them things to do just for a bit of flour, tea, sugar, a bit of dripping or something. The rations were very meagre in those days. So a lot of cheap labour went on in those days with clearing the land and things like that.

Nyungars lived pretty well, they were healthy people back in those days. I’ve seen photographs of these people from that era, big, huge men, healthy looking people, well-dressed too. But they used to survive out there, they used to walk from Bremer Bay across to Doubtful Island because there was a big camp as I mentioned before at Peppermint Beach, between Bremer and Doubtful. That was a big camp there. Some of my family were born there even, like I said before my great grandmother was born in Bremer Bay. And her mother, my great great grandmother comes from Esperance, which again supports the fact that people did travel long distances.
So how long would it have taken them to go right from the top of the Pallinup down to the estuary.

It depended on the season and the time of the year. If it was a good season then it would be a slower trip because they’d have everything they needed around them as far as game went I guess, and bush tucker as well. You don’t get the same food all year round in the bush so it’s no different to anywhere else. When you’re picking fruit you don’t get fruit all year round unless you freeze it, well it’s the same with the bush tucker. They travelled and they knew what was available at what time of the year. So they moved along to different areas where different fruit grew at different times.

And they would have been fishing further down.

Fishing yes. Once you got further down past Marra that’s when they were fishing yes. As I said they camped all along there. The rivers were a real source of survival for the Nyungar people no matter where you go right throughout the country, nationally you know. All the waterways supported Nyungars’ survival in those days because of the game, there was plenty of game, there was fish, everything was there. They would take their pick of what sort of food they wanted, some would go digging the tubers. In the sandy soils around out that way and some of the areas round the coast too you find a big tuber that grows quite large and that’s like a potatoe type of thing. Nyungars call them York? I don’t know what...

A yam

Yes some sort of a yam. It grows on a very fine root, the root system is like cotton and yet all of a sudden this big this would come out and you’d follow that along, dig all along at different depths. That was a very popular source of food along with many, many others. There was all sorts of berries and those little yam type things too you know. There’s a lot of it out there if you know which one to dig. None of it was poison that I know of, everything that was edible was ok to eat. They may have been some that wasn’t edible but I never come across any and I’ve tried most things.

You were telling me too about a camp on the north east side of the Pallinup where the Yate trees grow.

That was a traditional campsite for many families, they tell me they used to live there all year round for many years. And Nyungars lived as I said all along the coast. Some of them were employed by Hassells, Wellsteads, Moirs to shepherd their sheep right along from Two People Bay out here, the Hassell farm out here at Warriup, right along the coast to Bremer Bay. They were out there ten or twelve months of the year then they’d get them back to the farms close to shearing time. But there were people living there all year around they tell me, these families. And there were others in other locations also that used to go down to shepherding grounds and they never mixed the sheep.

They used to go right out to Young River over near Esperance.

Yes, Young River. My mob used to travel across the old telegraph line across to Ravensthorpe, they’d call in at Hopetoun and years and years ago the other town Kundip that used to be there in those days and so on. But most of them would travel along the edge, along the coast along the beaches and things and camp. When you’re on the beaches you can dig most places and find fresh water at the edge of the beach. It would take a long time, some times longer than others, some people might be gone for a year others might be gone only six months or a couple of months. Nobody worried about towns because there wasn’t many town around, or much of a town wherever you went in those days, so everybody lived in the bush.
AIDEN Well I’ve been going down the Pallinup from when I was a child, young child with my family and I know all the spots along there. From what we call the Swallow’s Cave, that’s in part of the old Marra farm property, we used to get in there. Right down past the Ranger’s Hut there’s another place further down, we used to fish all along there. A long time ago you could travel right down to Miller’s Point, because there was a track going right alongside the river. With all the fires trees have fallen over and blocked the roads there. So you go out along the Paperbarks and out to the highway and back into Miller’s Point. That’s the only way you can access that now, unless you’ve got a boat, that’s the easiest way down.

AS So pretty good fishing they tell me.

AIDEN Very good fishing yes when the stock is up. But the Pallinup has taken a lot of hammering over the last twenty years that I know of. Because some Nyungars get in there with their nets and ….one net ok but they get too far up the river where they’re not supposed to net. The signs are there, the size nets you can use too. Nyungars from other districts come in too and put heaps of nets in, just over fishing, five or six nets, too many fish. That’s just cleaning it out and of course with the different sized nets they take everything, they’re not really taking what they want. So it’s important that they do fish with the correct size net so that the smaller ones can escape to keep stocks up.

AS So there’s some there for everyone.

AIDEN Most of them don’t worry about that, they go down and get what they can and what’s no good they throw out. It’s criminal really when you consider that this river… we all have a connection to it and it’s provided not only for Nyungar people but non-aboriginal people as well. A lot of professional fishers used to fish there in the estuary part. But they just don’t police it enough. Then of course you get the Nyungars doing that and you also have the Christmas Islanders from Katanning, they come down and they really hammer it too with their nets. I don’t know whether they’re aware of the rules but they go and get their cut as well. They really need to, and I’ve mentioned this to the Fisheries and Waterways mob, they need to get a Nyungar in there to police these waters during the holiday seasons.

AS Obviously you’ve seen the fishing go down since you’ve been going there.

AIDEN Yes in the 70s we’d only catch what you needed, you didn’t take more. I’ve been down there after they’ve been with their nets and things and never caught a thing. Sit there all day and never catch a thing. Normally you’d throw your line in and sit ten minutes, fifteen minutes sometimes but you’d have a fish. And that would go on all day long, you’d catch half a dozen or a dozen and that was it. You could go on of course but you couldn’t eat it all, so you only took what you could eat I suppose, yes.

Like I said all the rivers were like that but the Pallinup was the main one. Because it went so far up and touched different Nyungar groups from right around. It’s just a special river.

AS You were saying you really liked going there.

AIDEN I enjoy it yes. When I go back down to that country, coast country, I’ve been down there with my grandfathers and my great grandfathers, I’ve been down with them when I was young. My uncles and my aunts and my mum and dad and people like this. Most of these people are not with us any more today and its all those memories come back to you and it’s a wonderful feeling because you are reaching those people somehow, in memory, and I get this good feeling when I go down there. All along the coast, even when I go to Cape Riche the same thing, yes… seem to be making contact there somewhere and the memories flow back very freely. That’s a
good thing I think, it’s wonderful to be able to do that I think. Most Nyungar people from the coast who have connections down that way feel the same. It’s like if you went away for a holiday, away from your husband and your kids, come back and it feels good the closer you’re getting to home. It’s a nice feeling and it’s the same feeling I get going down on the river camping. Even when I go back there now I get a wonderful feeling because my wife is no longer with me, she’s passed on, and we roamed all of that country and we know it right through. I would challenge anybody to tell me they’ve frequented Fitzgerald National Park area, the rivers, all of the rivers, more than my wife and I and my kids – I’d challenge anybody.

AS

So your kids love it there too.

AIDEN

Yes, well they literally grew up on the rivers fishing and all that bush stuff you know. We taught our kids all of that so they’re pretty right if they get stuck out there.

But Nyungars lived a very happy life, even though they were out in the bush, it was happy. There was always something to do, they made things happen, didn’t wait for it to happen, they made it happen. If they were hungry and they were out of tucker they had to do something about it. If it meant walking a couple of k’s to the river then that’s what they had to do, or even further. If they wanted to catch a groper they couldn’t catch it in the river they had to go down to the ocean side. So they all knew the spots where they would most likely catch groper and other types of fish of course.

– END OF INTERVIEW –
Interview with Bill and Amelia Moir on 4 April 2001

AS
OK Bill can you tell me when and where you were born.

BILL
I was born in 1934 at Gnowangerup.

AS
And where have you lived.

BILL
Although I was born in Gnowangerup my mother and father were living and farming at Kojonup, so I grew up at Kojonup. When I was 16 I left school and I went to work for my brother on his property Sandalwood on the Pallinup River.

AS
And you used to spend time down at the Pallinup Estuary I believe.

BILL
Well we did. Just prior to getting married a friend and I were contract fencing and we decided we would have a bit of a holiday, so we went down and took an old caravan annex down and pitched it right on the edge of the water at the Pallinup, right at the mouth and that was actually a terrific time. We of course used to mainly fish and explore and bream fishing was absolutely terrific. But Amelia’s father spoilt it a bit for us because while we were there she came down with her family and it rained. We had a good set up because we had this open fronted caravan annex and we could lay in bed in the morning and throw our line out in the water and catch breakfast. So it rained and we couldn’t do much and the old fellow sat on the end of my bed and he fished and he fished and he fished and every time he threw a line in he pulled out a bream and when they left we went fishing and couldn’t catch any more fish (laughter).

He did tell us about, he called them the Red Cliffs, and I now know that they are the cliffs of the type section for the Pallinup Siltstone. He advised us that a good fishing spot was to go over and walk around and follow the bar to the other side of the inlet and underneath those so called Red Cliffs it was really good fishing. We walked down there late one afternoon and it was getting dark when we got there and it was absolutely fantastic fishing. We found all you had to do was throw out about a metre, or maybe two metres of line at the most, and you could catch really great big bream. So that’s just what the fishing was like then, it was terrific.

AS
What did you used to use for bait.

BILL
We used to get hold of a currawong, just a bit of bird or whatever. Bream would virtually bite anything; they weren’t spoil on prawns like they are now.

AS
You used to camp on the west side of the estuary.

BILL
Yes. That is where we camped. We had a cat and we took the cat down with us and it was quite amusing because the cat didn’t like it very much being camped so close to the water. He virtually had only half a metre between where our annex was that the poor old cat could walk around. When Amelia’s mum and dad went to go back after visiting us the cat had ensconced itself in the back of the car. It decided not to stay with us. It was a fabulous holiday.

AS
So did you have a boat down there at all.

BILL
No. No. We fished off the bank. After we got married and 12 months [later] we had our first holiday we went and camped again at the mouth of the Pallinup. But this time it was a little more sophisticated, we had a proper tent. Amelia’s mum and dad came down with us too and we had a great holiday fishing again and exploring, walking around the coast. One of the significant things I remember about that is that we took the cat again, it was the same cat, and every afternoon it brought in a rat and we thought of course it was the normal sort of black rat and realise now that it was actually bringing in bush rats. And there must have been a lot of
them there because the cat brought in a rat every afternoon. I imagine there aren’t so many there now.

AS
I don’t know. There are probably quite a few there. So what other sort of wild life did you notice when you went down.

BILL
The bird life was just absolutely colossal, waterbirds of just about every variety, lots of swans and huge flocks of birds on the estuary, it was really good.

AS
Ducks and...

BILL
Oh yes, ducks. After that time we didn’t ever stop there again but a friend and I used to go fishing quite a lot and we used to go down to the mouth of the Pallinup and we would walk from there to a place called Groper Bluff, which was about a 3 kilometre walk. [It] was a great fishing spot and very interesting walking around; it was a very interesting piece of coastline on the west side of the inlet.

AS
You mean the geology is interesting.

BILL
Yeah, well I wasn’t interested in the geology then but it was just an interesting piece of coastline, quite rugged. Groper Bluff was like a great granite rock which you’d fish off, it’s well above the water and quite safe. I also remembered seeing at that spot a monstrous white shape deep in the water gliding past, so I assume it was a very large white pointer shark, probably the only one I’ve ever seen in the water.

AS
When you first went down there, how old would you have been then.

BILL
Probably about 22 to 23 I guess.

AS
And the last time you were there.

BILL
The last time I was there about 3 years ago and I was pretty disgusted. It really is degraded and I really don’t know why because it’s not as though there’s a lot of people pressure there, I think it’s probably fires more than anything. On the west side there were beautiful paperbarks and shady glens, it was really nice, but it looked quite horrid. I do know that the inlet itself too has silted up quite a lot from aerial photographs that I’ve seen and also from observation. Every time that we had a flood further up the river there seemed to be a noticeable burden of silt going into the river. We did take a boat down there on some occasions and you could boat around quite well. I’m quite sure now that lots of the parts of the inlet are so shallow that you wouldn’t be able to boat.

AS
Obviously you saw quite a few changes over the time.

BILL
Yes. One significant part is the bar, the shape of the bar, I suppose it’s because it faces out virtually to open sea. But it’s a very high bar and the sand is unlike the sand on most of the beaches around the south coast, it’s very coarse, very coarse quartz sand. I have driven a four wheel drive across there a few times and it’s really hard work, it’s really very hard, you have to let your tyres right down and you’re battling to get across.

AS
I wonder how often it opens.

BILL
That’s really quite interesting. Prior to the 1955 flood I think it had been a long time since it had been open, I really don’t know but I think it had been a long time. As more clearing has occurred in the upper reaches of the river, it’s opened more frequently. It takes a pretty big rain to put it out.
When you camped down there were there lots of other people there, was it a popular spot.

No. No you hardly ever saw anybody else, that was one of the good things about it. I think the whole time we were there when we camped on our first holiday we didn’t see anybody. It was the same when a friend and I camped the first time, nobody came along. But it was a pretty rough track to get in. On one occasion when we went out, we’d been down there fishing and we went out and we got bogged. I think we were supposed to go to a cricket carnival and we got bogged on our way out and they had to come looking for us and get us out.

So how did you get in there. Where did the track go.

East of the Wellstead townsit, the track that goes into Boat Harbour and the mouth of the Pallinup. The right hand fork of the track takes you into Boat Harbour and the left-hand fork takes you into the Pallinup. But there was also a track in from the north, the north east side from Bremer Road you could go in, that was pretty sandy too. It wasn’t such a good place to camp on that side it was much better on the west side. You had to stop at quite high sandhills coming in from the east.

It was mainly paperbarks that you used to camp in.

Yes absolutely, yes, a few gum trees but mainly paperbarks there. The only really significant thing is the type section for the Pallinup Siltstone I guess.

So that means that it’s a good representative sample of siltstone down there.

The type section is a section that the geologists use, they can indicate to anybody who wants to go and see a typical section of a particular rock or type or geological feature that is where they go, that’s the type section. It’s just typical, often of course it’s not so typically it’s often been the first outcrop or the most accessible outcrop that somebody has encountered so they have made it the type section but that is what it’s supposed to be. So you can go and have a look at the Pallinup Siltstone.

Amelia can you tell me when and where you were born.

I was born in Gnowangerup also, in 1939.

Where have you lived.

I lived very close to the Pallinup River but on a tributary called the Peenebup Creek at Mongup. Apart from a few years when I worked in Gnowangerup I lived there all my life, or lived there till I got married, and then went and lived another nine miles down the road at Salisbury.

And you used to visit the Pallinup Estuary too as a child.

Yes we used to go there for our annual holiday, the family would pack up and off we’d go in the old Dodge car. I can clearly remember getting to the river crossing, the Pallinup river crossing at Marra, and there was a gentle sloping bank on one side and a very steep bank on the other side and I’d flatly refuse to ride in the car up the steep side. Dad had to stop, which I’m sure made it very difficult for him to get up the steep bank, while I walked up and then I would get back on board and off we’d head for Pallinup. I often wondered how on earth we ever got there because the tracks were just absolute sand tracks. I think perhaps the narrow tyres on the car helped us get through. But we had wonderful times there we used to pitch our tents and camp by the river, catch fish, enjoy life.

So what was it like down there, can you describe it.
AMELIA  I clearly remember the very shady paperbark trees. They were always lovely to pitch a tent so that when the afternoon sun coming over, especially as it was the middle of January usually fairly hot, but it was lovely to have the shade on your tent in the afternoon when it got very hot. We caught lots of fish and I’m sure that was probably our staple diet while we were there being able to go and catch the fish.

There were people I can remember that used to come every year from York, they used to camp just a little bit further up in the camping area than we did. I remember one year them catching a huge, or what seemed to me as a child, a huge shark and they dragged it in behind the vehicle up through the camping area and hoisted it up in a tree. The memory of that stuck with me forever; it just seemed so big I guess compared to the bream we’d been catching in the river it was a big, big fish. And those people always had church services every Sunday and they always invited whoever was there to join them for their church service on Sunday.

AS  OK, was he a minister.

AMELIA  I don’t really know, but I believe one of them, his name was Tom Marwick from York.

AS  And who were the other people that you can remember.

AMELIA  I can’t really remember a lot of other people being there at that particular time just those people from York.

AS  And how old were you when you were going down there for holidays.

AMELIA  7 or 8 maybe. We also used to go fishing in the Pallinup River from Marra down, not necessarily in the estuary but in the actual river. We used to go down through Marra or down to the Marra homestead then follow the farm tracks down through the paddocks. We used to stop at various places down the river and fish. In those days there weren’t freezers and what have you to keep the fish so we used to go fishing and on the way home you’d drop fish off to all the people on the road home and then when they went fishing they’d do likewise. The fish was always shared, but in a good day you could catch a sugar bag full of fish no problem.

AS  Sounds like it was a good place for fishing.

AMELIA  It was a wonderful place for fishing. It was a wonderful place to teach children to fish because it was safe.

AS  Did you swim in the estuary.

AMELIA  No. Mum and dad couldn’t swim so we were banned from the water.

AS  You could if you’d been a swimmer,

AMELIA  If you’d have been a swimmer, yes.

AS  Can you remember any of the sorts of wildlife that you used to see down there.

AMELIA  There were lots and lots of ducks and swans, you could look out up towards the back of the estuary and you could always see lots and lots of birds on the water.

AS  And later on of course, we’ve talked to Bill about going down there, later on do you have any special memories about that.
AMELIA  Only that I was probably about 6 months pregnant and still horribly sick [laughs] but we had a wonderful holiday there yes, it was a great time of relaxation and enjoying oneself.

AS  And where did you actually used to camp.

AMELIA  At the paperbarks. It wasn’t quite right at the mouth of the estuary it was just about ½ kilometre back from the very mouth on the western side. I suspect they were probably flood plains of the river that when the river flooded it had taken out the sandbanks over the years and left a flat area. Because there was so long between the floods things like pigface and a lot of that small growth used to grow on the flood plain side of the river.

AS  Did you ever see it in flood.

AMELIA  Not at the mouth, no. But yes I did see it in flood further up the river and it’s a sight to see.

AS  Describe the bar to me you wrote a little bit about that in your paper.

AMELIA  It was always a very high sandbar and like Bill said it was quite unlike any other sand along the coast, it was very coarse and it was always a very high sandbar. It was impossible to see the sea from the river. You could hear the waves breaking but you actually had to climb up the bar and stand on top before you could see the ocean.

AS  So you used to spend most of your time on the estuary fishing rather than in the ocean.

AMELIA  Yes definitely.

AS  Did you spend much time on the beach.

AMELIA  Not a lot we used to walk down there, go for a walk but no we didn’t spend a lot of time on the ocean side at all.

AS  OK. So it must have been fairly sheltered where you were.

AMELIA  Yes. Yes, and I suspect the swimming on the other side would have been quite dangerous anyway, as I think there was lots of under tow on the ocean on the other side.

AS  Tell me about when you were bogged.

AMELIA  [laughs] Once when we’d had been fishing down at the river, going home we got bogged, it had been rather a wet year and there was this boggy patch and boy we were bogged. I think this was about 5 o’clock in the afternoon we got bogged and 10 o’clock that night we were headed for home. We carted rocks and rocks and more rocks and we put the rocks in and the vehicle would climb up on those rocks, you’d go and get some more rocks, it would climb up on those rocks until we eventually got out, but it was a long, long time.

BILL  In the ’55 flood I’ve heard hearsay evidence that when the river went out, when it broke it’s bar and went out, people who flew over it said that it was just a brown slick for kilometres out to sea and there was dead sheep and dead cows and trees floating out to sea. It must have been a colossal event.

AS  What was it like up where you were [Sandalwood].

BILL  There was a little creek came in on the opposite side of the river so the water backed up that, but it would have been at least a kilometre wide there, where it was backed up round that little creek. It was higher than any previous flood and my uncle told me there was a flood in 1914, I
think he said, and they’d put a fence up higher than that flood and it took out that fence so it was higher than any previous flood. At that part of the river it was higher than any flood since.

AS  And did it do a lot of damage.

BILL  It certainly changed the river. The river there had flat-topped yates, really big, like you couldn’t put your arms around them, probably take almost two people to put their arms around them they were so big. It just took them out, it just took all the vegetation out of the riverbed and it was just a rocky bed. It grew up again and some time in the early 80s there was another flood, nearly as big but not quite, and it took it out again. So in my lifetime I’ve seen that riverbed cleaned out twice, and it’s grown up again. But the second time the trees weren’t as big, they weren’t as massive so they must have been much, much older. That was in year 55.

AS  So if it hadn’t flooded since 1914...

BILL  Yeah.

AMELIA  You know how we were talking earlier about the easterly rains and the forecasters saying drizzle on the south coast, isolated drizzle on the south coast, more isolated drizzle on the south coast. In that instance at Mungerup we had 13 inches of rain in two days. So the volume of water that came down the river was just ...because it fell so quickly it just ran off.

BILL  I think the nature of the flooding changed because in the ’55 flood all the clearing was in Gnowangerup, Tambellup, Borden areas and they were only just starting to clear the Jerramungup-Corackerup Creek areas you see. So the water came from the higher reaches of the river and that’s why it was so high at Sandalwood. In the flood in the 80s it didn’t run anywhere near as high at Sandalwood but down towards the mouth it must have run nearly as high because it was lapping the decking of the Marra Bridge (which was built above the high water mark). But the nature of the [floods] had changed because you’d have all the clearing from Jerramungup and Corackerup so the creeks there were feeding the river lower down. So there really was a change in the nature of the flooding.

- END OF INTERVIEW -
Interview with Amos Moore on 4 April 2001

Interviewer: Angela Sanders, Amelia Moir also present

AS Before we start Amos can you tell me when and where you were born.

AMOS That's a touchy question.

AS You don't have to answer it if you don't want to but it's for the history of the project.

AMOS I was born in 1907.

AS And whereabouts.

AMOS Albany.

AS And whereabouts have you lived since then.

AMOS Numerous places, Narrikup, Tenterden, and then Claremont. I was married then and I came down to Kendenup and took up a thousand acres at Kendenup and we farmed there till I joined the Vermin Board. I joined the Vermin Board and went out to the Stirling Range, went to the Pallinup River, went to west of Mt Barker and cleaned most of the places up and they didn't have any trouble after.

AS So you were trapping dingoes.

AMOS Trapping then I was, yes. And that was the areas that I worked in. I worked through as far as South Australia and I worked on the rivers, there was the...that has got me thinking.

AM The Pallinup was one.

AMOS The Pallinup was one.

AM Bremer

AMOS Bremer River, yes.

AM Gairdner

AMOS Gardiner, yes and I worked on all the rivers right through.

AM So when you were working at Pallinup where did you camp when you were dogging.

AMOS I built a house at the Pallinup where the road goes down into it.

AM Into Miller's Point.

AMOS Miller's Point yes that's it.

AM And you lived there with your family

AMOS Yes, I lived there with them. I had a place at Kendenup at the same time [inaudible].

AS So tell me what it was like living out at Miller's Point.

AMOS It was very good for fish. The best fish I had for years there.
AM: Did you have a boat or did you just used to catch them off the shore

AMOS: I had a boat and a motorbike and a car.

AM: So what sort of fish did you used to catch in the river.

AMOS: Bream and mullet, I preferred mullet.

AM: So you netted the mullet.

AMOS: Yes, netted the mullet, netted the bream too.

AS: So you used to look after Miller’s Point, you were the caretaker there.

AMOS: Yes I used to take the nets off the blokes when they didn’t have a licence, I was issuing the license, and if they didn’t come and get a licence well I would take the nets off them.

AS: Did they often get upset about that.

AMOS: Of course they did (laughs).

AM: So you were working for the Gnowangerup Roads Board then.

AMOS: No. I was 2½ days on the Gnowangerup Roads Board but really working for the Shire in Gnowangerup.

AM: So it was the Shire in those days, past the Roads Board days. Did you have any other duties as ranger besides ensuring that they had licences for their nets.

AMOS: They had to have a licence and had to have certain size nets, 3inch net, if the net was smaller than that I could take it, and I did take it. When I got nets I would ring the Shire up and they would send a policeman down to get it.

AS: So they would come and get the nets.

AMOS: Yes.

AS: Oh OK.

AMOS: They’d come and get the net.

AM: Did the Pallinup river ever flood, big rains.

AMOS: Oh yes. Just about every winter.

AS: OK.

AMOS: It wouldn’t, not every winter, but very often.

MS: Was it scary for you when the river flooded.

AMOS: No

AM: Frightening, you were high enough.

AMOS: No we were up high, we never had any fear of the river.
AS  What did you build your house out of. How did you get all of the materials in there.

AMOS  It was brought in by a chap from Ravensthorpe.

AS  OK. Was it Ravensthorpe stone.

AMOS  No it wasn’t stone it was built of wood I think. [pause] I didn’t build it, I finished it off that’s all, the linings and that, but I didn’t build it.

AS  What years were you at Miller’s Point as caretaker.

AMOS  Cut that out [tape] and I will work it out.

AS  OK

AM  If it was at the time of the shire Roads Board change over that would be a fairly clear indication of the time span.

AMOS  There was one bloke ahead of me, I can’t think of his name now, and he didn’t do anything but I cleared the Point and the beach there, the kids could play on it. He didn’t do any of that work.

AS  And you used to get a lot of people down at Miller’s Point.

AMOS  Oh yes, used to get a lot of people there.

AS  Where did they come from do you know.

AMOS  All around, [pause] all around the district. Some would come from Gnowangerup, some from Borden, but when the weather was fine you got a lot of people there.

AS  So it was a very popular fishing spot.

AMOS  Yes.

AS  So it was mainly families having holidays.

AMOS  Yes and there was a lot of campers there too.

AM  Have you got any idea how Miller’s Point got its name.

AMOS  I heard it was from a bloke that was called Miller down there.

AS  George Miller

AMOS  He used to camp there. That’s I think how it got its name.

AS  So did you used to trap dingoes there as well. Or was that before then.

AMOS  Yes 2½ days I used to trap. I used to have people come down and tell me dogs were killing sheep and I’d go out.

AM  Was this after the war service land settlement at Gairdner River or before all that land was cleared.

AMOS  Gairdner River.
AM All the farms down along the Borden - Bremer Bay road.

AMOS Yes I know the places, it was before and after.

AM That would be going back to the late 1940's early 1950's.

AMOS Well I used to be trapping there before I went to live there. I used to just be working for the Vermin Board.

AM So you obviously had to live somewhere while you were trapping. Did you camp, tent, caravan.

AMOS Caravan. [pause] yes I used a caravan.

AS So were there many dingoes around then.

AMOS Well I used to get about 70 a year.

AM And you used to get a bounty on their scalps.

AMOS Yes.

AS Can you remember what they used to pay you for.....

AMOS Two pounds.

AS So did they actually pay you as well or was that.....

AMOS Yes.

AS You got an extra two pounds.

AMOS I got wages and travelling allowance and everything.

AM And the dogs got very cunning didn't they when you set the traps. You had to be very crafty in how you set the traps.

AMOS You had to know how to set them or you wouldn't get them.

AM If you left your scent.

AMOS Because I wasn't trapping at Pallinup all the time. I didn't build there until I got the job with the shire 2½ days a week of controlling the inlet.

AS That made up your weeks work.

AMOS Yes.

AS Did you enjoy it out there

AMOS Yes I enjoyed it. I was running a risk of course, they reckon.

AM What was the risk?

AMOS I'm taking their nets. (Laughter)

AS So did you ever get into any fights.
AMOS  No.

AS   That’s good.

AMOS  I came pretty near. (Laughter)

AS   When people went down there on their holidays fishing you could fish from a line OK.

AMOS  Ah yes.

AS   It was just the nets that weren’t allowed in there. A certain size.

AM  It was probably a certain size mesh of a net and they were only allowed a certain length weren’t they. Can you remember how many metres.

AMOS  70 yards long and 3 inch mesh.

AS   Were you there full time, so you were there every day.

AMOS  Yes I was there every day, except the days I was catching dogs.

AS   So those 70 dogs a year would have been caught over like your whole area not just around the Pallinup.

AMOS  Oh no, it was wherever they were killing.

AS   You were called in.

AMOS  Yes

AM   So how did they contact you at Miller’s Point when you were covering such a large area. How did they actually contact you at Miller’s Point.

AMOS  My wife was there.

AM   So they would come by vehicle and tell you.

AMOS  Yes [long pause] of course that was only for a start. I got into a VCO and then we got our own VCO later because I was only running around then. Running around checking them and putting them in.

AS   So did you see the fishing change at all while you were there.

AMOS  Oh it would change according to how it would fill up. But it was mainly the best fishing I’ve ever seen. You couldn’t put your net down very long.

AM   When the bar went out with the floods how did that affect the fishing.

AMOS  The fish would go out too. It would always be poor until they grew up again.

AS   Did you have a lot of ducks or other animals down there then that you can remember.

AMOS  Yes there was a lot of ducks down there. A lot of ducks died there too. All sorts of birds died there at times.

AS   Why was that.
Well they would get this disease, I wouldn’t eat them.

Any idea what may have caused the disease, the dry years or ....

No I don’t think so, just a disease got amongst them.

What sort of ducks would they have been. Teal ducks, black ducks.

Yes all them. Every duck died, nearly.

The Swans too.

Swans yes, not so bad though.

That’s interesting. And the fish used to get salt sores when the river got too low.

Oh yes.

And they used to come to the surface and they all had sores on them.

Yes, lose the scales.

So were there any funny stories or anything that really stands out in your mind from that time that you would like to tell us about. Interesting stories.

Well of course I put a road up to the Springs and a lot of people don’t know about that. There is a road from the Pallinup at the building place there, the point, right up to Springs.

Did the Springs have a name.

No

There were good springs there.

Did you used to get fresh water from there for your living purposes.

No, we had plenty of tanks.

So what were the springs like.

Well, they were all this.... what do you call it.

Yate trees around it.

Yes, all Yates, Hill Yates yes. And its got breakaway that’s washed away a bit. And its got this fern around it, bracken fern around it.

That would be most unusual out there.

Yes, well there were two lots of springs up there. There was a lot of springs rose up there.

Do you know if anyone used to use those springs when they used to take the stock from inland down there during the summer months. Did anyone ever use those springs for watering stock.

No never. That is why they were never used, they were found I suppose but never used.
AM       Were they nice fresh water.

AMOS     Yes they were nice fresh water. I don’t know what the road is like now I doubt if you could get up there. [laughs]

AM       To the springs

AMOS     Yes it was about 2 miles, about 2 miles I would say.

AS       Did you find the springs.

AMOS     Well I found them as far as I know (laughs). Nobody seemed to know about them. The surveyors would know of course.

AS       Did you ever have any aboriginal people come down to Miller’s Point while you were there.

AMOS     I don’t think so. No, I don’t think so. Of course there were plenty of places around the beach that is very interesting too, there are caves and that. Very interesting. Bee hives plenty of bee hives. We used to get all our own honey.

AM       Were there lots of little birds where you built your house.

AMOS     Yes a lot of birds. I used to feed the birds and there were a lot of birds, different types and a lot of big birds too nesting, like the hawks and that.

AM       Lots of parrots.

AMOS     Plenty of parrots, yes.

AM       28s, rosellas

AMOS     Rosellas and what do you call them mountain parrots. Not many cats though.

AM       We don’t want them.

AMOS     I had a dog there and she used to be with me in the water of course. But she was very handy. She used to find the nets in the water, she would smell them and she’d let me know and I’d search for them.

AM       So what sort of a dog was she.

AMOS     She was, I don’t know, she was a brown dog but there are not many of them about. I saw one over near Melbourne I think it was, I saw one there just the same as her. It’s the only one I’ve seen. [Her name was Bonnie]

AS       A very clever dog. Did you teach it to do that.

AMOS     Yes.

AS       You used to get out in a boat a lot.

AMOS     She was on the boat all the time. I had a shag there that was tamed; he was caught in a net and couldn’t get out. I took him out and put him in the boat and he stopped in the boat and before I got to Miller’s Point I threw him out, see, and every time I would go out he would be coming across to get in the boat.
AS    You became his mate.

AMOS  Yes the dog and him was mates. Very interesting country around there on the banks.

AM    Was it the type of rock that made it interesting.

AMOS  Granite yes. Of course there was a road up the river too on both sides. There was a mine up there I used to work a bit [pause] because there was a scam there I used to make all sorts of gems out of. It was very good that little mine I had there. A bloke came to me the other day and wanted to know where it was.

AM    So what did you actually mine there.

AMOS  I would mine ....I don’t know what the names might be now but all sorts, a big variety of stone you’d get there - but it cut out. I told this bloke I said it would only cut out and there is nothing in it.

AM    So you used to then take your rock back to Miller’s Point and polish it.....

AMOS  Yes and polish it there. So that was another building I had, I had a garage and this rock place.

AS    So people would buy the polished rock from you.

AMOS  Oh yes, I sold all I could. I used to go up to the Gnowangerup Show and put it in there and I would sell it in no time. Put it on brooches and things.

AM    Lovely. Well I didn’t know there was a mine there.

AMOS  The mine was there but I gave it back. I don’t know whether the Albany Department took it or what but it went away from the Shire as I know and the government took it over, they wouldn’t allow it to be worked.

AM    So that was up river from Miller’s Point

AMOS  Yes, a couple of mile up.

AS    So when you say a mine did you used to dig from the surface.

AMOS  Yes

AM    When your children were living there were they of school age or had they grown up.

AMOS  Yes, my wife had 5 of them.

AS    On correspondence

AMOS  No teaching them

AS    Herself

AMOS  Yes but Perth was running it.

AM    Do you think the children enjoyed their life at Miller’s Point

AMOS  They did. They did.
AM They would have been very free children.

AMOS Yes, they were good swimmers and everything else. I've only got two of them here, Ernie and Dorothy.

AM Could you tell us how you went about setting a trap, because there was a real skill in that.

AMOS Yes, there is skill in it.

AMOS Well, you find a place to put it for a start, you have to see dog tracks. And when you see the dog tracks you know you are on the beat. So you pick a place where they've gone against a bush and scratched and if you can't find that well you pick a place yourself. You scratch and you set the trap in the middle of the scratch up against the bush, not too close, and you put a stick about as thick as your finger only longer across the front of it. Also it's a good idea to put one on the other side too in case he comes in from that distance and of course as he steps over the stick he steps onto the trap. That's the idea but when I finished trapping, when I gave it up I used to shoot them, I found that a lot easier. The thing was to find the dog then, but I had no trouble to find them.

AM Were they still relatively purebred dingoes then or had they started to interbreed with domestic dogs.

AMOS No they were pure dingoes. Pure dingoes won't bark they'll only howl and that is how you know them and you know they're out in the bush and that's where you find them.

AS Did their howl ever set your nerves on end or...

AMOS No, it didn't worry me. I liked to hear them howl. They get in the trap and of course they fight the trap.

AM I guess we all would if we had our foot stuck in a trap wouldn't we.

AMOS I liked to shoot them, it's a lot easier.

AM And probably a lot more humane.

AMOS Yes, I shot three or four at times. You shoot one and the others hop into him, smell the blood, and of course you shoot them then. So you shoot a quantity.

AM Did you ever find the lair where the little ones were if you shot them, a female dog.

AMOS Yes, you take some risks sometimes going into caves.

AM Did you find these little ones in caves along the river or were they back from the river the caves where the little ones might have been.

AMOS Yes the little ones were pretty cunning the ones along the river were too frightened of it because it's too near people. But [pause] I have forgotten what I was going to say.

AM That's OK. So how many did they used to have in the litter.

AMOS They have up to six.

AM What colour were they generally. A sandy colour, a sandy yellow colour, the dogs.

AMOS You can get them all colours, you can get them black, you can get them white, you can get them all colours but the best I ever got was at Lake Magenta. Lake Magenta is out from Gnowangerup.
It's east towards Ravensthorpe and I got a lot in that place. But another good place is Ravensthorpe, west of Ravensthorpe about on the Gairdner River; I got about 3 bitches, 3 families all in one place. We kept one of them. One was a very bold one he would play with you as much as you liked so we kept one of them. I reared him up to about 14 months; I had to destroy him.

AM
He was a good pet. [Named Ding]

AMOS
A lovely pet, yes a good pet, but you wouldn't trust him with others, if a stranger came on you'd see his bristles go up.

AM
Very protective.

AMOS
But he was a good dog.

AM
It was, I think, strictly illegal to keep them as a pet wasn't it.

AMOS
I kept him because I was experimenting with them. He was a good dog.

AS
Did he have a name.

AMOS
Yes I called him, [pause] I don't know what I called him now.

AS
So when you left Miller's Point, were there still dingoes there when you left or had they gone by then.

AMOS
No I'd got them all. That particular dog, he used to go down and follow me to look at the traps and he'd go back sometimes, he'd get fed up and I expected to see him in the trap going back but he never once.

AM
Do you think he ever picked up the scent of other dingoes when he went out with you.

AMOS
Yes he used to pick up the scent and he didn't like them.

AS
Did you get foxes around Miller's Point.

AMOS
Yes a few.

AS
Did they ever get in your traps.

AMOS
Oh yes, foxes, native cats, and of course tame cats, I got a lot of them. People used to bring them down I used to reckon.

AM
The native cat was that the little spotted native cat.

AMOS
Yes the little spotted

AM
chuditch.

AMOS
Yes, there was two of them there for a while but they didn't stay long. My dog used to chase them.

AS
What about big possums, did you have big possums around the house.

AMOS
No there was no possums there. No, no possums.

END OF INTERVIEW
Interview With Betty Sewell and Brian Moir on 4th April 2001

Interviewer: Angela Sanders, Amelia Moir also present

AS  I'll start with Betty, when and where were you born Betty.

BETTY  The 24th October 1917 at Albany, at Nurse Brown's. That was a place in, I think it was in Grey Street West. That was the Maternity Hospital at the time and I'm sure that Brian will say exactly the same thing.

AS  Brain when and where were you born.

BRIAN  1st August 1922, same venue I guess.

AS  Both in Albany. As children you used to live out at Marra, is that right.

BETTY  Yes and mother used to come in at about seven months and wait. One of the houses she waited [in] was over in Seymour Street, they used to take people. She must have done a good bit of waiting in those days.

AS  So she had two months in Albany waiting.

BETTY  About that I think, yes. They used to come in by buggy and it would take about three days from Marra. Stopping at the farms along the way, there were only two or three farms, Cape Riche, Hassells at Warriup, and I think the next step was right through wasn’t it Brian?

BRIAN  No they used to stay at Greens.

BETTY  Well that was at Many Peaks, near Many Peaks.

BRIAN  Yes, near Many Peaks.

BETTY  So it was a slow trip.

AS  You were just telling me about some of the visitors you used to get out at Marra.

BETTY  We had lots of important people, business people, that came to enjoy the solitude and the quietness and the nature, it was a number one place. We had a judge that came with his son, who was a doctor, and they came every year and built more or less a permanent camp up river, as far as I know it was usually up river. They had an arrangement with Dad that if he should come down with the family that he should fire a gun before he got there so they could put their clothes on (laughter). They were real back to nature people, those ones. But then as I say one of the people was a great friend of the family’s and he was very popular with us because every time he came each year, sometimes he came with the family and sometimes he came with men friends, he bought a square Peak Frean biscuit tin full of an assortment of bags of lollies. When you lived at Marra that was a thing, a real impressive gift, this tin of sweets.

At one stage he came down, there were four of them, business men. He was an accountant, one was a chemist, one was in real estate and anyhow they were all huge, they were very big men, I think the lightest was over 16 stone or something. They had a little canvas boat which would only take two at a time. They camped down at the estuary and two of them would row across the estuary to waterholes that were on the other side of the estuary. The best waterholes were over there, and I think Brian said too you never actually went there did you?

BRIAN  Not to those, no.
I never went there but I knew in which direction they went and so forth and it was under some breakaway country I think. To get the water each day only two men could go in this boat at a time because otherwise it would sink under their weight (laughter). But they just went for the fishing.

Then there was this honeymoon couple who ran their battery flat and had to walk to Marra. She wouldn’t stay on her own because she was a city girl and had never been in the bush before. She elected to walk in high heel shoes fifteen miles, by road, they went by road. When dad got home from work he found a collapsed bride on his doorstep. People like that they were interesting.

Then there was the undertaker from Kalgoorlie and a married couple from Perth that were very great friends. They came down a couple of years. He taught me how to roll cigarettes, I reckon he needed another client (laughter). I used to do it very laboriously on the table sort of thing, getting everything organised. He said “You don’t do it like that Betty, you do it like this”.

The river bellied out at the bar, at the estuary. I’ve heard it quoted as about a mile wide then. But upstream where there were rocks, we fished the whole length and breadth of the river from about two miles from our house the fishing started. We knew all the rocks, and where there were rocks against the side the river was narrower and deeper but it bellied out when it got down to the estuary. Miller’s Point on was much shallower but wider. Amelia you would know that.

Yes.

Just above Miller’s Point was a good fishing place, Brian will tell you about that. Go on Brian have a go.

That would be the Paperbarks. Did you ever go there?

Yes, we went to the Paperbarks.

You had to stop before you got to the big high granite rocks. But nowadays you can drive everywhere because roads were made by four-wheel drive vehicle weren’t they.

They were indeed.

I don’t know when we stopped walking Amelia, but we did didn’t we?

It wasn’t a good idea.

No, however you could catch fish anywhere.

Yes. Mother was an outdoor person and at one stage she had us in the boat that had been up on the bank and out in the middle of the river with the water gushing in everywhere and she said “I think you’d better do some bailing”. Then when we didn’t have any effect with the bailing with little jam tins she said “I think we’d better go back to shore” (laughter).

Wonderful

Wonderful. But that was typical mother, wasn’t it.

That’s right.

She never said be careful, she just expected you to be.

Well she needed to be cool, calm and collected didn’t she?
BETTY  Well evidently when Ross was born she wasn't. She was surprised, she didn’t know what to do with him (laughter). And gran came down and stayed for several weeks and then dad took gran back to Cape Riche to catch the boat and mother spent the day sitting beside Ross’s cradle watching him in case he died, he suffocated or something. She was a wreck by the time dad got home that evening and he had to turn round and go back to Cape Riche and grab gran before she got on the boat. That was in the days when the steamers used to trade along the coast. They used to call at Warriup, Cape Riche, Bremer Bay, Doubtful Island and on to Hopetoun and Esperance. Have you been to Hopetoun?

AS  Yes, I have.

BETTY  It had a lovely shelter for the early boats doesn’t it?

AS  Yes it’s beautiful.

AM  Brian you had some notes tucked away there.

BRIAN  Yes, just describing the movement of sheep from the homestead. Every autumn the mated ewes were walked down to the estuary of the Pallinup River.

BETTY  We had a paddock there, fenced paddock.

BRIAN  They were kept there for about six weeks, taken home before lambing of course, but this was an important time of their pregnancy and they went on to excellent natural feed. One of the best feeds available in that particular locality was a bush that we called ‘blue bush’. Now you couldn’t get a horse to walk past a ‘blue bush’ and I don’t suppose you could get a cow, but we didn’t have any in those days. It was something that attracted all animals, they thrived on it so it must have...

AS  What did it look like.

BRIAN  Well it doesn’t look blue.

BETTY  I don’t know it at all.

BRIAN  It’s more like... each leaf is partly bronze coloured and the other half is possibly a pale blue, it’s got that combination. It’s a low shrub usually, only about this high and spreads out.

AS  About a metre and a half.

BRIAN  It would be yes. Once the sheep got there they were looked after by two Aboriginal brothers, and of course they were referred to as shepherds. Occasionally my father used to go down and see if everything was ok and that meant that he rode down. In those days you always carried a rifle and he would have lent this particular brother named Roy the rifle and one cartridge to go and get a kangaroo. A change of diet because the rest of their diet would have been rabbits and ducks that they used to trap in the shallow water with rabbit traps, and fish. Now this particular gentleman was a super shot and he had an unusual mannerism about his skill and that was he shot with both eyes open. Have you ever seen anyone shoot with both eyes open? Incredible.

On one occasion, and I really can’t remember how it worked out, I was left to ride the horse back to the homestead from this paddock at night time. My instruction from dad was let the reins stay loose, keep your knees well behind the knee-pads on the saddle and let the horse take you home. And it did. It took three to four hours for that to happen. I was scared stiff, I was still in short pants, I wasn’t a teenager even. And of course pitch dark night and you’d hear a thump, thump, thump and that’d be a kangaroo but you never knew what was going to leap out of the dark.
BETTY  Brian said there were dingo howls.

BRIAN  The occasional dingo would howl.

BETTY  Night birds.

BRIAN  The owls used to swoop by and the horse would throw its head around and the bridle would rattle and I’d think what’s it going to do, I could hardly see its head. That horse surely had sharp ears.

AS  So there was no track, the horse would find its way back through the bush.

BRIAN  Yes. There was one particular thicket and it was where they discovered what they thought might be gold, it turned out to be graphite. Of course these people that had made this discovery dug a lot of holes and only the horse could tell where those holes were. It was in a thick mallee thicket and of course the track through them was anywhere it was up to the horse, because it was dodging the holes. And that’s when you kept your knees well in (laughter).

The waterfowl of all descriptions were just so fantastic there were countless millions, swans, [ducks and waterfowl].

BETTY  This was in the bay around where the river started to billow out and it came in a big thing like this and it was narrow here and there was Miller’s Point there [indicating map]. The waterfowl in that would come in to water because just in the middle of that bay was fresh water ...

BRIAN  Just seeping out of the ground.

BETTY  About this far from the river. Perfectly fresh water. All dad used to do when he took the sheep down was to dig out these holes and the sheep would go down there each day and water again. They camped in a lovely grove of...

BRIAN  Banksias.

BETTY  Yes.

BRIAN  Back about a hundred metres from the waters edge just out of the way.

BETTY  That was when my brothers refused to sleep with me because the time before when they slept with me I could only get to sleep if I put my feet on ones back and my head on the others back (laughter). When mum said “You can all sleep in the ute”, they said “No we’ll sleep on the ground if she’s going to sleep in the ute” (laughter). Do you remember that?

BRIAN  No I don’t really.

BETTY  You were most unsociable (laughter).

AS  Sounds like you had a great childhood out there.

BRIAN  It was amazing, it really was.

BETTY  In that paddock there was an area of grassland called the ‘Yates’. The foliage there was scattered yate trees with grasslands around that. It wasn’t a big area was it Brian.

BRIAN  No, no.
BETTY  But the sheep all went there for a change of feed and it was just back from this bay, it came in here to the fenced paddock.

AS      So that was a natural area that you fenced off.

BRIAN   Yes

AS      You didn’t clear it.

BRIAN   No, no clearing, we used to control the regrowth.

BETTY   At one stage there was a fishing industry down there. Now that was before our time and we don’t know anything about it. But they had a smoke-house off the end of the beach. The camping area was there and then there was the bar and this beach ran along there [indicating map]. Just up from the end of the beach where it joined the rocks, which were very ordinary rocks, they weren’t spectacular or anything they were just little pebbles as far as we were concerned. Back from there in the sandhills but still in our paddock there was this smoke-house. I can only remember it as a wreck, I sort of know about where it was.

BRIAN   Anyone staying any length of time had no way of keeping fish other than smoking them and this is how it all happened. Smoke-houses of some description popped up everywhere if you were staying a week or a fortnight, some people stayed a month.

BETTY   Some used to go down with their wagons, the Murrays used to go down with their wagons and some of the Gnowangerup families used to go down with their wagons. Marg House talks about going down there for a holiday. They’d set up permanent camps for that time, it was a lovely place really. I don’t know why, but nobody ever got washed off the rocks there, nobody got drowned at sea there. We didn’t swim really in the ocean did we, except right down in that corner?

BRIAN   I never swam in the ocean there.

BETTY   Sometimes I think we had a little dip, quick dip right down by those rocks. We never took any liberties. It was just a lovely place to be.

AS      Did you used to swim in the estuary.

BETTY   Yes, oh yes. The bar was a big bar and you had to walk around...

BRIAN   It would be almost a kilometre long, the bar. We never ever went that far but you could have walked that far it was a beautiful sandy area.

BETTY   The last time Brian and I were there, I think was with June and Clive wasn’t it? Have you been there since then?

BRIAN   I don’t think so.

BETTY   We went down there fishing and a man and son came along and every time they threw out they pulled in big whiting. We got a few but we didn’t get that many, it was their bait that the whiting were going after. They had cockles and they were squashing squid in the cockle juice sort of thing. Anyhow they had about half a sugar bag of fish when we left. We’d got a meal or two but that was all.

AS      So when was the last time that you went there.
BRIAN  Well to that area, to the estuary it would have to have been pre war for me. I rode quite a way there post war in about 1947 or 48 prior to my wife and I and two children [one born at Marra] moving in to Albany. I used to ride because I used to ride the boundary fences as some of them went downstream from the homestead. But I never went back to the mouth.

BETTY  We used to row, we kids used to row from where we had our boat parked, down to the mouth.

BRIAN  That was eight miles.

BETTY  Yes, mum would let us go. We’d ride down there and tie the horses up and get the boat going and row and work on it until we got down... we didn’t go down to the bar very often we usually stopped at the Yates. I think we must have got tired by then Brian (laughs).

AM    So it was eight miles to the Yates was it.

BETTY  No it was less than that.

BRIAN  No to the bar.

BETTY  Actually if you went the other side of the river, Miller’s Point side, and you went in to the Paperbarks there it wasn’t that far from the Paperbarks on to the Yates, was it, really?

BRIAN  Ah, no.

BETTY  Two or three miles.

BRIAN  It was a fair way especially if there was an east wind howling up the river.

BETTY  Yes we used to use something to hold up to sail home on. We didn’t have a proper sail. But old Robert Wellstead, we had a lovely photo but I couldn’t find it I think I must have tipped it out, of Robert Wellstead sailing on the Pallinup River and it looked beautiful. And I was looking also for one of the rocks outside the Marra end of where the yates were, outside our paddock where Jim and Greg and I fished at one stage. There was a lovely photo I had there of Greg holding up a bream like this and looking at it. He was in short pants at that time. But I think I gave it to one of his sons.

AM    You told me a little story about one day when you were fishing, you looked up and there across the river...

BETTY  Oh, (laughs). That was after the war and we had our favourite rocks that we reckoned you could always catch fish off all along the river from where it started up in the Marra end. That was about two miles inside our paddock?

BRIAN  Oh at least yes.

BETTY  You could fish there and right down the river and we were about half way down that Brian said was Kowalds Point or something, because there was and old fisherman, he used to come down there called Ryan Kowald, tough old guy. You know honest and good, decent old fella. He used to come down quite often with a Mr. Thorman, who was the parish priest, Anglican priest. Brian came at one stage when Jim, my husband, and his two mates and myself, and Neville I think, were living at that house at Marra. No one was living in it at the time and these two came and lived there with us and at the end of the day Mr. Thorman would say “Oh, Ryan’s a tough old thing but nobody else would come with him but me”. And Ryan would say “You know, he’s a tough old thing but nobody else would come with him except me” (laughter).

BRIAN  And I don’t blame them either.
They were two of the most cantankerous old beggars that you could ever [meet] (laughter).

Back to the story of what you did see at the river.

Well I was fishing there all calm on a favourite rock of mine and I looked up all of a sudden and there across the river, on a little beach where a jut of land came in and there was water behind it, was a naked man drying himself in the sunshine, or at least standing in the sunshine and getting dry. And that’s when I decided it twern’t my river any more (laughter).

I think that’s gorgeous, I love it.

It was after the war and every rock was spoilt with rubbish and litter, broken glass, plastic, cans and things like this. Mother left me some land down there that she had, a separate block, in her will but I sold it because it was just rather revolting to go there because all the beauty had gone out of it.

That’s sad isn’t it.

And when the floods came, you know it was either a feast or a famine, wasn’t it Brian, really?

Well, yes it was, but at least it did a bit of cleaning up.

Well that’s it, I should think it needs a jolly good sweep out now. When was that very wet year when we went out to Ryans, they had the farm they were managing for Dr. Gilmore, just out of Marra Bridge, this side of Marra Bridge. Their driveway was just a waterway, a canal.

It was in the late 50s that’s all I could say.

Was it?

Yes I would think.

I can’t remember when it was, but that was a good clean out but it brought down a lot of rubbish from the whole way down. Of course like everything the fertiliser from the farms has got into the river.

Did you ever see the bar break while you were down there?

No, I didn’t. It did that time and different ones flew over it and said it was mighty. But it came almost up to the bottom of the Marra Bridge.

That would have been ’82.

Was that ’82? Yes it was pretty late Brian.

I never saw it actually break. I was standing on the bar at Bremer Bay in the evening and you could feel that it was going to break. So I left (laughter). But then we rushed off the next morning down to the Pallinup River to see what had happened there and it had broken and it was a massive break. It would be …

Whereabouts did it open up. Along the camping site side?

That side of the centre of the bar but not that close, it was back towards the centre of the bar length. Further along there was a salmon fisherman’s camp and they had nothing to do with the Pallinup, they used to come in from the country and go to their locality. We were standing
there, we’d come up from Bremer to have a look at this, and we spotted a little rowing boat out in the water. The sea was opposing the river and of course that was creating quite a choppy surface and all of a sudden this boat does a slow roll, in fact it was a quick roll. The occupants of the boat disappeared, but fortunately one came up quick enough to grab a bit of the boat and he hung on. It was just as well because he couldn’t swim and the other person was Bill Hassell’s eldest boy. All the gear from the boat came ashore and young Hassell had the good sense to just keep afloat and he came ashore. But the other fella was left out there where the two opposing forces were meeting and he was more or less stationery, being thrown up and down (laughter) but still hanging on for dear life and then another boat came from the salmon camp and rescued him. But boy he a lucky man.

BETTY He certainly sounded that.

BRIAN Oh, yes. Of course they came in and they picked up young Hassell and took him away, he was helping at the camp. I would think that other gentleman, who I knew quite well, would volunteer to be cook full-time (laughter), no more salmon fishing.

BETTY Who was he Brian?

BRIAN I had the name and lost it…no.

AS When was that, do you remember when that was.

BRIAN That would be in the 80s, oh I don’t know. Our youngest daughter was married to a farmer that was about 30 miles back from Bremer townsite on the road and we’d gone out to visit them and he took us to the...

AM So it’s relatively recent.

BETTY Yes. With the fishing, the first year I was teaching in Pingelly, I went into the hotel to buy some cigarettes and Jim and the fishing crew had just come back from Margaret River where they used to go fishing. They had their fish box there, and coming off the Pallinup River I of course as I went past, I looked like this. There were a few fish in the bottom of the thing. I didn’t know these blokes because I was a new school teacher, anyhow Jim said to me” What do you think of them”? And I said I thought there weren’t very many there and proceeded to walk on my way because I just wasn’t interested in the fact that they’d gone all that distance for those few fish (laughter).

AM They would have caught a lot more in the Pallinup.

BETTY He said “Did you catch more fish than that”? I said “We’d always catch more fish than that in our river”, OUR river, because that was my thinking at that time. Anyhow a bit later on he came looking for me and he said “Where’s this ‘our river’ “? And it led to he and a couple of his friends coming down and Nev and I going with them and staying at Bremer Bay. One of the men rigged up a wool bale, that was to be a smokehouse sort of thing, and [he] had a very restless night keeping the fire going and the smoke going just so and putting the bream on sticks through the wool bale. He got them fixed and that was the only lot he ever got because after that he put them at Marra at the homestead in the old smokehouse and the cattle invariably went looking for something to eat and horned around this wool bale and let the flies in, so his effort weren’t successful there. But I think that’s about all we have to say isn’t it Brian.

BRIAN It is really, yes. We have many memories of it and they are really treasured memories because we will never see it again like that.

BETTY They were fun.
BRIAN  It's everybody's river and they abuse it in many ways. Of course the fishermen have their turn, they are allowed to net for a couple of months and then there's a gap and another fisherman's allowed to go, if it's worth going. When they net they just empty rivers.

Pause

BETTY  What was Mr. Marwick's name.

AM  Tom

AS  You were just talking about the other people down there.

BETTY  Tom Marwick, was farmer at York, out of York, Green Hills or something, and he used to come down with Basil Craig, who owned one of the big hotels in York. They came very often, Basil Craig was rather keen on Freddy Stone's sister, Emily, at one stage. Tom Marwick asked mother if he could adopt Neville, Brian's older brother, the one that came between Brian and myself. He didn't have any children and he reckoned Nev was a good bet and when mum said no he said "Well I'll buy him" (laughter). Mum said no again, she couldn't imagine selling a child. They were two that came from York but then there was a party of York sportsmen. Eminent families in York, well they were all farmers or associated with farmers, they were a couple of younger fellas. Anyhow when they went down they used to go well supplied with liquor and they were very proud of their mountain of bottles that they had built there during their stay at the river. When they went the following year there'd been a flood through the camp and the bottles were scattered hither, thither and wither. I don't know where they got the wire from but they got the wire and they fenced them in, collected them and fenced them in (laughter). They were very proud about that. I was teaching at the time at Pingelly and they came back through Pingelly and called in because the people that had the hotel where the teachers were staying had recently had the hotel at Green Hills. That doesn't sound quite right that name does it, it was something Hills.

BRIAN  No it doesn't. I used to get rams from a fella there.

BETTY  Anyhow they called in to see these people and Mrs. Williamson, the proprietors wife, came upstairs and said there's some people that have just been down at the Pallinup River and I told them that we had a teacher here that comes from there and they want you to come down and have a drink with them. So I went down and they were a wild mob, really and truly. Eventually they stayed the night, booked in and stayed the night because they soldiered on to such an extent that they thought it was best to (laughter).

AM  So really the Pallinup was known for the length of the Great Southern really wasn't it?

BETTY  Yes it really was and known in Perth too because quite a lot of the people used to go through Marra to get to the bar.

BRIAN  At one stage there were a lot of people this side of the river and there was a flood and they had to all pack up and they worked their way back to Marra by road.

BETTY  Yes and they camped in our shearing shed for ages.

BRAIN  About sixty people camped in the shed and one family lived with us up at the house.

BETTY  Yes and dad had the boat up at the house and he was ferrying them over in the boat wasn't he?

BRIAN  A father and son combination had a beautiful boat with the curved oars...

BETTY  Is that what it was.
BRIAN  We’d never seen those curved oar blades before and they did the ferrying and they left the oars with dad after they went. Yes, we had great fun really because there were youngsters in that group. We used to ride the horses and of course we didn’t have enough saddle horses so we took to the team horses (laughter) and some of them were pretty big. Some of these little people sitting on the back of a wide Clydesdale (laughter), they had their legs out there not down there (laughter). It was said that if you fell off a horse seven times you became a good rider, so it was no trouble to fall off a horse seven times in one day (laughter).

BETTY  At one stage mum used to tell the story, dad had been to Cape Riche, I don’t know how but in the buggy. When he came back the river had come down and mum went down to the river, she knew it was down and across the crossing and so on. Anyhow he swam across hanging onto one of the horses tails as he came across, to get back.

AS  Your father too used to take people down the river in the row boat, is that right, he used to take visitors rowing.

BETTY  Look I can’t remember.

BRIAN  Yes that would be right because I think I can recall…

BETTY  Yes when we had the boat down at the end of the bottom paddock and we’d go from there.

BRIAN  It would be the likes of the Milnes, Mal Milne, Mal and dad were great mates.

BETTY  And Owen Gaze and Co. He used to have a party of specials that he would take down there. I wasn’t home then but Peg was.

BRIAN  There would be quite a long span that all that took place because in the early days when mum and dad were first married…

BETTY  They rode everywhere.

BRIAN  Well yes, their nearest neighbour was Chillinup, which is twelve miles away and the other was Cape Riche. There were only three families in the area and they were eighteen miles away.

BETTY  I can remember riding with Nev to Chillinup to get the mail, in tweed pants. I can tell you by the time I got to Chillinup I was a very sore girl (laughter). This rough Donnegal tweed, I hastily disposed of them as far as riding trousers were concerned.

AM  Where did your mum, before she came to live at Marra, where did dad meet mum.

BETTY  Now that I’m not too sure, I think at Bremer Bay, I’m not sure. She was friendly with the Post Masters daughter at Bremer Bay. Now how she became friendly with her I don’t know.

AM  I had the feeling that maybe she was governess to the Wellstead children.

BETTY  No she was governess to the Dempsters in Esperance. I’ve got a copy of her wedding and there were two Dempsters at her wedding. One was master of ceremonies and the other was a description of the bridal grounds and so on and so forth. She was married at Esperance and caught the ‘Ferret’. Now the ‘Ferret’ at the moment is propping up the Bight, it was wrecked there somewhere.

AM  So she caught the ‘Ferret’ from Esperance…
BETTY From Esperance to the eastern states. I think they went to Adelaide first. I have a feeling it said they were on their way to New Zealand, but I felt that she didn’t go to New Zealand that they went to the Blue Mountains.

AM That would have been quite an adventure in those days.

BETTY Dad and Aunt Olive were the two willing workers in the family and they had the least opportunities but did the most work in the Cape Riche family. They did a lot of the shepherding, they used to do a lot in the early days, shepherd the sheep all the time. Dad was a great reader and he could just about recite Walter Scott’s ‘Lady of the Lake’ from beginning to end - I think he could. They had limited books and while they were out shepherding he’d be reading these books and things. But he and Olive were the work-horses in the family. Grandmother was a bit of a matriarch. She’d have the girls up at about half past three to four on Monday morning to do the washing and every morning the yard had to be swept, the front yard or the back yard had to be swept from fence to fence. Have you been to Cape Riche?

AS Yes.

BETTY Well the stone verandah was always swept every morning too, yes.

BRIAN Well I think one of my disappointments, now that we’re talking about our father, was that at one stage he and Bobby Wellstead had fallen for the same young lady down at Bremer. In those days I suppose the only way to settle such a situation was to have a shoot-out (laughter). And they were going to have a shoot-out, but I think they both chickened out in the end.

BETTY They did, one went to Albany and one went to Katanning.

BRIAN They didn’t meet at Yendeyerrup Swamp.

BETTY They were meant to meet at Yendeyerrup Swamp and shoot on sight, but they didn’t (laughter).

BRIAN Neville and I used to try and imagine one would come from one bush and one would come from another bush and all of a sudden there’d be bang, bang. But it didn’t happen. Perhaps it was just as well too.

AM So was the young lady your mother?

BETTY No. She played the piano, there was a photograph of her in mother’s photograph album. She had long hair that she could sit on when she sat on the piano stool, the men thought that was lovely (laughter). Somewhere I’ve got a little notebook of dads, well I think I might have it still, but in it he said he was engaged. He had met this wonderful women, wonderful lady or girl, and he was engaged to her, and that was mum. That was written in there. It also showed a docket, they used to do their shopping orders and send them on the coastal steamer when it called at Cape Riche. Then when it came back on its next journey they’d go in and collect their groceries. You bought flour and sugar and tea and all of those things by quantity. But there was a docket from Barnett’s shop, which doesn’t exist anymore now, but it did in 1935 when I was at school, I don’t know when it went out of fashion. The most expensive item on that was cartridges, they were up around seven pounds, which was a big order, the other things were under the pound. I don’t think I’ve got that now.

AM So those cartridges would have been used probably a lot for you to survive.

BETTY Shoot kangaroos. We kids used to have a money-making thing on brush skins [brush-tailed wallaby] we’d snare. We’d see where the brush would come in under the fencelines to the grass on the fields that were cleared, and there was Ross and Peg and I did this. Ross and Peg used to get on their horses and ride further up. I used to sit on the ones close to the house where I didn’t have to walk far. In the morning we’d go around our traps and as we went past the wood heap
we'd pick up a section of wood ready to dong them on the head (laughs). We had no mercy on them and we didn’t feel any guilt about killing these live creatures or anything, it was just a natural part of our life.

Ross used to skin the brush. As soon as I’d done my two or three holes I’d go home, I didn’t have a very big heap of skins. He and Peg did much better because on the weekends they’d ride out and set where the brush didn’t expect to find snares. He used to hammer the skins up on the shearing shed, which was made of wood, rough wood, and they would always have skins drying out there. When there were enough to realise on them we’d sell them to dad (laughs) and then he would sell them on to one of the traders.

AS
Do you remember how much you used to get for them.

BETTY
No I don’t. But I had a very good system where I sold my heap several times (laughter). But when I came to the third time to sell them he said he’d already bought them twice (laughter), he wouldn’t fall for it and I was disappointed in his dealing then (laughter).

I’m quite sure we got things like a shilling or something like that for it because I can remember ... Well with Brian he was dreadful with the money in the Christmas puddings. He would sit there watching mum cut the Christmas pudding up, when he saw a piece of coin he would say “Can I have this helping mum”? Of course I’d be sitting on the other side of mum saying “But girls come first mum” (laughter), in my usual sweet way.

BRIAN
I had to decide on an alternative to that because I used to get chased away from the serving up of the Christmas pudding. So I accepted my helping and I went and sat on this favourite log I’d found, this was when we used to camp at Cape Riche, and I’d go through it all. If there weren’t any threepences in it I’d toss that lot on the ground, mum couldn’t see from where she was sitting (laughter). I’d go back for another helping.

BETTY
That was a source of money to us (laughter).

AM
Nothing like working the system.

BRIAN
Yes it started at an early age.

BETTY
I can remember at that stage I was keeping my money in a book in the bookcase, the bookcase that Peg has got in her unit now. Mum was having a clean out at one stage and all these threepences and sixpences that I’d been saving and hording scattered everywhere on the floor. She didn’t think it was a very good place to use as a purse (laughter). But money at Marra didn’t mean much really to us because there was nowhere you could spend it.

AM
Can you remember any of the little animals, native animals you might have seen like Echidna or Chuditch..

BETTY
I trapped one, I think it was a dalgyte, is that an animal Brian?

BRIAN
Yes.

BETTY
Stripy back.

BRIAN
Yes. A vicious little creature.

BETTY
Yes nasty little thing.

BRIAN
To get one out of a rabbit trap was very difficult.
BETTY  I was going around my traps and there was this thing in it.

AS  Was it stripy or spotted.

BETTY  It was stripy I think.

AS  The really nasty ones have got spots on their back, they bite and they’re very nasty. That’s a native cat.

BRIAN  Native cat that was it. I was going to say a native cat.

BETTY  We had no sentiment about killing things. If there was a sick chook we stuck it in a bag and took it down to the river and threw it in and then watched to see how many bubbles it would blow, things like this (laughs). It didn’t worry us one little bit and if there were kittens they went the same way, with a stone in the bag to make sure they sank, didn’t they Brian?

BRIAN  I don’t remember.

BETTY  Oh, you’re being all pure and nice (laughs). I can remember jumping with joy at the number of things and all. But we had definite ideas about what you got rid of and what you didn’t. It was a wonderful life really and there was adventures, weren’t there. You had adventures all the time, every time you went out on a horse you had adventures.

BRIAN  Oh yes. I can recall the first time I ever saw and was given a fox whistle and my brother and I went off, we were going to get all the foxes in one foul swoop. What we didn’t cater for, we chose a rock and we sat on this rock that looked down on the riverbed and we overlooked the fact that this rock was really a ledge, it jutted out from where it was anchored in the side of the riverbank. We got blowing this fox whistle and the next thing we had a fox sitting between us (laughter) and we didn’t know what to do and nor did the fox. But we got a lot of foxes with that whistle, it was a wonderful thing.

BETTY  Brian used to come home with some amazing tales about his fox adventures.

– END OF INTERVIEW –

Additional Note

In 1999 the Shire of Albany via Mrs Glenys Armstrong discovered that there was 10 acres of freehold land left to Brian and his brother Neville (now deceased) by his father Gordon Moir. It was originally taken up by his grandfather Andrew Moir. It is now owned by Brian and his nephew Rod who is Neville’s son. It is on the bank of the Pallinup River upstream from Marra Bridge about 2km and is alongside a good pool.
When and where were you born Charlie.

I was born in 1951 in Subiaco, but my hometown was Beverley, out west of Beverley.

So you grew up out there.

Yes, in an area called West Dale, which was on the Dale River. That’s where I spent the first 28 – 29 years of my life. We only had a small farm up there and then we moved down here in 1979. My wife Margaret and myself bought this farm here that was about half developed, so it was about half bush, half cleared country. The cleared country still needed attention so we proceeded. We didn’t do any clearing at all for about 18 months - two years but Margaret and I of a Sunday afternoon, if we had time, we’d pack a thermos and a sandwich and we’d walk through all our bush working out how we were going to clear it and so on and so forth. Because it’s got yate swamps and so on and we wanted to leave them and we’ve connected them up for wildlife to travel. This farm backs onto the Pallinup River reserve and we wanted to retain a connection from our shelterbelts and swamp areas down into the Pallinup reserve, so we’ve done that.

So what attracted you to this area.

As a young bloke I used to go down to Cowaramup, I had an uncle, my fathers brother used to farm down at Cowaramup and as a young fellow I used to go down there for holidays and so on. I always just reckoned it would be great to have a farm not too far from the ocean. When the decision was made that we really needed to do something to expand our landholdings, obviously the coast started to attract me in a pretty big way. Also we were good friends with the Gormans over at Wellstead and Michael suggested to come down and have a look down our way, so we did, and we’re still here.

That’s great. It’s a good spot and you've named your farm Beaufort Plains. How did it get that name.

Well that was the name the previous owner had given it because of the Beaufort Inlet, which is once again just down the back of the farm. And I thought, yes it’s the land above the Beaufort Inlet so the Beaufort Plains is a very apt description, so I kept the name.

Do you know where the name Beaufort came from originally.

I believe it might have been some surveyor or someone on a boat or something like this.

So it’s probably someone’s surname.

I think so, it’s something along that line, or the mate of someone or...

I believe you got a gift from the estuary the first or second day you moved in.

My first experience with the Pallinup River was back in 1979 when we first came down here, Margaret and I. We’d only been here about a day when one of the old gents from down at Miller’s Point had heard that these new people had moved in up to the Beaufort Plains and they’d come from somewhere up in the wheatbelt. So he went out and set a net and duly arrived up home with a smile from ear to ear but with three enormous mullet in this bucket. I’ll never forget it if I live to be a hundred because they were still flicking their tails, that’s how fresh they were. He handed us over these three mullet and it definitely proved to me that I’d arrived pretty close to paradise anyhow I reckon.
I’ve seen a lot of people fish the Pallinup River by handline and a lot by netting, the old square hook as they call it. It draws fishermen from a huge area. From up in the Lakes district and so on and so forth and even years ago apparently there were even people out west of Beverley, out where I originally came from who used to take an annual trip down to the Pallinup river to go fishing. I think in those days they would salt the excess catch and take it back home to Beverley. So it’s always been a great river for fishing for bream and mullet. I’ve caught a few nice bream down there myself.

AS

Yes you said you’d been fishing down there.

CHARLIE

It’s a great natural asset for the area. I have a belief that difficulties in farming will come and go and we’ll always have difficult spots in farming, it’s the nature of the beast. However, over the years I’ve always found that when things were starting to get me down a little bit Marg and I would pack up the trailer and the girls, when they were home, and a bit of tucker and a nice red wine or whatever it might have been and we’d head off down to the river and camp for the weekend. A couple of days of dangle fishing in the water. I always managed to catch one or two bream so that was good, but it was just the relaxation and the clearing of the head and so on. I believe these natural assets that we’ve got, like the Pallinup River, indeed like the coast, I think in actual fact will become more and more important just for their mind clearing sanctuaries and so on.

AS

So like you said before they help you through the hard times.

CHARLIE

I’m sure they do. People will come to an area and if it’s got no features whatsoever, and of course every area has its feature, but if you have got some features that are quite outstanding as the Pallinup River is, that even in the hard times it gives you something to take your mind or focus off the hard times and sort yourself out a little bit. I’m sure that when you’ve spent a day being close to something that’s absolutely quite pristine and beautiful the problems diminish down to about a tenth of what they were before you started. There’s no two ways about it in my mind and areas like this really need to be preserved simply for the sake of our mental health in our communities, if for no other reason, but of course there are a million other reasons as well.

AS

That’s right. You were saying too that you used to take your girls, your daughters down there when they were young.

CHARLIE

The eldest, Elizabeth, would have been about 6 weeks old when we went on our first camping expedition. Mainly I think to bring them up that there’s a lot of good stuff outdoors, that there’s a huge amount of interesting things to do and it doesn’t have to cost you the earth to go and do it. And to try and give them appreciation of the layers of nature and how important all those things are. It was rather strange when they were in their very early teens they really didn’t want to go camping. They went off to school up in Perth and it was an absolute hoot because they’d come home for the weekend and want to bring a couple of their city mates with them. But dad can you get the ute and load it up because we want to go out camping [laughter]. I guess you could say in that that we did hit the spot. That was great to see that they still wanted to go out camping, that was just around the farm, there’s a few really very nice spots around the farm. They’d take their friends out there in the winter time and light a little camp fire. I think there’s still some of the primitive man in us, we seem to like looking in the flames of a camp fire (laughs).

AS

Yes, I’d say so. Also with other visitors you’d take them down there.

CHARLIE

Any visitor that comes to my farm I have always tried to show them the natural beauty around on the farm. Then we’d always take a little journey down to the river or out to Fitzgerald River National Park or wherever it might be. But we were always trying to show people the unique beauty that we’ve got on the South Coast, and that’s from rivers to mountains, coastline and so
on, landforms, plants form and the whole box and caboodle. And we’ve got it all here on the South Coast.

AS

Yes, well I agree with that. And you were saying that over the years you’ve noticed the water quality changing, can you tell me about that.

CHARLIE

As time has gone on it’s my belief that the water quality has gone down and it’s getting more nutrients into the river. It seems to me that each year on the opening rains, if we have a big rainfall event, each year the first flush of water seems to be a little bit dirtier than the one before. That doesn’t happen every single year but we seem to be getting more algae and so on into the river and things are certainly changing, NOT for the better. I think that’s a worry.

AS

You mentioned before that a couple of years ago there was a heavy rain event.

CHARLIE

Yes and I remember going down the river most probably a couple of days after that rainfall event when the water had come down and it was just about like a very thin, brown, liquidy chocolate. It really had a foul smell about it, almost like a dirty old sheep dip or something like this. It was not very pleasant at all. So I suppose what it’s most likely saying is that there’s been removal of a lot of vegetation further up river and obviously the water flowing into the river is not having the benefit of having a filter system to filter it out. So I suppose looking at some sort of rehabilitation along the river I would see a big thing for grasses and sedges and all these sorts of things, which are the natural filters at any rate.

AS

So what about the vegetation itself in the camping areas down there, have you seen many changes to that.

CHARLIE

Not in my time really, it’s always had a weed presence down there as in double gees and Patterson’s curse. That most likely would have come years ago when people would have come in by horse and sulky and so on. The vegetation along the river, down this end at any rate, I think has been quite well preserved, well it’s in the Pallinup reserve at any rate. I think it’s most probably further upstream where things most need to be done.

AS

Were you here in 1982 when the flood came through. Can you remember that.

CHARLIE

I can remember that one very vividly because we actually went down to the Marra Bridge and the water would have been maybe 18 inches from lapping the decking of the bridge. We went out into the middle of the bridge to have a little bit of a sticky beak and just at that moment a great big yate log or something came along and rammed into one of the pylons and the whole bridge sort of shook. Well I reckon I got off that bridge that fast it would have made Cathy Freeman look like she was walking backwards (laughter). But that was a huge big flood event and a huge volume of water, unbelievable, and it went out, of course broke the bar and went out into the ocean and made a great big brown mark right out into the ocean. I believe there are actually aerial photos around of that. It’s quite a spectacular photo.

AS

I have seen the one of the Marra bridge.

CHARLIE

I think there are photos of it actually going out into the ocean, but that really did flush the river out. That was in January and some of the most incredible bream fishing you could ever imagine took place after that with a hand line. It was just unbelievable and the size of the bream. I was with one of the old blokes down from Miller’s Point one day and he caught, on the hand line, bream that was just a smidge under 5 pounds. That’s a big bream, it was a beautiful huge big fish. But once again I had friends come down from Beverley and Brookton and so on, we used to just go down to the river and go bream fishing. They are magnificent fish to catch and magnificent fish to eat there is no two ways about it.

AS

On the bank, you haven’t got a boat.
CHARLIE No we used to just go on the bank and I have got a few little spots that I can't divulge on this tape [laughter]. But yes, magnificent fishing no two ways about it. But it would be my desire I feel that if work could initiated that we could start to see the rivers coming cleaner. I think that would be an incredible thing to have happen and it would be really adding a very good interest rate to an already incredible asset I reckon, there's no two ways about it.

AS So that's what you would like to see for the future.

CHARLIE Exactly. Learn about the river and so on and so forth and then take steps to start to reverse the detrimental effects. It won't happen overnight but I'm sure if we set our minds to it with a heart and a will that it can be done. Then it would be great for my great grandchildren to be able to visit a river that's pretty well pristine. Even if it is saline, but it was saline for a long long time in fact most probably forever but that's its natural state. It would be great if we could start to set something up for our grandchildren and great grandchildren that they could go back and visit that in as near as possible to its natural state. If I could do that I would feel I would have most probably contributed to mankind on this earth I think.

AS Yes that's for sure. We've been talking about different stories, do you have any other stories that you can remember now that we've got your memory going.

CHARLIE Not really. I suppose as I say that the stories that I do remember are the ones going fishing and so on. Of just the great times we had going fishing and the camaraderie that you have with people when you go fishing and the great relaxation it is and the great family outing and all those sorts of things.

AS Do you still go down there fishing.

CHARLIE The unfortunate thing is with the pace of life that we all seem to have to run with these days we don't go as often as we did. Margaret and I have been trying to go at least once a year, just to go down there and chill out as it were. But not as often as I'd like to go. And it's not just going down the river to go fishing either it's an incredible wild flower area too. Down Paperbark Road and down through there, magnificent spider orchids and in actual fact [there's] a lot of the ravines between Paperbark Road and Miller's Point Road, there are some huge ravines that lead down into the Pallinup. I'm sure there's lots of undiscovered plants and things in there, absolutely certain of it. I think they're worth a good look in time and study and so on.

AS Have you done any walking along the river.

CHARLIE Only small amounts, not as in a big expedition or anything, but I'd love to go through the bush from Paperbark Road virtually down to Miller's Point Road. It all got burnt several years ago in a great big fire in December, it just burnt everything. We had to do some back burning, that was in the December, and in the following September a couple of friends, Marg and myself went down and camped down there. We did just a lot of walking around in the bush, not a vast area but the bloom of spider orchids and so on was just unbelievable. It is a very, very important spider orchid area.

On that I was up at the Kings Park Wildflower Show two years ago and talking to Kingsley Dixon, the flower person. He happened to ask me where I came from and I said down Bremer Bay way he said is that anywhere near the Pallinup River and Boxwood Hill and I said that is exactly right where I come from. He said, well it's the spider orchid capital of Western Australia, in his book. So that was something a lot of people wouldn't really know, that it is a very unique spider orchid area. Even some of the swamps that we have retained on this farm have got some magnificent spider orchids in them. We've got one swamp, the closest one to the reserve, it has got a lot of different coloured spider orchids in it. I go to another swamp and it seems to be all
white spider orchids. I’ve got another one that’s enamel orchids, so they all seem to have their own little habitat. Then I’ve got another one that’s got a real mixture of spider orchids, donkey orchids, the whole box and caboodle.

Just on that one I had some English visitors come out a couple of years ago as well and they wanted to camp on the farm. I took them out to the swamp that’s got a lot of different coloured spider orchids and it was in the spring so they were in full bloom. Well, you would have thought I’d given these people a million dollars, they were just blown out of this world that they could go to a place. I’d just got them a few mallee roots so they could have a nice little camp fire, honestly I have never seen people so happy in all my life. They took all these photos of the spider orchids and sent some down to me. So those sorts of things they do give a lot of people a huge amount of pleasure and it’s good, pure pleasure. I think we’ve got to preserve it forever, there’s no two ways about it.

– END OF INTERVIEW –
Interview With Jeff and Rhoda Ellett On 17 May 2001

AS
Jeff when and where were you born.

JEFF
I was born in Melbourne in 1926.

AS
Where have you lived.

JEFF
Well where I was reared was a Koo-Wee-Rup, which is southeast of Melbourne. Not long after we were married we moved up to Yarrawonga, that was about 1958. In 1962 we came over to a land board sitting at Chillinup because the blocks through here were coming up and we found that we were allocated a block on Kojaneerup Springs Road and that’s where we lived.

RHODA
Shifted over in 1963 and developed the new land here.

AS
Rhoda when and where were you born.

RHODA
I [grew up] in Victoria too at Cranbourne, it was just a little country town out of Melbourne in 1930 and I was brought up there and married and went to Koo-Wee-Rup of course and the same story. We’ve got six children and eighteen grandchildren now. We came over to the west as we said in 1963. Developed the new land and farmed here for thirty-five years and then we’ve just retired to the back of Wellstead. Our son is on the farm, we sold the farm here and bought a farm out northeast of Esperance and our son and family are out there farming now.

AS
You were telling me that you spent some time on the Pallinup and you used to go over there for holidays.

JEFF
Long weekends, or go there for a week.

RHODA
We took the caravan. Just down to Miller’s Point really, and we’ve fished down the mouth and just down to the bridge here. Just with the kids in the early days. We saw the flood going under the bridge where the water came right up to the bridge.

AS
That was the 1982 one.

RHODA
Yes

JEFF
You can’t image it can you when you go over it now.

RHODA
We’ve not been closely associated with the Pallinup really, not like the Moirs and a lot of the families that lived along the river. Ruth Moir is another one that’s lived on the river.

AS
Yes, I’ve spoken to Ruth, I spoke to Ruth last week. And Brian Moir, I’ve spoken to Brian, they were at Marra.

JEFF
That was in the early days.

AS
Yes, very interesting stories. You have been doing some research Jeff on the history of the area and talking to the Nyungar people, can you tell me something about that.

RHODA
It’s fairly disjointed but he’s written quite a bit.

JEFF
Yes, you have to realise that they never lived in one place all the time, they travelled according to their food supply and the seasons. When the first non-aboriginal came to Australia and started to settle around there were some families looked after by the new settlers and they
didn’t travel on then. They stayed in that one area because they were fed by the new settlers and they looked after their stock and so forth, which was marvellous. Until the first Aboriginal Protectorate laws were passed and their enforcers were given the power to go around and take aboriginal children from their parents and put them into missions and so forth, the idea was to make them better servants for white master. Until that happened there wasn’t the mixing of the bloods all over Western Australia, because in the early days the tribes went out well before the first settlers came over here and they were all families. The families had the law, and each family had a totem and there were some totems that they weren’t allowed to intermarry with, but over time they were all inter-related. Their language was basically all the same, all around with the different families.

RHODA They had different dialects didn’t they.

JEFF Yes but they could basically talk to one another.

Break

JR The way they looked after their environment, the total environment, they had to look after their environment.

RHODA It was natural for them to do so.

JEFF Because they couldn’t go down to the local store and buy a pound of butter or anything because there wasn’t anything like that, it was their food and they knew how to manage it. They never burnt any of our bush, their bush, under 8 to 10 years depending on the season. They never lit a fire before 2 o’clock in the afternoon and some afternoons they wouldn’t light the fire before 6 or 7 o’clock in the evening they had to wait until that wind had died down, or settled down.

RHODA That was their burning fire not their camp fire.

JEFF Yes their bush burning. The amazing part of it was, and some of the old Nyungars aren’t quite sure, but the majority of them that I’ve spoken to have told me that the old grandmas were the ones that carried the fire sticks as they were travelling from one area to another. They never lit any of the bush until they were told by the grandpas, the old men, the elders, and as I said some evenings they wouldn’t light them before 6 o’clock.

RHODA They didn’t have wildfires then.

JEFF No, no such thing as a wildfire.

RHODA Even the lightening strikes were never a wildfire because everything was just patch burnt.

JEFF That’s what we’re trying to go back to.

RHODA And the animals could come in to those areas.

JEFF Where the fresh food is after the burn, and incidentally that is totally 1080 free, the fresh growth after the burn. Now you go to the next year after the dry summer and the first rain in the autumn and the regrowth, the poison plants, are totally poisonous. You knew that did you?

AS I didn’t know that.

RHODA Just at certain times, but they understood all this, they controlled their food supply to their population, to their area. You see this bush here, this hasn’t been burnt for yorns, this is at Wellstead, and it’s as dense as anything because of the restrictions. They never had that they could travel through the bush because it was more open.
And you were telling me that the Pallinup is an aboriginal name. Do you know what it means.

I can’t find out. Julia got me the history of Gnowangerup from before non-aboriginals came and also the history of Jerramungup. The Nyungar name for that area was Yarramungup and that meant the place where the yate trees grow on the hills. When that land was first surveyed for farmlands the surveyor changed it because it was easier to write Jerramungup than Yarramungup. When the first settlers came and they found that the Pallinup was so salty they called it the Salt River but then when he did that first surveying he went back to the aboriginal name of Pallinup. You could say Pallinup river to somebody up in Perth or anywhere and they’d say, “Oh, I know where that is”, which was quite good.

Down here at Hassells, the first year that they had sheep there, in the autumn the aborigines weren’t allow to carry on their burning program because that was against Englishman’s ideas. The first winter they lost sheep, they died and that happened again the next year. One of the old Nyungars, how they did it I don’t know, he and Bill’s ancestor, grandfather, talked about it and somehow he told Bill’s grandfather that it was the poison in the bush that was killing the sheep. After their burns there was no poison so he said righto you carry on with your burning program, and the next year they hardly lost any sheep.

Before non-aboriginals came to Australia, and I’m only talking about this area around here, from Bremer Bay through to Albany. Before non-aboriginals came to Australia people only had one name like our Christian name they didn’t have a surname. After non-aboriginals came to Australia the babies had two names, their family names their father’s name and that’s why most of the aboriginal families around have a non-aboriginal surname.

So for the Wellstead people Cape Riche was a lot more popular for a place to go down to the coast and the Pallinup was more the people who lived a bit further out. It was fairly inaccessible, so they tell me in the early days, it was a real trek to get in there.

It was a real trek to get down to Cape Riche too in the early days.

Yes in the real early days. The Pallinup even when we up came here...

It was only dirt roads.

It’s still a bit of a trek in to the mouth, if you go in either way.

And before the bridge was built, getting across the crossing and going down to Miller’s Point, that was a bit of an adventure.

Yes. You went in to Miller’s Point did you?

Yes, I’ve been in to Miller’s Point.

It’s lovely the way they keep it there.

You just imagine hunting sheep across the mouth of the Pallinup, across the sandbar, there were no dogs or anything like that in those days. Now you’ve been down to Bremer Bay?

Yes

Have you seen the track across the sandbar there where you head out to go out to Doubtful Island?
AS
Yes

JEFF
Well that’s where Hassells used to herd their sheep across there too.

RHODA
All along the coast across the Pallinup, across the Bremer crossing there and on right down to Doubtful Island. They had the shearing sheds and everything down there. That was the Hassells.

JEFF
The shearing shed has gone now.

RHODA
They bought them down from Jerramungup as well, the Hassells.

JEFF
They took them from here.

RHODA
But they were mainly from Jerry where it first started, the Hassells. That’s an interesting place. Do you know Bill Hassell?

AS
Yes, I have met Bill.

RHODA
Yes well we visited him down at Doubtful too at the shack there.

JEFF
Sacred sites, there are three registered sacred sites in our area, one of them is up at Kojaneerup Springs, one is down here at Waychinicup and one at Cheynes Beach too, but around the beach.

RHODA
But Angela’s only doing the Pallinup, is there any on the Pallinup?

JEFF
No there aren’t any.

RHODA
Well that’s what Bob said. There’s something at the back of his place, I don’t know whether it’s a gazetted sacred site but there’s an aboriginal pool there and they fenced the area off so that it would never be cleared. So you can talk to Bob about it anyway and he will have quite a lot of information about it.

JEFF
Aden Eades told me that he, this was when aboriginal land rights was first mooted, he and a few other old elders from in there came out all through this area looking around for artefacts and sacred sites. Now there are sites around the coast that I know of where they used to hold initiation ceremonies and where they would have corroborees, that went on forever you know. Well they never found any, they found them at Kojaneerup Springs and down at Cheynes Beach and Waychinicup and the mouth of the river, but that was all.

Break

JEFF
You haven’t been in to the mouth of the Pallinup from this side have you?

AS
I have yes.

JEFF
How long ago.

AS
About 9 years ago.

JEFF
Oh

AS
Not since it’s been burnt. It was before it was burnt the last time I got in there.

JEFF
Oh my godfather, you should see it now. I’m a member of the Wellstead Progress Association’s Coast Care Committee. We managed to get the track down to Boat Harbour done up but the track down to the mouth of the Pallinup has been done up about three parts of the way down.
But the other end of it is something awful. Because Cape Riche now costs you $5.50 a night and the same at Miller’s Point, there are people who won’t cough up so they’re going to places like Boat Harbour and the mouth of the Pallinup on this side as alternatives. Well, you should see the track. I know the salmon fishermen there near the mouth of the Pallinup and I also know two farmers on the side of Boat Harbour Road and they said that this last spring and summer-autumn they have never seen so many vehicles backwards and forwards every day. Now we’re trying to get some more money to do up the other end of Boat Harbour track, the Pallinup river track I mean. Now my godfather!

AS

So where have you been trying.

JEFF

All the bureaucracies that you could ever think of.

Break

JEFF

Now these reserves down here, that one on the western side from the Pallinup through to Boat Harbour track that was burnt seven years ago this coming December and three of our fellows nearly got burnt in that.

AS

Was that a wild fire.

JEFF

No, no it was supposed to be, and this is something that upsets me, it was supposed to be lit by an aboriginal campfire on the east side of the Pallinup river, at Paperbarks, well it is where they were camped down there. We don’t want that to happen down here. One of the best incentives we’ve got behind us now is that fire in the Stirlings, up the eastern end, because there are an awful lot of people really up in arms about it. Because the whole total environment is wiped out.

– END OF INTERVIEW –

Interview with Handley (Bomber) Page on 4 April 2001

Interviewer  Angela Sanders. Amelia Moir also present

AS          OK Bomber can you tell me when and where you were born.

BOMBER      Yes, Gnowangerup West Australia in what we used to call the old hospital 1926.

AS          Where have you lived.

BOMBER      Quite a number of places round the Great Southern. I did a two year stint in Perth and most of the other time I've been working on farms and different things around the southern area until I came to Albany.

AS          How long have you been in Albany.

BOMBER      To live permanently I've been here since '56. Prior to that we used to come for holidays and prior to that we used to work here but I was the only one of the family that was born up at Gnowangerup because that was where dad was working at the time. Prior to that he had a wood cartage yard here, him and his brother, they had a contract to cart for the woolen mills. We moved around town here in several places, the job eventually ran out like all contracts do and he went back up to where we originally were years and years before.

Stopped there and did me schooling there in a tin shed, what there was of it. Left school at 14, went to work on this farm which brings us up to the time of the war years of 1939-45. As a young lad of some 16 years of age I was working on a farm at Gnowangerup, my parents were also on a farm at South Borden. I was sometimes given the opportunity to push a bike some 36 miles out to where my parents were for weekends. That was all gravel roads in those days, there was no gear changes on bikes it was just one gear and that was it you know, your legs. Instead of being an armstrong I was a legstrong (laughs).

I was given a chance with my father who managed to obtain enough petrol to go camping at Pallinup estuary, because in those days all the petrol was rationed. This was great as we had approximately two weeks camping and fishing. One such trip we went to Bremer Bay in a Ford A car, that's the one with the old canvas top on it, 1927 or something and this was after harvest of course. It was a hard trip as boxes of provisions of food etc had to be carried on the running boards. The old cars had running boards and they weren't straight down like the modern cars. So 6 by 1 boards had to be placed on each side and secured by bolts and this was done to carry our provisions where we had to go. Halfway down there we came across a big stretch of water on the road. So we had to camp by the roadside for four or five days in tents living in the bush, nothing around you, as dad wouldn't risk getting stuck, because there was about 300 metres of water you see and we didn't know how deep it was. Bremer had a big storm down there. We had to unload the old car in order to get at our stores and blankets etc and when we thought it was ready to go on we had to carry all the heavy stuff across first to make sure that the car wouldn't get stuck. We took another track through the bush to get there, by hand we had to do that. We went across and got the car on a dry patch of road so then we had to load it all up again.

Travelling along the edge of the road, which was still bush, an old sand track virtually, a bush put a hole in the radiator so as prepared as dad was he always carried a soldering iron. When we did manage to get there he repaired it. All this trouble cut our trip short so as you can imagine only a small amount of fish was caught. It was real hard work and by then we were short of bait, thankfully we caught a rabbit and a swan was secured. But when the lines were baited and we put them into the edge of the river channel, meat ants were so bad not only did they crawl all over us they swarmed out across the water to the meat that was on the end of our
lines before the meat sunk. This was something I could hardly believe. Shortly after this we had to pack up and head for home. No one talked very much about our Bremer trip.

This was one of our coastal holidays that we didn’t enjoy. However some 12 months later our next trip, we’d saved enough petrol on the farm for our next trip to the Pallinup estuary. This was a great trip. A 30 hundred-weight Chev truck was used which was good and had plenty of room to move about on. As we had approximately two weeks of camping and fishing on this trip we used to fish and sleep, swimming too, as we camped at the estuary close to the beach. One day ‘you know who’ got rubbish for not catching many fish. So up next morning at 4.0 am I got up to fish for bream of which I got 5 big ones. I never was rubbish anymore.

In this camp a family from Narrogin way goes fishing at Pallinup every year. This bloke we made fun of him because he used to fish with a line tied to his foot and then he’d lay back on the bank and wait for the fish to bite. The thing about this is, and we couldn’t get over it, this chap had the biggest toe I had ever seen! It was 3 inches long and 2 inches wide if I can remember what it was like. We could only laugh and say he would have been good at harvest time with that big toe in the gas pedal. Us boys always remarked about Claude and his big toe. He gave us scope to keep the pot boiling. About two days before we came home some time was spent fishing and catching enough fish to bring home. So an apple case was used with a layer of seaweed on the bottom and a layer of fish and this was repeated until the box was full. A layer of fish and a layer of seaweed, that was the only way, because there was no fridges and no way of keeping fish we only had this salt thing and when you got them home you had to get rid of them quick. I had to push the bike back to Goowangerup and my family carried on at South Borden on the farm. Dad gave most of the fish away.

Like I said before petrol was hard to get and people say it was a good easy life but hard but happy. Seeing petrol was in short supply people used to set to and make charcoal to put into gas producers. I for one burnt mallee roots and buried them in the paddock and two days later dug them up and they were black and all cold. The charcoal was then fed into a burner with a fan to keep it hot. The water tank, about a gallon in size, with a top fitted to drip water onto the hot coals. Now this burner was made on a frame so that it would fit on a motor car. This made gas although it lacked some power it helped all people and some of them were able to stock up a bit on fuel. I guess looking back over the years this was how we obtained enough petrol to go camping and fishing at Bremer and Pallinup.

AM And did you put salt with it Bomber or just seaweed.

BOMBER Not that I can remember just the seaweed.

AM There was a fair bit of salt in the seaweed.

BOMBER Yes a fair bit of salt in the seaweed. And of course being in the summer time like that the river was fairly low and it has a tendency to go salt doesn’t it when it gets low, because they need flushing out with winter rains to replenish everything.

AM Did you use a flat fruit case or an ordinary dump fruit case.

BOMBER An ordinary dump apple case. I think they were made out of jarrah or karri, I can’t remember what they were made out of but that was all we had. Very intriguing, I mean with all the work you went to to get there you sometimes wonder if it was worth it.

AS Did you eat the fish as well.

BOMBER Oh yes, we all liked fish. We had fish five times a day, breakfast, dinner, morning and afternoon tea (laughter). Of course in those days it was reasonably easy to catch fish, you know, although the bream fish is a very wily sort of fish he is very hard to catch. You’ve got to sort of bait your
line and have a runner on it, on the end of your line and leave it. You don’t touch that line until you see the line move, because if you do he knows straight away there is someone on the other end of it. When he pulls this loose bit of line, about that much, oh boy this is all clear and away he goes with the bait see. Give the line a quick snap and you’ve hooked him. He can’t do anything, they have a very strong mouth but then he’ll dive and dart around in the water and if he can find a stone or a tree or a hole he’ll get in it, they are hard to catch not like ordinary fish.

AS

So you just fished off the edge.

BOMBER

Off the edge, yes mostly off the edge, we never had boats in those days and there were no nets in any of the inlets in those days that I can remember of.

AM

That was the reason why there was lots of fish around.

BOMBER

Of course nowadays you still can catch them but you won’t catch so many in a boat you have to have a net to catch them.

AM

What did you use Bomber mainly for bait. Obviously when you went to Bremer you used swans and they used to use swans...

BOMBER

I don’t know, we probably took scraps of stuff we had from Teana. I don’t know what they really had. But rabbits were flaming hard to catch too because they were ducking around. They had no warrens they just lived in this short scrub. They would go behind a bush, you couldn’t shoot it, you couldn’t find a hole to set a rabbit trap in, you would go a bit further and just get lined up and he would be gone again. He was like a crow he knew when you were pointing a gun at him. In desperation we got this swan and later in years they became protected species so you can’t shoot them, but we got quite a lot of bait off that swan, kept us going for a few days.

AM

I know there were a lot of swans used for bait in the early days.

AS

Yes. So how old were you when you went down there fishing.

BOMBER

About 16 the first trip, something like that.

AS

Have you been down there since.

BOMBER

Only for a day sort of thing. Patty’s brother had a bus camp down there about 3 years ago and he said why don’t you come down for a day we might get a few fish. This time instead of being camped on the south side where we used to camp, you cant get in there with a bus or anything unless it’s a light vehicle or big tyres or something like that, four wheel drive or whatever. So we came in the gravel way, which is Miller’s Point on the north side. We went in there and had a great day there. Went out with a chappy on a boat. There again the nets come into it he had 900 metres of net out for mullet (pause), I’m not sure how much but he had a lot of net out and he picked up 900 kilos of mullet in an hour.

AS

Wow that’s a lot of fish.

BOMBER

A lot of fish, they were like this [indicates size], they weren’t small fish they were big mullet. But in a way it was easy but in another way it wasn’t. I knew that when you were chasing mullet you had to stir them up if you could, because mullet are supposed to be a surface fish although they do go down near the sand sometimes if its shallow water looking for food. What we did, when we set the net and tied the ends off, it only took us about 20 minutes to set the net, a fair bit of it anyway, something like a thousand yards. I don’t know offhand how much it was but we circled that net with this boat flat strap all the time up and down the other side of it and by doing it it excited the mullet and they didn’t know where they were going and bang they were all netted in the net. So I was lucky enough, we brought three or four home that night.
Paddy’s brother was out on a boat earlier and he’d caught a few bream and we were cleaning bream and mullet and had a barbecue dinner, it was really nice.

AS

So you used to camp on the south side you said.

BOMBER

Yeah, in the early days, yeah.

AM

It was commonly called the Paperbarks.

BOMBER

Paperbarks, well Millars Point. Paperbarks is the first one you come to. You can’t get in there unless you have a damn good four wheel drive.

AM

There’s probably two paperbarks I think, there is one further up in Marra and the Paperbarks what we used to call the Paperbarks was down near the estuary.

BOMBER

I have been into paperbarks but I went in there with Paddy’s brother because he had a four wheel drive. You would never get an ordinary vehicle in there with holes 2 feet deep, you have to go through the scrub and all this sort of thing. But there is a terrible lot of people camp in there at different times, a lot of broken bottles and stuff down in there so they’ve had a good old weekend there I suppose some of them in days gone by. But it’s a pretty good place to fish too and I don’t know how far below the bridge where the Paperbarks are.

AS

When you used to go down there as a teenager were there a lot of other people there.

BOMBER

I suppose there was half a dozen other tents that were there. Different people there on holidays catching fish. [break]

Funny man I can tell you, all we could do was see this big toe and we laughed every time [laughter] I reckon he had a toe about that long and about that wide.

AM

He was blessed with something different.

AS

Yes.

BOMBER

He was a bit of a character I think at the same time.

AS

It sounds like a good way of fishing.

— END OF INTERVIEW —
The last 8 miles of the Pallinup River to the estuary was an unbroken stretch of water. At the beginning it touched our farm “Marra” for this half of the distance, a part that especially presented so many exciting reasons for regular weekend entertainment – to swim, row our boat, fish and hunt ducks. A two-room cottage of weatherboards and corrugated iron was built mainly to allow the extra time needed to row our 12-foot wood boat to the estuary as a special weekend event. That remaining 4 miles spelt much excitement to the mind of an 8-year-old. Also endurance, when doing a turn on the oars.

There were very important landmarks enroute. The “Paper Barks” was one spot for extra good fishing and opposite to which was a small peninsular, bordered with “pig face” and then sand at the water’s edge. Such an inviting spot for some refreshment on the way. Out of sight, behind, was a well-chosen haven for ducks. “The Yates” at a bend in the river, (one of several) was a worthy sight with it’s large yate trees growing close to the water. Red meat-ants there were a real pest when ashore. From around the bend, excitement tended to mount along with the first sighting of the estuary.

The river by then had begun to widen and continued to do so until the impressive score of 1 mile was reached near the end. But before that was a sheltered bay, alive with ducks with a floating mass of teal, black duck, mountain duck and swans. On sight of us they were quickly airborne enmass making a breath-taking sight. A wonderful fresh water spring trickled into the river nearby. It was of course, the main drawcard to the waterfowl, visitors and campers were glad to have such a water supply on hand also. There was an inviting clump of paperbarks on a floor of white sand.

Amongst the campers were two separate families of stud sheep breeders who declared the peace of the Pallinup plus fish and ducks were unequalled. Another regular was a doctor looking for an all-over tan. He let it be known that visitors were quite welcome providing their approach was noisy enough. Some business people from Perth came regularly for various reasons, mainly quiet and pristine surroundings.

“Marra” has a scrub paddock, including the fresh water spring, to give the Bungaree wethers a change of diet. Although fenced, it needed a shepherd on guard against dingoes. Extra heavy winter rains inland would fill the river’s water level enough to open the bar into the sea. The great King George whiting would then come in in large numbers inviting an extra visit from “Marra” and more excitement for that little 8 year old to whom the estuary was nothing short of magic.

— END —
Annual Holiday

I remember the excitement as a child when we packed and went for our annual holiday. It was the only time of the year for the inland farming family when we went to the sea. Going to the sea was a whole 50 miles away but it might as well have been on the other side of the earth. With everything packed into the old soft hood Dodge car off we set. Amid the excitement I had one fear. I hated crossing the Pallinup River at Marra. On the east side of the river there was virtually no bank but on the west there was one so high that it scared the wits out of me. I insisted at all costs that Dad stop the car and let me out. “Thank you Dad” I will quite happily walk up the other side. How I hated that slope. The whole 50 mile of road was no more than a sand track. Narrow tyres on the car, I am sure, prevented us from getting bogged. We arrived hot and sweaty. We always took our holiday in January. In the long school holidays. We would proceed to unpack and make camp. I have recollections of us having two tents a large and small one. The large was used as a kitchen and Mum slept in there. The smaller tent was occupied by us three children. There were no modern gadgets then for keeping food so it was pickled meat, powdered milk and a plentiful supply of black bream caught from the river. The estuary of the river was only a few metres from camp.

It was always exciting to explore the sand bar. It was so high that the ocean could not be seen from the river side. The sand was coarse with broken shell scattered through it. It was so different from the fine sand at the farm. Because it was so loose it was difficult to climb. It was always fun to climb to the top and see the breakers rolling in on the beach. Remember this was our once a year holiday.

I hated thunderstorms. Because I slept in a room on the verandah at home I always called out to be taken inside. Here I was sleeping in a tent. Where was I going to? I clearly remember the storm, the lightening illuminating the white canvas tent. I have no idea what I did, as there was nowhere else to go.

There were a number of other people who always camped there. One family – named Marwick- how’s that after forty years to remember that name. They were obviously very keen fishermen. I have very vivid memories of them dragging a shark with a vehicle through the camping area. It seemed and probably was the biggest thing I had ever seen in my life. This same family would have a church service every Sunday morning to which everyone was invited.

END
Interview with Peg Tyndale Powell on 16 March 2001

Interviewer: Angela Sanders, Amelia Moir also present

AS Peg can you tell me when and where you were born.

PEG I was born on 17 March 1914 in Albany at Nurse Brown’s Maternity Hospital on the slopes of Mount Melville, later to become the home of the artist Sir Claude Hotchin.

AS And where have you lived.

PEG Well, at many places, at Marra on the Pallinup River to begin with and later my family acquired a farm at Borden. Then I went away to boarding school but along came the 1930 depression when I and my elder brother were whipped away from boarding school because of costs and then we were made into farm workers. That went on for some years until a young man was sent to the district as a jackaroo and we fell in love but were unable to marry because he had to do a stint. He wanted to be a planter like his father in Malaya and he could not be taken on until he was a certain age and also he was not allowed to marry until after the first agreement, which was a period of four years. So in 1939 we married and I went to live in Malaysia in the most northern state Kedah on a rubber estate and that was a very happy life. We had our baby son but he was only a few weeks old when the Japanese invasion threatened and I was evacuated back to my home town and family at Borden.

AS Peggy can you tell me about your time at Marra as a child.

PEG Well it was play time mainly with horses with my older brother, who was only a year older, and whatever he did was OK for me to do also. We liked to be sent out mustering sheep and during that period, as we had read all of our fathers’ thrilling novels by Zane Grey, we acted out the part as we went looking for the sheep. Suddenly my brother would raise his hand in the halting position and I would whisper “why are we stopping” and he would say “Can’t you see that spiral of smoke over the hill there, Indians are there, we better be on the lookout”. So then we would get going again and finally find the sheep and take them home.

We did a lot of farm things my brother and I, we hunted and we learnt to use a gun, which would horrify most people in this era. Two guns that were single shot, they weren’t repeaters and a single shot shotgun for raiding the parrots in the orchard and a 22 rifle for whatever. We weren’t awfully good with that because you had to be an experienced shot to use any type of rifle. But there were rules, very severe rules set down by father. We were never allowed to carry a loaded gun. If we got over the fence with a gun we had to place the gun, unloaded though it was, on the ground first and then mount the fence and things like that. He was very strict on the subject of safety and riding our horses at high speed down hill was a no no. That is another example, and we were taught to look after our horses and to think of them before ourselves.

We had a wonderful orchard at Marra and that was a great draw card and we always had a stack of preserved fruits and jams and things as a result. My father always had a lovely vegetable garden so we were fairly self-supporting. But the main things and the hardware required for the farm came to us by boat to Cape Riche and any produce we had. Bales of wool and bags of oats were loaded on a dray, a small wagon, and we would set off to Cape Riche where we would unload our farm earnings in an old shed there at one of the beaches, an old shed built by convicts. Then we would spread our tarpaulins at one end of it to make ourselves a camp overnight while we awaited the arrival of the ship. Then of course, the usual row boats came in to load up our produce to take to the ship to bring back to Albany. Also at that time we would have got an order through to a shop named Barnettes in Albany, which supplied our food stuffs like tea and sugar and flour and the necessities and hopefully, from our point of view, some nice biscuits that were different to the ones our mother made. We’d tootle off home with our load.
and also of course I must mention there was hardware, fencing, coils of netting, nails and bolts and things for the farm, and we’d return to the homestead at Marra.

The arrival of ships were very important to both Cape Riche people, our relatives at Cape Riche, and also to us. It was very exciting to see the ship coming in and especially at the time when an uncle of ours, a captain, who was to be an uncle of ours, was skipper of the Kybra and he eventually married one of the Cape Riche girls and that was all very exciting.

AS
That is wonderful and you said in your piece that your father had a big row boat that you used to go on the river with, can you tell me about that.

PEG
Not a big row boat, near 12 footer. Are you switched off now.

AS
No I’m still going, can you tell me about the row boat and your times on the river.

PEG
Well as mentioned in here [written piece], the river was our source of entertainment and we usually managed to get down every weekend, more often than not, for just one day, Sunday. But sometimes luckily, for a whole weekend and then we could proceed to go down to the estuary as described.

AS
So it was a source of your entertainment, did you used to catch fish down there too.

PEG
Yes, the fish supply was marvellous and continued to be marvellous for many years until the professional fishermen were allowed in and then the numbers receeded considerably.

AS
How long were you at Marra altogether.

PEG
Off and on, I suppose we owned Marra until I was about in my early teens but we had another farm at Borden and so it was a case of up and down. We had a man in charge at Marra managing the place, looking after the animals. Then when war came my father did an incredibly foolish thing, out of the kindness of his heart, his three physically fit sons all wanted to join up. Three from one family to go to war was fairly exceptional. I never ever heard of it happening in any other family, but off they went and they decided amongst themselves that it would be interesting. They presumed they would all return from war and therefore being one in each of the three services they could compare notes and they could have some very interesting chatters. Two did return, one did not. When they went away there was no one left to manage Marra and most of the work and the income was being received from Cherridup because it had more country suitable for cropping. So who was to manage Marra? But dad said no problems, you, pointing to me, can do that. And my mother could go with me and of course my baby son. But my mother was an angina case and so although dad considered she was able to do farm work she was not really and so she looked after the house and the baby son while I continued to run the farm.

AS
So how long did you run the farm for.

PEG
For 3½ years until the end of the war when one of my brothers came home.

AS
What was that like.

PEG
I managed because I had been brought up on the farm and I did not have to use farm machinery. Periodically my father came down to help me fill up the chaff shed for feeding all the animals. I should mention that we had our first tractor and that was a very big event but that was needed on Cherridup, the Borden farm. Therefore the team was housed or stabled at Marra and I had them to look after and an assortment of cattle including two milking cows, which we needed very much. We ran only wethers there because a lot of the country was uncultivated and although we ran Wellard’s breed of sheep....pause.
There were no amenities as farmers know of them nowadays. There were absolutely no amenities, no water laid on, no self feeders and also sprays for flystrike and things like that I had to manage as well as I could. It was incredible what a person can do when they have to and how to treat sheep when there was fly strike detected in a mob. It was challenging to run them into the shearing shed and pack them into the catching pens the shearsers used. [That] was a solution and then to sharpen up the hand shears and cut off the affected areas on the sheep, big strong wethers. I had to ride them back to front most of the time and cut off the affected areas with hand shears and sponge on a mixture of Cooper’s Dip and that acted very well, that was quite effective.

AS
So where did the sheep and cattle get their water from.

PEG
Well we had dams and they held the water very well ‘til the late summer and that presented the biggest problem of all. When the dams, the local dams ran dry luckily there was a wonderful fresh water soak near the head of the river mentioned there where the cottage was. And so I had to take the horses and I put all the sheep, no matter if they mixed up the hoggets with the older wethers, too bad, they all had to go together in that paddock which was a big and accommodating one feed-wise luckily. Then every second day I had to take the cattle and the horses to water. Well horses can be very naughty indeed if anyone attempts to mix them with cattle. They put up their tails in the air and they prance around the cattle until they have them in a mood to stampede. So that didn’t work, I couldn’t take them together, I had to take them separately, down 2½ miles to water, 2½ miles back and then the cattle the same.

AM
It was very isolated then wasn’t it.

PEG
It was terribly isolated. The nearest neighbours...this is an interesting point if you want the history of those days. Chillinup, dads elder brother had Chillinup. It’s still in the family, a third generation has Chillinup now. Twelve miles west of Marra along the river, the river runs through Chillinup also. In the early days there was a weekly mail service to Chillinup that was the terminus of a weekly mail service that came down from Borden Post Office. We could get supplies and of course that was very handy for us when my older brother and I became of school age.

We had governesses, that’s plural because some of them did not like the isolation. One governess on her first night when she heard the curlews cry and dingoes howl she thought the devil at least had arrived on her doorstep and she demanded a passage home immediately. So we didn’t learn much from her (laughter). Then we had some wonderful governesses. My brother and I were four [years] ahead of the additions to the family so the third child was a girl and she did infants through correspondence. But by then we had moved to Borden and I never attended the Borden school nor did my elder brother but the younger members of the family did. We were sent away to boarding school and from there on you have heard that the depression of the 30’s ended that period after four years.

AS
Thank you that’s great. Can I just ask one more question. When you used to play on the river and go down the river in the row boat what did it used to look like, how do you remember it.

PEG
The river?

AS
Yes

PEG
Oh it was a wonderful stretch of water and there was so much you could do. If you were not taking an oar you could dangle your feet over in the water. Also there was always fishing tackle in the boat, you could drop an anchor over, we had an anchor, and then do a little fishing. Duck shooting was not allowed on the river on those occasions. It was only in the evenings when the ducks were in flight, looking for fresh water, usually dams on the farm.
We had an interesting visitor who used to come quite frequently. He was a doctor from here, a well known doctor from Albany, who, when he felt the pressure of work was getting too much for him he would get in his car and travel to Marra through the Chester Pass Road. On two wheels we always thought (laughter) because he did it in record time. He would stay a night with us. He would arrive mid afternoon on the Saturday and unload. He always brought us a parcel of meat regardless of the fact that there was no refrigeration. But it was a very kind thought and much appreciated from our usual diet and some of it we would pickle to keep it to have later on. But then there was a ruling with him, there were only two spare beds in the sleepout, the closed in sleepout of the Marra house, and they were more or less reserved for him and a friend. But once he broke the rule and he brought two friends and I scolded him because he had done this and he said ‘Oh well you’ll manage’. He always said to people that they’d manage. I think he said to his patients that they’d manage and not to worry (laughter). They’d go off shooting ducks in the evening and when he was away I studied my bed, which had two mattresses on it. I left the thickest one there and dragged the bed out into the sleepout with the thin one on it and made it up. That fixed the bed arrangements, I thought, and he would be non the wiser, he wouldn’t worry about a mere detail like that. But at 4o’clock in the morning, it was barely light, there was a thud (he was a very noisy man) thud on my bedroom door and before I could say come in or stay out, he was in. He said ‘Good god woman, what are you doing down there on the floor’? I replied, ‘It’s your fault I am here on the floor’ and so he said ‘You are bringing that up again are you’ (laughter).

– END OF INTERVIEW –
Interview with Ruth Moir on 11 May 2001

Interviewer: Angela Sanders

RUTH I was born at Moora in 1928.

AS And where did you lived.

RUTH Dalwallinu on a farm. Then in Perth during the war and during nursing training and then when we’d finished training we came to Albany to work at this Old Vancouver Art Centre Hospital and I met Keith there and we were married in 1950.

AS And during that time you told me you used to go out to the Pallinup River, can you tell me about that.

RUTH Yes. Not long after we were married we went down to the Pallinup and I can remember the large flock of birds taking off and re-settling again, they were everywhere, they were just wonderful to see.

AS Do you remember what sort of birds they were.

RUTH They were mostly swans I would think, a lot of ducks and probably coots and grebes and all those sorts of things, but I can remember the swans were just fantastic.

AS And you used to go fishing there as well, is that right.

RUTH Not a great deal, occasionally, but it was sort of an occasional visit, we went to Cape Riche more than anywhere.

AS And what was the fishing like at the Pallinup.

RUTH I think it was always reasonable. Beach fishing mainly.

AS OK.

RUTH We didn’t particularly like the bream from the river. Keith always maintained they tasted muddy, particularly if the water levels were low. Of course we could always get the odd bream from the Eyre River at Cape Riche which was much nicer.

AS And you were telling me that you were interested in birds and you did some bird survey work there, can you tell me all about that.

RUTH Yes we did. We were asked if we would check for the RAOU, as it was called in those days, and it must have been either the late 70s or early 80s. We had to fill in a form and send [it] back to Rodney Vervest and it was a count of ducks, swans and coots. So we did the Pallinup. When I say we, a friend of mine Viv McCormick who was in the RAOU, would come out sometimes and help me with the count. We would do the Pallinup through Chillinup and then we would do the Corackerup and we’d do the bottom section where it joins the Pallinup. But I’d forgotten to tell you that we used to go on the Boxwood-Ongerup road and go to a crossing there and walk up to a pool. It was fairly quiet and when we first went there were quite a lot of the three of them there really, there was a nice pool and there was a lot of bush that we could screen ourselves and observe them. Then we would call in at the Monjebup creek, just opposite Chillinup, virtually and there would always be some there. We also did chestnut teal counts,
they were very interested in those, and there always seemed to be a pair just above the Chillinup crossing.

AS
Down on the estuary, did you see them down there.

RUTH
No we didn’t go to the estuary much anymore in those days because there was nothing much there. Well there were no birds to be seen in great quantity.

AS
So it had changed then.

RUTH
It certainly had. It changed, Corackerup changed as well, you could see the green coming into it and the smell and it did change in those later years. We saw musk ducks, there always used to be quite a few musk ducks down on the point at Chillinup but they seemed to disappear and the swans of course disappeared. There was always swans breeding on the Pallinup, at the Point Pool mainly. When we were doing the count I went down there one day and there was an abandoned swans nest just off the bank and the eggs were there just thrown out of the nest and left. There was always a pair breed up on the pool above the crossing at Chillinup and when the little ones, cygnets, when the cygnets were old enough mother would bring them down as if to show us. She would cross across the crossing, the cement and be very proud of herself. But that all stopped, they just didn’t breed there anymore, I presume it was because it was unsuitable. It became just not suitable for breeding.

AS
And you used to go to Marra looking for birds too.

RUTH
Yes on that bird survey. We’d go to the pool below the bridge and then we would get permission from Duncan Hordacre at the time I think and go in there and have a look just down from the house. But they were always very scary, if there was anything there they would take off and we didn’t ever see much there at all, not really.

AS
I believe you used to go looking for wildflowers as well with your husband.

RUTH
Oh yes, I still go looking for wildflowers, it’s a long held interest that one. We searched for this Scaevola we were looking for down at the Pallinup, which we found in 1997 but which we couldn’t find a couple of years later, it had just disappeared.

AS
In 1997 you said it had been burnt down there.

RUTH
Yes. There had been a fire. I think it was the same fire that had been zig zagging for weeks on the changing wind that went up the river. Of course there were some very thick places in there that hadn’t been burnt in yonks and it started to get close to the farming land so something had to be done.

AS
It sounds like you spent a fair bit of time down there on and off.

RUTH
Yes.

AS
You remember the big flood in 1955.

RUTH
Very clearly.

AS
Can you tell me about that.

RUTH
Yes. It rained for about 10 days, I think, on and off. We kept rain records and kept throwing out the gauge, it would be full and out would go that lot and then there would be another lot and that was incredible. It rained from the southeast, I think they were upper atmospheres or middle
levels or something that didn’t move. I had a two-month old baby and I was a bit concerned that if anything went amiss, we had no telephone of course. The telephone was carried away with the river and everywhere you looked it was just river, just swirling along, trees going down, the occasional pair of horns going down, it was very dramatic. I forget the level but it was recorded out there at Chillinup but it was a record so far I think in our lifetime.

AS

Of course you wouldn’t have been able to get down to the mouth.

RUTH

We couldn’t get anywhere and for about 18 months and more afterwards there were detours all through the bush tracks that we used to go down to the Pallinup or to Cape Riche, or anywhere for that matter on those bush tracks. There were these huge detours, the swamps were full for ages, the yate swamps, it was incredible it really was. I think we had about 30 inches that year, because we got over that lot but then upstream from the Corackerup there was a deluge at April, it was about Easter. There was a big storm and down came the Corackerup and it wiped everything out, it was there to be seen for a long time where it hit the banks.

AS

And that was in the same year.

RUTH

Yes, yes. Just one of those years.

AS

And we haven’t had one since, thank goodness.

RUTH

Dear oh dear it was devastating.

AS

You’ve shown me some photographs of the 1997 floods as well, you were down there for that, just tell me all about that one.

RUTH

We just happened to be down there looking for wildflowers and it was a fairly damp year because the roads were very slippery into the Pallinup. We met someone coming out on the way in and he said, “Oh, it’s gone out, with a bit of help”. I think someone had been down there with a spade or something and we went down there straight away and there it was running parallel with the beach, between the beach and the humpies down there. It was quite unique to see this going out that way and so we were quite happy about that and Keith took some photos and we came home thinking we’d seen something (laughs).

AS

Quite exciting.

RUTH

Because quite often when the river did go out, we weren’t there, there was no one there to send up a signal to say the river’s gone out.

AS

You’ve described the changes to the birds while you’ve been going out there. Have you noticed any changes to the vegetation out there at all, on the edges of the estuary or the river.

RUTH

Well I’m able to see it now. The people at Chillinup, Michael and Penny, it’s been fenced and the growth that’s starting is absolutely incredible, even with the dry season that we’ve just had. The jam trees are all coming back and the everlastingstof course are up there, they’re beautiful and have stayed there all through. The floods didn’t even wipe them out. I think that’s the main thing I’ve noticed. There is going to be a lot of vegetation and the next hazard of course will be fires, I suppose. But we’ll just hope that it doesn’t happen. Lightening plays quite a big part in fires out there.

It’s just wonderful to see all that happening. The rest of it I don’t really know. We do odd trips over by the Boxwood-Ongerup Road, just do a square around and then go back to Chillinup. More or less to check on the wildflowers more than anything, ones that we’ve collected over the years and wondering if they are still going, they seem to be still going.
AS  When you were going down there doing your bird surveys did you notice any other animals down there at all.

RUTH  Whereabouts.

AS  When you were doing the surveys on any of the pools on the river.

RUTH  No not really. Foxes. We did see more bandicoots of course here and there. On the road say from Cape Riche to Chillinup you’d often see a little strange critter and it would be a bandicoot. The disappearance of the black-gloved wallabies, they went right out of fashion. Also a strange thing the birds, the grey currawong went, there was so many about when I first went to Chillinup they were a worry in the fruit department in the orchards and they were quite prolific, whereas they just faded from the scene. But they’re around now I often go out to Chillinup just for the day and I see them on the Chillinup Road and all sorts of places so they’ve come back. The black-gloved wallabies are not as thick as they were by a long chalk but the signs are there protecting them and it seems to have helped a bit. They were very vulnerable, you would hit them low down on the car, on the front fender part, and that would be the end of them. You wouldn’t hit them hard but they seemed to suffer, they’d get down and go and straight into it, it was a shame, they were very vulnerable in the daytime.

AS  It sounds like you had an interesting time. Do you have any other stories that you would like to tell me about the Pallinup.

RUTH  Well the phone line was a scream because that was done before I got there with fencing wire. Mr Hassell and Keith’s father, Cleaver, and Cape Riche and Marra, they were on the overland telephone line which probably Brian and Betty told you about.

AS  Yes they did.

RUTH  Because that would be the first thing to go when the river rose. It didn’t take much of a flood, it was only slung across on two poles across the river and away that would go. But in the beginning of settlement out around us with the conditional purpose blocks that were thrown open people would rely on us to ring the Eastern States or anywhere, it was the only phone for a long way around (laughs). It was terrible it really was, it was a very poor phone service you would have to scream and yell, it created a lot of tense moments but it was very humorous really.

AS  It was just fencing wire put up.

RUTH  Yes. It was a party line and there were about six or eight of us on it. The men would all decide this would be the time to go along and check the line and do some renovations and repairs so they’d go along and have a look and that would be that. I suppose in the next year perhaps, if you were lucky, it would be checked again. It was a scream but it was the only means of communication.

AS  Yes a long trip to Albany.

RUTH  Yes. Our only road was through the Pass, Chester Pass and it used to take over two hours when the children were small. Sometimes we would go up the river, follow the Pallinup up the river through all those old Moir places and that took not quite as long but you had to open about nine gates. So it was a long way to Albany and then the Chillinup Road was put through when they surveyed the blocks. Then eventually of course Highway One, which made a big difference.

AS  Yes, getting around must have taken a while.

RUTH  I know that they used to get these, people called them sores, you know scabby things on the
bream when the river levels got low, the salt must have been high I suppose. I don’t know what it was, I just presumed it could have been partly the salt levels.

AS That would put you off eating them I guess.

RUTH Oh, yes you didn’t bother, no they were quite bad. I think it happened while I was out there about two or three times.

AS It doesn’t seem to have changed much over the years from what I can gather around the river itself and the estuary.

RUTH Well certainly after the floods there was nothing left. It was as bald as a badger. But then up came the Casuarina, but I can’t remember which one grows down there. I should, there is one that grows all along the Pallinup.

AS Yes the very big tall tree.

RUTH Well up they came, they came up like mad particularly around the crossings at Chillingup because most of the flooded gums had gone.

AS And the Yates had gone.

RUTH The Yates had gone. But of course Yates seem to regenerate and they seem to grow up quite quickly but I don’t suppose anything is quicker than the Casuarinas or the Acacias. The jams would have been there quickly too probably in certain parts, I mean jams do grow.

AS So the big old Melaleucas even got pushed over with the flood too.

RUTH A lot of them did yes. Just everything went. There was a lovely place in this Point Pool which is over a mile long. There was quite a little jungle down on the corner where the river cornered around more or less at right angles. I can remember taking photos there when my eldest child Jill was about two, I had visitors out and took them down there and we took photos. It was lovely, it was really beautiful with all these trees but after that it just changed, the river, and made a sharper sort of bend and all the trees went. It was incredible the difference it made.

AS So it probably changed the course of the river in some places as well.

RUTH Just minutely, yes. After that subsequent floods went in a different direction in a way. We had two, at the crossing, there were two channels of the river. There was the waterfall side, where it used to go over the rocks and then there was the other side. The other side seemed to gather momentum and it would take out soil, because there was a soil bank on that side, it was quite a high one and it would take out more of that, so it did change, yes. It was not hugely but...

AS When you go out there now it’s hard to see, it looks like it has been like that for a long time, well forty years I suppose.

RUTH Well it is a while because I can remember there was quite a big flood in 1981 or 2 and Jill my daughter was over with her little girl, she was staying with us for a little while, and of course we were marooned. It didn’t take much to maroon you because the Corackerup would back up, you see it couldn’t get out. If that came down and Monjebup in flood they both go into the river not far down from Chillingup’s boundary. So they would back up and the school bus used to run that way to take our kids to the Gairdner, well they’d have a day or two off here and there. You’d always know when the rivers were up because it was the Monjebup and Corackerup both backing up if the river was high. We could get out towards Borden because there were swamps over there but at least we knew about swamps. But we couldn’t get over the river of course and that was the only way we could get out. It’s an interesting thing Angela, but when
we had dry seasons and we were a bit short of water for stock, there’s a fresh water component comes into the river, you’ve heard about that?

AS

No I haven’t.

RUTH

You see there was an old location at Chilinup it’s called ‘Forty Acres’ and in the old days the shepherds used to take up 40 acre blocks with their owners or employers like George Cheyne perhaps has or that sort of thing. George Cheyne was recommended to take up river country where there were jam trees particularly, because of the good soil. Now they had access to water there that is why they took up these 40 acre blocks mainly, it would be their camp probably and the fact that they could water their sheep there. This ‘Forty Acres’ was a very low number on the litho charts. We were caught with a couple of very dry seasons and Keith always knew that there was fresh water there somewhere so he dug in the riverbed itself into this salty, salty sand. They’d dig a hole with the bulldozers, or some mechanical means, and then they’d put a tank in to hold the sand back and the water would flow in and it would be fresh enough for stock no trouble at all.

AS

That’s interesting, I heard about a spring but that was near Marra, just up from Marra.

RUTH

Yes there is a spring there. I don’t know where but I’ve seen it on the lithos. An interesting thing, on the Corackerup we were there one dry year, it was a hot day and we had friends down from Perth and we jumped in and had a swim at this pool. It’s a very nice pool, it’s just north of where Peter’s shearer block is, his other block, and you tasted it and it didn’t taste too bad. That’s obviously another one where there’s fresh water coming into it somewhere. Well we had it investigated, another dry year Keith decided he’d drill a bore, he got a boring contractor in. They didn’t ever find it, they thought they’d found it and put a mill on it but it wasn’t of much use. There wasn’t a good supply there for some reason but it’s certainly there.

AS

OK, that’s interesting.

RUTH

It was the sort of country we used to have vegetable gardens out in the paddocks. You’d see a soak, a damp place and you’d build a fence around it and put in tomatoes or something like that and they did very nicely, but then that would dry up. Those soaks were very numerous after the big flood. All the aquifers would have been filled up I suppose.

AS

You would probably only be able to grow vegetables there when it had been wet.

RUTH

Yes. We were talking about it the other day when I was at Chilinup and Michael was showing us around and there’s no sign of soakage now.

I always loved the river it’s got some magic somehow about it, the birds of course, the scenery. The scenery from our kitchen window, we had the river there with the big pool and then the Stirlings on top of that.

AS

It’s a lovely river.

RUTH

It is, it’s got some very nice pools.

AS

There’s some coloured cliffs too that I’ve seen further up.

RUTH

Through Boxwood it’s very rugged through there and I remember someone reporting that there was a pair of peregrine falcons nesting on one of those cliffs at Boxwood. Viv and I went to the Boxwood golf club and walked down to the cliff and we found a lot of traces of them but we didn’t see any there.

– END OF INTERVIEW –