

Glenda Aoake

OPEN FOUNDATION - AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

REGIONAL HISTORY PROJECT

MEMOIRS OF THE HUNTER VALLEY TIMBER INDUSTRY

1) Taped Interview.

Interview with Mr. Charles Lewis axeman/teamster, on
'Memoirs of the Hunter Valley Timber Industry', during
the early 1920s to 1930s.

2) Transcript.

3) Summary.

500 word summary of the interview.

4) Research Paper.

'THE HUNTER VALLEY TIMBER INDUSTRY, 1920S TO 1930S'

MEMOIRS OF THE HUNTER VALLEY TIMBER INDUSTRY

S U M M A R Y

Five hundred word summary of the interview

It is hoped that an historic perspective of the generalities of the timber industry within the nominated time span will emerge from this taped interview. This tape will endeavour to show that technological innovation and social evolution were in progress throughout the early 1920s to 1930s. However these changes appear more evident as a process of intergration rather than rapid domination. With the use of oral history seven topics have been observed relevant to the timber industry in that particular era.

This history of any industry must begin by examining its raw resources. To this end the purchasing, selection and felling of timber prior to its transportation to the sawmill has been discussed.

Following this the next section examines the economic advantage of the more advanced mechanical methods of snigging and haulage.

The third topic covers three specific modes of transport to and from the sawmill namely, bullock and horse teams to a lesser extent motor lorry transport.

Furthermore the sawmill warrants a detailed

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examination for in size and technology they vary considerably. Many began in the humblest of circumstances and evolved into focal industries of the town in which they were situated. Others remained small, servicing local and immediate needs, whilst others having served a useful purpose in any one area were transported elsewhere as needs demanded, or simply ceased to exist.

The fifth section examines the effects of the Great Depression in 1929. An explanation is given about the social welfare benefits which unemployed axemen/teamsters received. Insight has been given also concerning how the workers relied on other skills to maintain an existence at that time. To etch the Depression in our minds Charles Lewis has given vivid examples of hardship.

Memoirs are told of the convict participation in the timber industry near Port Stephens which coincide with historical records.

In conclusion mention has been made concerning the timber workers' fraternity in the country towns and those who liked to associate with the axemen/teamsters, particularly the Aborigines of Port Stephens. Charles Lewis describes their friendly cricket games and something of the Aborigines' way of life at that time. Hopefully giving an overall view of life in the Hunter

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Valley timber industries, between the 1920s and 1930s.

T R A N S C R I P T

GA = GLENDA AOAKE (Interviewer)

CL = CHARLES LEWIS (Interviewee)

GA 'August the 13th, 1989, memoirs of the Hunter Valley timber industry around the 1920s to 1930s - interviewee is Charles Lewis axeman/teamster.'

GA 'What age did you start your working life?'

CL 'Thirteen and four months.'

GA 'Where did you mainly purchase the timber from?'

CL 'Viney Creek, Tea Gardens.'

GA 'Can you give us some examples of the purchase price?'

CL 'Eight shillings, ah six shillings per super hundred feet for the mill logs delivered at the wharf or mill, mainly the wharf those days ah eight pence a foot for girders, super feet squared girders.'

GA 'That would be in the 1920s, wouldn't it?'

CL 'Yeah, 1924.'

GA 'Having secured an area of cut, how did you select the

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GA ...trees to be felled?'

CL 'Well, I didn't do a lot of cutting until I was, like say for 12 months. The timber was all cut so you buy the, ah, the contractors had men on squaring the girders, sleepers, poles for New Zealand and the China sleepers and all such like, there was a terrible big demand for it in that area, and then from around '24 on till about '28, and then the Depression started to come on and toughened up, yeah.'

GA 'Some trees were huge, what was the biggest tree you know of that was felled?'

CL 'The biggest one I felled was sixty six hundred that was a lorry load in one tree, but that's not so long back, yeah, but in the early days the biggest tree was I think, I drew was somewhere about, I better put it in tons oughten I? The biggest tree would be, ah, three hundred tons. Over six ton was the biggest tree I drew in those days.'

GA 'You'd need special safety precautions cutting down a tree that size?'

CL 'To be honest a big tallow wood was felled and they couldn't get it out so they said you could have the

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CL ...tree, so I said right. We went the right way about it I thought. We took the dolby up to it and this is how I came to draw this big tree, yeah, it'd be six ton.'

GA 'So there was quite a deal of thought put into the actual felling operation. Beside the independent axemen with their own bullock teams, were there others who felled the trees also?'

CL 'Ah, there was other teams, oh yes you mean there was other teams, oh yeah, there were other teams there, be somewhere about eight to ten teams altogether drawn out there, yeah.'

GA 'And, what was the next step once the trees were felled, once they were cut down and, 'n'??'

CL 'Well, ah.'

GA 'You'd load them?'

CL 'Load them onto the jinker, the lorry. The loading log belonged to the bullock team and they'd be two days over it one day to load up and one day to take them down to the wharf or Dirty Creek where we used to put them on the punts or at the mill at Tea Gardens.'

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GA 'In the case of illness did you receive any compensation or sick leave?'

CL 'No, there was nothing those days, no there was nothing of it.'

GA 'Apart from logs cut for sawmill use, there was timber taken directly from the forest in the form of handcut poles, girders and sleepers. Can you tell us something about the type of cutting instruments used and the time taken to cut them?'

CL 'Ah well, the girders were squared when the tree was felled, ah, cut off at the head and then they'd count hooks and roll them onto skids and then they'd line them out with, ah, chalk line, but it was generally wet where there'd been bush fires, they'd get the black and use that couldn't afford chalk to put on them and they'd go along the line with a square axe and square that off and then turn them over and square them the other side all sides and then that'd be the complete sleeper or girder, yeah.'

GA 'In large sawmill operations and where timber was abundant the economic value of more mechanical methods of snigging and haulage was a viable option and a greater advantage was gained if the sawmill was

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GA ...located within a convenient distance of a railhead or siding. Can you tell us about the haulers?'

CL 'Well, the haulers never came into being, for ah, about in the middle twenties, early twenties, anyhow but um, they never came into operation and most of the haulers was worked with steam and water, you know, waste wood from the bush and the boilers, like, to heat the steam up, and they were mainly the steam hauler. They'd take weights out, say from here (Marks Point) to Belmont and go through the bush and some of them was up to two mile and they'd take them out with the draught horse, out to where the logs were and then they'd. They had these haulers there, that was the terminus of the trolley like the transport used to be rolled down to Pumpkin Point. Although they'd haul those logs and load them on with a hauler onto these trucks, and away they'd go. And when they had about twenty-odd trucks loaded they take them down near Allworth and when they'd take them down to Allworth there, they'd dump, 'em, on the water and then the steam punts, as they was called, they would paddle up the river and get them, roll them on, take 'em down to Windy Whopper or Tea Gardens mill and that's how the hauler came into operation.'

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GA 'There were wooden~~ed~~ rail horse-tramways, could you tell us a little about those?'

CL 'Yeah, well they used to, I suppose it got a bit expensive with all the distance, and they used wooden rails as well as their iron rails and, ah, it'd be more or less expensive for the sawmills, to what the iron rails would be.'

GA 'Also the 'Jarrah' mill near Stroud introduced a locomotive, how was it powered and how would you describe it?'

CL 'Well, it was four mile out from Stroud on the eastern side and there was a good lot of timber there and the hauler was used by the Jarrah Company they called it, it was 'Jarrah', the name of the place or Simsville was the little village and that's where they had the hauler. I'd say they worked it there and then when the timber got further out they had to get the bullock team to take the ropes out it got too heavy for the horses and a lovely patch of timber there.'

GA 'You were a bullock drover, when did you get your first team of bullocks and how many bullocks were in your team?'

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CL 'Ten there was in 1924, it started on anniversary day.'

GA '...and you were thirteen, twelve?'

CL 'Um.'

GA 'Thirteen years old, twelve years old?'

CL 'Thirteen and four months, yeah.'

GA 'Was a bullock team a major form of transport in the haulage of timber in those days?'

CL 'Well, where I lived at the branch, when I went to school there, that's where I got the bump on the head, where I lived at the branch, there used to be seventy-three bullock teams come into this mill, sawmill, and they wouldn't let them in all in one day. They had to be say no more than twenty-five each day and when they came in there, there'd be too many to unload and measure up their logs. And they ended up by every alternate day they'd have the twenty-five teams come into this mill and all you could hear was bullocks, dust flying, whips cracking and bullocks going.'

GA 'And how far could the bullocks haul the logs in one day?'

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- CL 'We used to haul them in nine mile, up to nine mile was a good days haul, like, and nine mile was roughly quite as much. You'd be overdoing the bullocks if you did anymore than nine mile.'
- GA 'Right well, what were the bullocks like to work with?'
- CL 'Oh good, real good, extra good.'
- GA 'Easy to manage?'
- CL 'Yeah, treat them right they're nearly human, yeah they were lovely.'
- GA 'How important was it to take good care of the bullocks?'
- CL 'Oh well um, really it didn't matter sort, long as he was a bullock and he'd work, if he'd work that's all you needed.'
- GA 'But your livelihood depended on these bullocks, so were they hard to husband?'
- CL 'No that's right, yeah.'
- GA 'What was the average purchase price around the 1920s?'

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CL 'Six pound, I bought many a full paddock full if I wanted them for six pound each.'

GA 'Where would you go for waggon repairs and the shoeing of the bullocks?'

CL 'Well, those days we used to have to if we had anything wrong with the waggon we couldn't do it ourselves, my father and I. We'd have to get the loan of oil or something off one of the other men and we'd have to put our wheels up on top of the loader and take them to Tea Gardens and wait for a boat to go to Richardson to Bulahdelah that was the nearest wheelwright and they'd be away sometimes three months, yeah.'

GA 'Were there any advantages do you feel in using a bullock team, rather than a horse team?'

CL 'Oh yes there's a lot, oh yes, a horse is easy crippled and you got-ta too much work with the shoeing and feeding and the bullocks live on any rough grass and they thrive on that and keep strong.'

GA 'What happens if the horse breaks a leg?'

CL 'Well its gotta be destroyed it wont knit, see theres no marrow in the horses leg.'

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GA 'How many times can a bullock break a leg?'

CL 'Oh well, if they break a leg they can put out to pasture for a couple of months and the legs right, yeah, that'll knit see. Bullocks are more or less an asset this way, you can't lose on a bullock either ways, you know you can fatten 'em up for meat.'

GA 'So they're an investment to you?'

CL 'Oh yes they're really good that way you never lose on them, I've often bought them for say four or five pound, worked them for ten years and got twenty and twenty-five, you know, after they've got old. About fourteen years is about their average limit to work.

GA 'Were you on a set wage when cutting and hauling the timber?'

CL 'No, no it varies, wherever, whatever the timber is. Tallow wood or youre dealing with the top price or ironbark, spotted gum. I used to haul for Healey Brothers in Hamilton and they have a special, thats gotta be a special timber, see, no rings or gum veins or anything of that. Thats gotta be a special timber, thats one thing thats gotta be clean. The logs have gotta be clean you know and, ah...'

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GA 'Did you work for just one particular mill?'

CL 'No any mill that came along, that gave the best price.'

GA 'Can you tell us some of the mills you worked for?'

CL 'Tea Gardens Mill, Mills and Rigby, ah, J. Almsley over at Redhead, Crolls at Dungog, Pent and Fosters at Maitland.'

GA 'Crolls at Dungog was a large mill, for a country mill, wasn't it?'

CL 'Large mill, beautiful mill.'

GA 'It used the same steam engine as the flour mill, didn't it at one stage?'

CL 'That was just over from the sawmill, the flour mill was just over from that, Clarencetown, they had a sawmill there.'

GA 'What effects do you feel the motor transport had on the timber industry?'

CL 'Well, you see when the Depression came on and everything slumped up and the lorry mill closed down.'

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CL ...See they couldn't get orders to run the mills. When they closed down that was about 1929 and 1933, 1932. When things did start to brighten up, the mills, the lorries started to take over on the roads and that ended up, then that meant by the lorries taking over, well, we used to have to haul out by the side of the road for the lorries and the bullock waggon was left to stand idle. But anyhow thats really how the lorries came to take over so they are...'

GA 'The lorries were cheaper to run weren't they?'

CL 'Um.'

GA 'The lorries were cheaper to run, more economical?'

CL 'They were up to a point sort of thing, but I always maintain we were a bit quicker getting the logs there. See that was it, when there was a lot of teams they supplied the mill at the branch for years and years. Oh yes, that went on for many, many years back in the 1800s, early 1800s. The branch mill and the bullock teams were that numerous you know that they supplied the mill, or over supplied it. But when, ah, when the lorries, well of course, they had to have two or three mills to supply. See, when the lorries took over they'd have to have two or three mills, like, to keep the amount of timber up to the mills.'

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GA 'Can you tell us a little about the sawmills, some mills were portable, why was this?'

CL 'Yeah, some were portable they shifted them about from, ah, wherever there was a little patch of timber, they shifted the little mill about, well they could take it nearly on the table-top and cut out the baulks for pits. And, they'd get a certain size log, not too big, well that meant they had a flat face to go up against the roof of the pit and then the baulk went on to it, well, that's how they shifted the portable mills around, yeah.'

GA 'And how were the saw blades at the mill powered at that time?'

CL 'Well some of them was electric and at that time some was diesel mainly diesel because there was no electricity in a lot of places where the timber was.'

GA 'How did you unload the logs from the bullock waggons?'

CL 'Used to have two skids put 'em up on the wheels and then the chains came off each side under the log and then over and load them with the bullocks we used to load nine logs in twenty minutes, I did.'

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GA 'Some logs were exported, where were they sent?'

CL 'Where were the which?'

GA 'Where were the logs exported to, New Zealand I believe?'

CL 'Well, mainly the mills, the logs, they never went away from our shores, there was mainly the local mills, the logs were...'

GA 'The timber industry went on strike in 1929 what was the reason for this?'

CL 'Ah, well, the Depression came on, everything got down to a low ebb and, ah, somehow or rather the orders from overseas, they couldn't get them and everything seemed to drop at once. And the mills some of them had to close down altogether and they ended them, some went as far as burning them down then, you know, in the Depression or they accidentally burnt down. That wasn't proved, that they were burnt down, but this is what happened. They couldn't get the orders and they couldn't get the, they just had to run at a loss sort of thing or else close up. Some of them closed up, you know altogether.'

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GA 'How did the workers cope when out of work, what did they do for a living then?'

CL 'A lot of them got the dole 7/6^d a week and when we were over there, that was their only outlet until things got a bit better, bit of a move on. About 1933-34 when things started to lift a bit, they got back to going and now they got into operation again.'

GA 'What did you do actually, did you...?'

CL 'Ah, well, I had the bullocks and I offered me services for a shilling an hour to pay the grass. You know, a shilling an hour, a shilling a day was all they'd give you and ah, I couldn't get anywhere so I got the dole for about three weeks. Said to my father, I'm going to try and do something to get a few shillings in. But we got through anyhow, it wasn't so bad, but it was bad enough.'

GA 'Could you tell us a little about the timber workers' fraternity, country towns are well known for their helpfulness and closeness, what activities did you have for entertainment?'

CL 'Like to cut the timber?'

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GA 'No the, like you, your entertainment, like you had a dance hall I believe.'

CL 'Entertainment, ah, well, at the branch they used to have a big dance hall there. The owner of the mill gave them a big mill log and said if you'd like to work on Saturday and cut that big log up you can build a hall with it, and they built the hall out of this big log. A lovely big hall it was, and they used to, four of them bought button accordians, four of the men belonging to that locality and they ended up having dances there and it'd go to midnight of a Saturday night and very often all night Friday night and all that and have a, you'd think you were going to Christmas dinner with all the lovely sandwiches and cakes and everything and this was their entertainment an all night dance, huh, huh...'

GA 'I hear some of the men got up and went for miles the next day to work.'

CL 'Yeah a lot of them would get up next morning and go and have their breakfast and catch their horse and go for miles out into the mountains and work their bullocks all day and come back and go and get ready and clean up and have another dance on a Saturday night that happened, aw, gee, that happened nearly every about nearly every fortnight.'

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GA 'You mentioned an amusing incident when one bullocky was known for his swearing, his rather bad language and he was warned...'

CL 'Yeah, ah yeah, yeah that was the chap that would come home of a night and he'd swear something awful and ah, he was a good chap but he couldn't help it you know and anyhow the women all clubbed in and went to the sawmiller. And said look you'll either have to get rid of that man or else we're gonna leave. He said, 'I can't get rid of him, he's too good a hauler, he keeps the logs, he's one of the best bullocky's.' But anyhow another old chap offered to, he said, 'I'll tell you what I'll do I'll get his house taken up out there on that hill.' So the old chap got the twenty-eight bullocks took the house out on the hill there. He was able to swear to further orders then no-one heard him and that was what happened at the branch, right near where we lived.'

GA 'Tell us a little bit about the convict days in the timber industry.'

CL 'Well the convicts they were sent out here for some reason when they settled over by Tea Gardens they used to be given jobs such as falling trees and splitting them into fence posts and most of the timber was

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CL ...covered in blood rings and when they started to saw into the tree the blood would come down and it would take a draught horse to pull each side so they had to pull the saw out and take it down to the creek and wash it. That'd probably go on several times before the tree came down. Well the saw to start with only had teeth about as long as your fingernails and they were too mean to buy a file for the poor old fellows. And anyhow they used to get the tree down and they'd have to saw it up and then in the post length and then they'd have to split it up with a maul and wedges. And these mauls they were nearly too heavy to lift and the old wedges were all burred up and that sort of thing. Anyhow they used to worry away at that and they'd be days getting one billet, like one log out of it, they'd be days getting that split up into posts. But when they got the posts they were really good timber, you know the bushfires wouldn't burn, the, that type of timber. But anyhow, they were over, that there, way, for many years, over on the coast and the Port Stephens. But the poor old fellows, they used to have luxuries, such as they might boomerang a wallaby over or kangaroo and cook that. They had a bit of a job keeping up their livelihood with the food. And anyhow that was back in the war years, more or less back in the First World War so they had very hard times and they gradually disappeared. I don't know

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CL ...where they went to but they gradually dwindled away and that was most of them went from there and went to different centres.'

GA 'Right, and the Aborigines liked to associate with the bullockies.'

CL 'Oh, they were good, they were good old fellows. My father used to love them coming up there. They were really good, they was, ah, look they'd do anything for you. Aw, they'd come up there, and they'd, well, both ways, when the branch men went down to their pitch, their cricket pitch and they had a game, a days play. They used to play all day, they never played Sunday and they played all day of a Saturday and they're that friendly and that, gee, the men used to like at the branch. They were easy to get on with and they was lovely sports and good catchers, good bats and the poor old one-legged chap he was a bonzer old fellow. He used to have the crutch stand on the crutch on one leg and he'd, he'd be pretty skilled. If he didn't pick you up off the, take the bales off, anyhow they were that good of sports. They used to tell more, can't you come a bit sooner or something like that. They probably come up about once every three months, you see they'd have to pull seven mile in the pulling boat. But when they used to come up then to put on

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CL ...these sacred concert with gum leaves and so on. They used to have to go back about eight or nine o'clock in their boats and pull all the way down the river. They didn't mind it one bit, they used to think that they were made, you know, coming to the branch (mill) they loved the people on the branch, but it's a pity those days have sort of wandered out isn't it?'

GA 'And tell us how they used to get their bush tucker.'

CL 'The poor old fellows over on the coast there, they used to climb the trees and they'd have this little stone axe, steel axe, and they'd put a little chop in the tree and so high up and then they'd put their big toe in there and they'd have the axe and they'd go right round the tree. You could see the tree, terrific length tree and you could see where they cut a bees nest out. On one limb you could see the remains of the honeycomb and then on the other there was a possum. They used to love possum. When they got a possum, they'd ah, I can't tell you just how they used to skin them. But anyhow, they'd rub two sticks together and roast them and they used to get hares or anything about. But the eagle-hawks used to love the hares, you know, there was some monsters. Big eagle-hawks used to be there, they'd frighten you

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CL ...with their big long wings out. But oh, they used to live in hollow logs or wherever they could get sheets of bark. They (Aborigines) were a good hand at stripping sheets of bark, they'd know how to do it. They'd rub two sticks together and make a fire and heat the bark and make it tough and that's how they used to get under that and put it up over a log and they'd have a little sort of hut, put a sheet each side of the log like that. But it was really interesting to think they'd got their own form of food, you know, out of the bush, and, ah, I don't know what other. There was mainly possum and bees nests. They might have got a wallaby or something like that at different times.'

GA 'That was Mr. Charles Lewis, seventy-nine years old, born in Lithgow, parents from Girbin, moved to the branch, near Karuah in 1912, started his working life at thirteen years with his own bullock team.'

'Interviewer, Glenda Aoake.'

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S U M M A R Y

This research project attempts to give some insight into the early timber history of the Hunter Valley within the nominated time span of the 1920s to 1930s. All aspects of the timber industry of that era are included. There are seven topics under review they are the felling of timber, this section dealing with the purchasing, selection and felling of timber prior to its transportation to the mill. The second topic covers the transportation of logs to the mill priority given to railway systems and haulers. Following this the next section examines transport from a logging operation to and from the sawmill. Furthermore the fourth point examines the sawmills their various sizes and technologies. The fifth section observes union activity which had little influence in that particular era due to noncompulsory union membership and also because most timber in the Hunter Valley at that time was felled on private property. Also mention has been made of the timber workers' fraternity. In conclusion an assessment has been given concerning the impact of the Forestry Commission and its policies. It is hoped that this information will give an overall purview of the historical Hunter Valley timber industry around the early 1900s.

MEMOIRS OF THE HUNTER VALLEY TIMBER INDUSTRY, 1920S TO 1930S

The history of the Hunter Valley timber industry in the 1920s to 1930s must necessarily begin with an examination of its raw resources, the purchasing, selection and felling of the timber. In this time span the greater source of mill logs was from private property. The purchase of mill logs from a property owner was calculated as a royalty on usable timber. In 1934 the mill prices for timber was exceptionally low for a long time, one shilling per super hundred feet⁽¹⁾. This wage was low even compared to the convict era when in the 1820s to 1840s seven shillings and six pence to twenty shillings per super hundred feet was the going rate⁽²⁾. On private property the selection of trees to be felled was the responsibility of the axeman. The tree was selected according to its size, soundness and if it could be felled with safety. A good axeman will walk up to a tree and say "Well that tree will fall easily that way"⁽³⁾. When felled the trees must be hauled to a sawmill.

The more advanced methods of hauling and snigging the timber were quite versatile in this time span compared to the 1820s when planks were sawn in the bush and carried on men's shoulders to be loaded on drays for transport to Sydney⁽⁴⁾. The positioning of wire blocks meant hauling could be conducted in most directions from a central point and greatly facilitated loading for a railway or tramway

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some trams being drawn by horses⁽⁵⁾. A steam hauler was used in the heart of the bush, this being the cheapest means of hauling logs to the mill⁽⁶⁾. The hauler could snig a log twenty tons and over up to two miles in top gear with no trouble at all⁽⁷⁾. After the First World War a rail line was laid between Allworth and the 'Jarrah' mill near Stroud for a steam driven locomotive which was operated by two men for transporting mill logs to a dump⁽⁸⁾. This was phased out as motor lorries began to take over in the 1930s⁽⁹⁾.

Up until the late 1930s no one mode of transporting timber from a logging operation to and from the sawmill had a marked superiority over another. Although there were horse drawn waggons the bullock dray was the most common form of transport in the haulage of timber. Apart from its sheer pulling power the bullock was favoured for the length of its working life and the comparative ease with which it could be husbanded compared to horses⁽¹⁰⁾. Horses were an advantage in open country but if unlucky enough to break a leg had no chance of survival because the bones will not knit; a bullock could break a leg four times a year and after three months rest is ready to go back to work⁽¹¹⁾. A number of teams hauled logs to the branch mill near Karuah and seventy-three teams were counted in one day⁽¹²⁾. Bullocks could pull enormous loads over trackless scrubland and up and

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down rock strewn gullies⁽¹³⁾. Without the bullock dray man in Australia would have been handicapped⁽¹⁴⁾. They were a definite advantage when hauling logs to the sawmill.

In the 1930s and earlier many small sawmills were in the bush⁽¹⁵⁾. When describing the sawmill consideration must be given to its size and technology as they varied considerably. Many sawmills were temporary, lasting only a few years until the timber on a property or locality was cut out. Some mills were run by two men, which did not require much capital. Equipment was often improvised, for instance using an old engine from a steam traction carriage to a power saw. In a few instances the mill expanded and a larger mill was built⁽¹⁶⁾. The Croll family sawmill at Dungog would have been a large mill by comparative standards for a country town; it was run by the same steam engine that operated the flour mill⁽¹⁷⁾. Timber from this mill was exported for New Zealand wharves and decking and was always closely inspected⁽¹⁸⁾.

Union activity was virtually nonexistent before the 1920s and then only in locations where there were sufficient employees for the purposes of organisation. The Timber Workers' Union, formed in 1926, had little to offer the independent axeman/teamster, and well into the 1930s confined its activities to the cities and larger

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regional country areas⁽¹⁹⁾. Activities were based almost entirely in the sawmill or road haulage operations. Union activity suffered markedly from a lack of compulsory membership⁽²⁰⁾. In 1929, timber workers struck for twenty weeks. This particularly affected the country mill workers. During the strike many fell back on old skills and independently accepted work where it could be found making one or two pounds here or there⁽²¹⁾. The union lost and the mill workers remained on a forty-eight hour week⁽²²⁾. But throughout the strike and Depression the closeness of the timber workers was evident.

The closeness or fraternity of the timber workers was apparent in country towns, although their first houses were hessian walled, they were not without a dance hall⁽²³⁾. For entertainment at the branch mill near Karuah before 1920, a very large hall was built by the people near the school and many happy hours were spent as men would take turns at playing the button accordians. After playing until daylight they would go home and change into their working clothes, have their breakfast and sometimes ride many miles to gather their bullocks. They would yoke their bullocks and work all day before going home to have their tea and get ready for another night's entertainment⁽²⁴⁾. Their entertainment was well earned as these men worked very long hours felling and hauling timber.

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Until the mid to late 1930s much of the timber was taken from private property but as this diminished the Forestry Commission policies became more evident. Concern about the diminishing timber supplies led to the establishment of Forest Reserves⁽²⁵⁾. Its duties were to regulate the felling of timber, establish nurseries and plantation of timber trees and collect a royalty for forest produce obtained⁽²⁶⁾. For nearly one hundred years from 1788 the only effort put forward in connection with forestry was in the collection of fees from timber getters⁽²⁷⁾. However the 1930s was a period in which the Commission was able to enforce practical policies for the protection of timber from excessive felling and fire, thus contributing to the continued growth of forests, benefitting the established Hunter Valley timber industries⁽²⁸⁾.

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