

VicRoads Association

Newsletter No 196



Membership of the Association is available to all who have been members of VicRoads or forerunner organisations or the spouse of deceased members and bestows on them all the rights of the Rules of Association. Current cost of membership is a once only fee of \$30 plus a joining fee of \$5. Enquiries about membership or receipt of the Newsletter by e-mail should be directed to the Secretary at 60 Denmark Street Kew 3101 or by phone or e-mail as shown in the footer below. An application for membership of the Association can be found at the end of the Newsletter.

Dear Members,

I left for India exactly eight weeks after my hip replacement operation. At Tullamarine Airport my new hip set off the alarm on the x-ray screen and I had to undergo a personal 'pat down' without my belt and shoes. In the following three weeks I had to negotiate screens in India and Hong Kong at airports, hotels and tourist sites without so much as a beep, leading me to think that the strength of x-rays in Australia, being in the southern hemisphere, is much greater than in the north. In fact in India, I think that some of the machines weren't even plugged in.

We had an intriguing time in India visiting Delhi, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Pushkar, Bharatapur and Agra. With the exception of Delhi and Agra, all the other places are in Rajasthan – in the north-east region of India. Jaisalmer is in the western reaches of the Thar Desert (commonly known as the Great Indian Desert) and it is the largest town before the Pakistan border. Consequently there is a large military presence there. The Thar desert is about 10 per cent of the land area of India (320,000 sq km) and is the most densely populated desert in the world inhabited by Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. Agriculture and animal husbandry are the only occupations in the desert – apart from tourism. We were able to penetrate the desert proper to see the large, shifting sand dunes and I hope to make them the subject of many of my paintings of my Indian experiences.

It is easy to look at India through western eyes and be critical of what we see. The chaotic traffic, the rough roads, the filth in the streets with cows, pigs and dogs consuming the mountains of rubbish, the smells, the almost incessant noise, the pathetic beggars, the destitution of the marginal sections of society, the inequality (most of India's recent economic growth does not trickle down to the population), the corruption, and the desperation of people to make enough money to survive on the most meagre of rations – are some of my memories.

And yet there is much to learn if you can cast these criticisms aside. The history, colour, artistry, culture and the warm generosity of Indian people can be humbling. Let me give you an example. We were invited to visit a small village about 25 km out of Jaisalmer. We met a young man who worked in a shop at the hotel and this was where he lived. I was suspicious of his motives but, seeing we had a bus at our disposal, the 12 people in our party decided to accept his offer. The village was in the desert and it sprawled over a largish area with stone, brick and adobe buildings, many with thatched roofs. I estimate that no more than about 150 people lived there but it would be difficult to tell. We first of all visited the school and it broke my heart. I often visit my grandson's primary school in Armadale and I love to see the learning environment which most Australian kids enjoy. In Malik's village it was a couple of dark rooms with chairs and tables and a blackboard. The heat was intense. School was not compulsory and some children loitered around the village. These were the ones who came begging.



Malik took us to his house where he lived with a large extended family ranging from grandparents to nieces and nephews. His house was the grandest in the village - made of stone. We sat in the main room of the house which had a large bed against the wall, a television set under a blanket, a concrete floor with a few mats, and about six plastic chairs. A high shelf across one wall stored a few plastic toys, some photos and other sundry items. They crammed about 30 people in here, providing us with cups of sweet black tea and the good will in the room was palpable. They gave us all that they could give. Malik acted as interpreter.

They were a Muslim family. The women were bare faced and allowed us to take photographs as long as we agreed not to post them on the internet. They wore bracelets with a projecting spur. Apparently these were peculiar to this area. We spent an hour with them – laughing and sharing experiences, before they invited us to explore their village. They were as curious about us as we were of them. Going back to the bus, the school children streamed out of school to bid us farewell and we were fairly silent on the way home musing over what we had just witnessed. There were no tourists in this area and I think we might have been the first westerners some of them had ever spoken with

David Jellie - Editor



Malik's village



The school in Malik's village



The colourful dress of the women. Note the spurs on their bracelets.



Malik with his father and niece



Dates for your diary

Our program this year is as follows:

DATE	TIME	EVENT
April	Monday 10	12 noon Occasional lunch, Shoppingtown Hotel
May	Monday 1	TBA Visit to Western Distributor Authority
June	Monday 5	12 noon Occasional lunch, Shoppingtown Hotel
	Monday 19	TBA Visit to Infrastructure Victoria
July	Monday 31	TBA Visit to Melbourne Metro Rail Authority
August	Monday 14	12 noon Occasional lunch, Shoppingtown Hotel
September	13 and 14	TBA Visit to VicRoads Regional Office in Traralgon and local attractions
October	Monday 9	12 noon Occasional lunch, Shoppingtown Hotel
	Thursday 12	6.00 pm Drinks and dinner at Waverley RSL
	Monday 30	TBA Visit to VicRoads South Eastern Projects
November	Monday 27	12 noon Occasional lunch, Shoppingtown Hotel
December	Monday 4	12 noon Christmas lunch at Kew HO
2018		
February	Monday 12	12 noon Occasional lunch, Shoppingtown Hotel

VALE

I am saddened to report the death of Robert (Bob) Meggs on Sunday 26th March. Bob was a great colleague of mine and after we both left VicRoads we continued to see each other on the tennis court. I propose to write an obituary in the next newsletter.



What's coming up

Occasional Lunches – Shoppingtown Hotel – Monday 10th April and Monday 5th June

Bookings are not essential, but it would help with arrangements if you can let Kelvin York know on 9438 1028 if you can attend. We hope to see you there.

Visit to Western Distributor Authority – Monday 1st May 2017 at 1.50 pm

The Western Distributor Authority is a new authority and is an Administrative Office within the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (DEDJTR) responsible for the management of the Western Distributor Project on behalf of the Victorian Government.

The authority works in partnership with Transurban to deliver the Western Distributor Project. This project includes the Western Distributor, the Monash Freeway Upgrade and Webb Dock access improvements.

We propose to meet in the foyer of the authority at 80 Collins Street at 1.50 pm. Please contact Jim Webber before 24th April if you propose to come – so that he can arrange security passes to enter the office.

Visit to Infrastructure Victoria – Monday 19th June 2017 at 9.50 am

Infrastructure Victoria is also a new authority with three key roles as follows.

- Prepare a thirty-year infrastructure strategy for Victoria.
- Provide advice to the Victorian Government on infrastructure matters.
- Publish research on infrastructure matters.

We propose to meet in the foyer of the authority at 530 Collins Street at 9.50 am. Please contact Jim Webber before 12th June if you propose to come – so that he can arrange security passes to enter the office.

While friends and partners are welcome to come along, local Government councillors and CEOs should not be invited as our visits should not be used for political lobbying.

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING

4th Annual Golf Day at Greenacres

Nine members of the Association played - our highest number to date. Congratulations to the winner of the VicRoads Association trophy, Rob Gilpin, who won with 36 points. Runner up was Neil Tull (35) and third was Peter Hassett (33). Five guests played - the winner was Pete Smith (40), who was followed by Vic West (35) and Colin Cust (34). Nearest-the-pin prizes on the par three holes were won by John Ford (2), Peter Hassett (1) and Vic West (1).

Rob Gilpin (right) being congratulated by Jim Webber and the first four winners of the tournament – Jim Webber (2015), Ken Vickery (2014), John Ford (2016) and Rob Gilpin (2016).



AGM – Monday 20th March 2017

Rather than include the whole of my report that I presented at the AGM, I thought I would just mention a few of the highlights as follows:

- Our membership rose by one. We now have 278 members.
- Our program for this year will include visits to all of the authorities visited last year plus a visit to the Western Distributor Authority and Infrastructure Victoria.
- Our regional visit in September will be to Traralgon and our VicRoads Project visit will be to the Eastern projects under the leadership of Charlie Broadhurst.
- Our fees remain unchanged at \$35.00 one off payment for life membership.
- Our bank account remains steady – not enough to risk Ken Vickery absconding.
- The committee membership is substantially the same as last year but Peter Lowe has resigned and been replaced by Graham Gilpin. Peter's outstanding contribution as secretary was acknowledged and a small presentation was made to him in appreciation of his service to our Association.
- Office bearers are David Jellie (President), Jim Webber (Secretary) and Ken Vickery (Treasurer).
- Rob Gilpin was presented with the winner's cup for the Golf Day.

I also want to thank the committee for their assistance and support as well as acknowledge the wonderful support we receive from VicRoads – without which it would be extremely difficult to survive.

If anyone wants to read my report in full, please get in touch and I will send it to you.



David Jellie (right) making a presentation to Peter Lowe



Jim Webber presenting the winner's cup to Rob Gilpin

Visit to the Melbourne Level Crossing Removal Authority – Monday 27th March

Thirty four members and guests attended a presentation by the Level Crossing Removal Authority (LCRA) on Monday 27 March. Presentations were made by Tony Hedley (Project Director), Andrew Peppinkhouse (Senior Project Manager) and Robert Kania (Senior Project Engineer). Tony's team is responsible for all new rail and upgrades in the western and northern suburbs.

LXRA reports to the Co-ordinator General of Transport, along with Melbourne Metro Rail Authority, Western Distributor Authority and the North East Link.

The team indicated that the progress made against the Government's commitment to removing 50 level crossings in eight years is: 10 completed, 4 under construction, 13 design and construct contracts awarded.

Tony's group is also responsible for several rail upgrades at Hurstbridge, Mernda, and others. One of the other issues raised by the team was the focus on contributing to urban renewal around the new stations by encouraging retail developments in the station precincts. Also mentioned was the importance of the level crossing removal program in facilitating greater train frequencies when Melbourne Metro is completed. Examples are provided below.

The meeting was opened to questions and comments. These included additional projects (the current 50 are locked in), the business case for the 50 crossings (it was pointed out that each project requires a gateway evaluation), priority should be given to tram/rail crossings, the short construction time frames were praised, the value of the removal of crossings located close to signals was questioned, the value of additional open space created by the elevated rail construction, concerns about Councils allowing buildings close to the rail reservation and graffiti.

Lower Plenty Road, Grange Road and duplication of the Hurstbridge Line

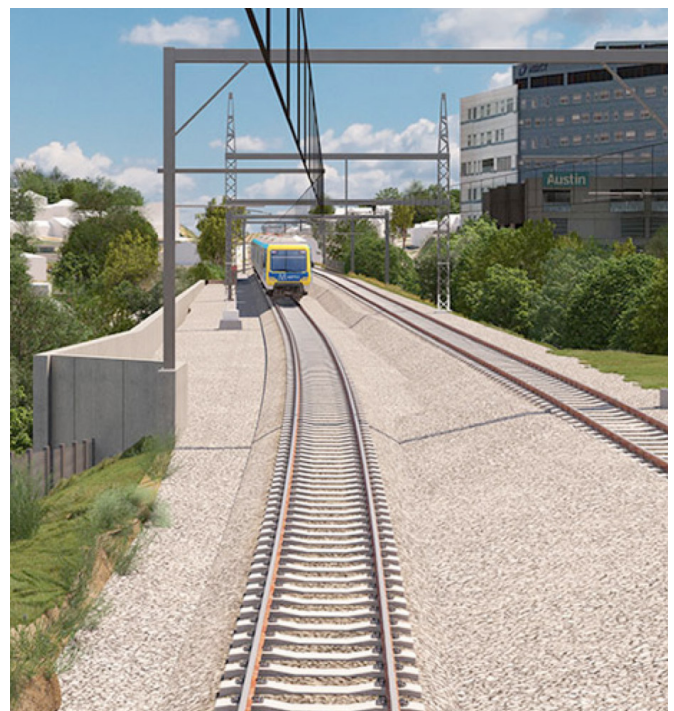
Work has begun to remove the level crossings at Lower Plenty Road in Rosanna and Grange Road in Alphington, and duplicate a 1.2 km section of the Hurstbridge line. These crossings are among Melbourne's worst, with boom gates down at both locations for around 40 minutes in the two-hour morning peak, holding up traffic and triggering risky behaviour.

Around 1000 people will work on the project at its peak, including more than 30 apprentices and trainees over the life of the project.

Over the coming weeks, the team will begin to establish site fences and a site office, complete further geotechnical investigations, remove vegetation and relocate underground utilities in preparation for major construction, with works ramping up through March and April.

The Hurstbridge Rail Line Upgrade will improve the frequency and reliability of services in Melbourne's north east, with flow-on benefits for the South Morang line. The project will safely separate trains from traffic, cyclists and pedestrians, as well as building a new Rosanna Station, and duplicating tracks between Heidelberg and Rosanna.

The \$395 million contract for the Hurstbridge Rail Line Upgrade and removal of two level crossings will be complete by the end of 2018.



Artist's impression of the duplication of the Hurstbridge Line



Revitalisation of Carrum

A massive plan to revitalise Carrum is proposed. It includes a complete reconfiguration of the local road network including Station Street extending over the Patterson River, closing the level crossings at Station Street, Eel Race Road, and Mascot Avenue, and removing the ugly train stabling and replacing it with a new Carrum village built around a modern new station.

McLeod Road – the main arterial – will be extended to the Nepean Highway with a level crossing-free road intersection, a short modern rail bridge and brand new Carrum station.

After extensive consultation, and exhaustive technical investigations, it was determined that a rail trench was not feasible due to the proximity of the project to the Patterson River. This massive reconfiguration of the road and rail network will safely separate trains from traffic, reduce congestion and improve access to houses, shops and the bay.

The revitalisation provide opportunities for more parking, parkland and bike paths, as well as new community facilities, better access to the foreshore and a range of other improvements that will be determined in consultation with locals.

The existing train stabling yard at Carrum will be moved to a new, purpose built facility in Kananook with more space for the extra trains that will run on the Frankston line because of the Metro Tunnel.

Building the new stabling facility will require the acquisition of seven commercial properties in Kananook. LXRA will continue to work closely with all affected businesses, to assist them through the acquisition process and help them find alternative premises. No houses will be acquired.



Artist's impression of Carrum Station area

Works to date

Since the start of 2017 two more level crossings have been removed in Melbourne's Eastern suburbs. After 41 days of 24/7 work the Belgrave/Lilydale line reopened on Monday 6 February with trains travelling underneath both Blackburn and Heatherdale roads. Ten dangerous and congested level crossings have now been removed in Melbourne since 2015.

This summer works program has been a massive undertaking with hundreds of staff working non-stop for six weeks. During that time 80 Olympic swimming pools worth of material was excavated out of the rail cutting to lower the line in Blackburn and Mitcham.

The new Heatherdale Station is the eighth station rebuilt as part of the level crossing removal project. Ongoing work around the station precincts in both Blackburn and Heatherdale will continue as scheduled through to mid 2017 to complete landscaping, parking and the new walking and cycling paths.



NEWS FROM VICROADS

Transport for Victoria

There have been recent legislative changes in relation to Transport for Victoria (TfV) which will impact on VicRoads. Early in February, the Victorian Parliament passed an Act amending the Transport Integration Act 2017. Essentially, this follows on from the establishment of Transport for Victoria (TfV) last year and provides more clarity around VicRoads' role and the role of TfV.

VicRoads, Public Transport Victoria and other transport entities now report through to TfV as the lead transport agency. This ensures TfV has the authority to set the direction for the whole transport portfolio, enabling better collaboration among transport agencies to create one integrated transport system for Victoria, regardless of the mode of transport.

To help make this happen, VicRoads becomes an advisory partner to TfV, subject to TfV's strategic framework, policies and performance measures within the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Roads.

For TfV to function as intended, the legislative and road safety planning functions will now move across to TfV. This means TfV will now develop road safety legislation, and VicRoads will support the legislation by continuing to develop and implement operational road safety policies. Specifically, six people currently in the legislative area, and five people in the road safety planning area will move across. People Services is working with the people involved to ensure a smooth transition with all their entitlements intact. Timing is yet to be confirmed.

This is the second of two identified stages in the establishment of TfV and follows on from last year's move of 33 roles in the road system planning function, across to TfV.

Housing for the homeless

VicRoads has entered into an arrangement to make available nine pieces of land along Ballarat Road to locate 57 small transportable housing units to provide housing for homeless people. The program partners Launch Housing, are running the program, together with the Harris Family, who are significantly funding the construction of the units through philanthropy. VicRoads is keen to see how the program will work and at the same time look at where it might have other land that might be suitable for this purpose.

Management of country roads

Parliament has agreed to conduct an enquiry into VicRoads' management of country roads. The enquiry is yet to convene and call for submissions, but it is due to report by 30 November 2017. The enquiry will address:

- the effectiveness of VicRoads in managing country roads;
- the existing funding model and its lack of effectiveness for country Victoria;
- the lack of consultation with regional communities and their subsequent lack of input into prioritising which roads are in dire need of repair; and
- the option of dismantling VicRoads and creating a specific Country Roads organisation and separate Metropolitan Roads body.

Note from the editor: When I read of this I was both pleased and flabbergasted. From our visits to regional offices over the last ten years or so it was made very clear that the neglect of maintenance of country roads was not acceptable to VicRoads managers - in the regions and across the board. It was Treasury that controlled the purse strings and allocated the annual budgets for road maintenance. In fact I recall in a previous newsletter saying that I doubted that there was a road engineer in Treasury who would have understood the importance of having a proper road maintenance program.

It now seems to me that the interference by politicians and Treasury bean counters in the details of road management has led to the realization that our country roads are in dire need of maintenance and rehabilitation - and that VicRoads has been responsible for this deterioration. Woe is me!

Road safety

Remember this time last year how I was lamenting the road safety toll. You will recall that 2016 began with a terrible January and February with motorcyclists being over-represented. However by the end of February this year we had 20 fewer deaths than for the same time in 2016. As I write this in late March, the picture has improved even more. Deaths are 37 % lower than at the same time last year - from 75 in 2016 to 47 in 2017. Motor cycle deaths are down 74 % and deaths in Melbourne are down 62%.

Australia is on the move – and how it affects VicRoads

Australia is situated on the world's fastest moving tectonic plate. It is now necessary to change Australia's national co-ordinate datum to better relate mapped features to global satellite positioning system measurements.

The changes potentially impact all users of geospatial information to varying degrees (forgive the pun) ie. mapping and map based products such as design plans, GIS datasets and GPS attributed data, especially when measured at sub-metre level accuracy. Many VicRoads staff regularly, if not daily, utilise mapped datasets and/or GPS related data.

Changes are being made to the system that underlies Australia's location information. The changes will bring Australia's national latitude and longitude coordinates into line with global satellite positioning systems, enabling smartphones and other positioning technologies to accurately locate features marked on our maps.

In short, the current co-ordinate system GDA94 is changing to a system known as GDA2020 which results in a shift of approximately 1.8m in a north-easterly direction. The changes are needed because national and global location information systems operate differently, and they are diverging. Australia's national grid of latitude and longitude coordinates moves with the drift of the continent, like a giant net tied to known reference points on the landscape. Together, these reference points and latitude and longitude coordinates are known as a geodetic datum. Every country has its own datum, and the one Australia uses now is called the Geocentric Datum of Australia 1994, or GDA94. The coordinates of features on our maps, such as roads, buildings and property boundaries are all based on GDA94 and they do not change over time.

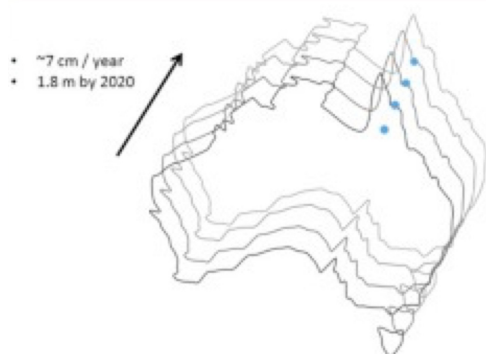
Historically, location differences of a metre or so have not been an issue, because positioning systems have been broad-brush to say the least. When GDA94 was adopted in 2000, GPS locations were 'accurate' to 100 metres. Since then, however, two important things have happened. Australia has moved about 1.5 metres northeast, effectively moving the location of mapped features and their associated GDA94 coordinates. At the same time, positioning technology has evolved considerably. By 2020, Australia will have moved 1.8 metres north-east of where it was in 1994, and many of us will own devices that pinpoint places as small as, well, a smartphone. With real-time access to precise satellite positioning at our fingertips, we'll notice discrepancies with GDA94-mapped features. The upshot is that Australia's datum needs updating so we can reap the benefits of 21st Century positioning technology.

Stage 1 commenced in January 2017 with no immediate impacts to VicRoads, but over time data will begin to be purchased and/or gathered that is referenced to the new datum, GDA2020. This new continent-fixed datum is being modelled on bringing the co-ordinates of Australia's mapped features into line with global systems in 2020. This datum is not only accounting for the continental drift between 1994 and 2017, but is moving beyond that (over-correcting) to that of 2020.

Stage 2 will commence in 2020 when Australia will shift to a "dynamic datum". This modernisation will establish a different kind of location reference system, similar to the global one that will continually model Australia's movement and the location information Australia relies upon will always be in "perfect" alignment with the devices used to access it (ie. GPS enabled systems).

GDA is a mapping (co-ordinate) system ie. it is essentially two-dimensional and as such the vertical dimension is not affected. The Office of Surveyor General Victoria (OSGV) has advised that AHD will continue as the state's vertical datum, but OSGV is undertaking measurements and re-adjustment of control marks in several areas of the state known to be affected by inconsistencies and discrepancies.

GDA2020 - WHY do we need a new datum?



ITRF position (from GPS) vs GDA94 position



NEWS FROM OUR MEMBERS

Iris Whittaker

I have another story to tell about Iris Whittaker. In the last newsletter I wrote about her husband - Russell Meehan - her Lambda Man. This time, the story is about her mother. Iris' mother was born in 1907 at home in Yando in Northern Victoria. Her name was Sarah May Haw. Yando is about 10 Km from Boort. She married a farmer, Len Whittaker, and they lived for the rest of their lives on a farm outside Boort. May - as she was known - had little schooling. She preferred to spend her time in the garden rather than the schoolroom and she remained a keen gardener for life.

Like many of us at a certain age, Len wrote a memoir of his family's history as early settlers in the area. He called his memoir *Recollections of Life on a Farm in North-West Victoria 1904-1988*. He wrote it in 1989 when he was 85 years old. I have read it and I was quite touched by its honesty and for the modest way he described the heroic efforts of the settlers of those days just to survive in a land of heat, drought, storms, floods, isolation and reliance on horses. Today's generation would have little appreciation of what life in those times was like.

Len started his story thus: "I have already written this story once. But as I have some time on my hands and perhaps not much time left, have decided to do it again, perhaps better, perhaps worse." But as a prelude to his story, he commenced with 'Recollections' written by May. Iris thinks this may have been a transcript of a conversation with one of her sisters. Her simple words moved me and I hope you enjoy reading them as I did. This is an unedited version of her words.

'In 1908, oil was first discovered in Persia, after long years of searching, 1000 to 7900 feet down, to run cars on (not many cars then). By 1920, there were 92 million, they were getting tons of oil.

1902 was an extremely bad drought year. 1914 also a bad drought year, when water was very scarce, no Waranga water in Yando then. The nearest Waranga flowing channel was through old Penno's property under the bridge on the way to Pyramid Hill. My father carted our domestic supply from there, twice a week, in two large square tanks, which he had set up on the wagon, drawn by horses. The tanks were filled by a bucket, or container, on the end of a pitchfork with a long handle; all by an honest hand. When the tanks of water arrived home, all the fowls, dogs and anything with a mouth rushed to the drips of water from the tap, splashing for a drink. With it, we washed the clothes, cleaned floors, bathed and did everything that we needed water for. No rain, dry, hot and dusty, and I'll guarantee we were clean as the next one!

Later the channel was made, along the road past our front road, and the Waranga water was turned on. It trickled into our mud-cracked dry dam, and our lambs, which my father had to sell for one shilling each because he had no water or feed for them, they had to jump over the trickle of water to go away. It came just too late to save them. That was the end of sheep for a while. Father sold them all and went back to cows again.

The River was the nearest other water, which was also nearly dry and very brackish, but the cattle could get a drink from the river. There were no gardens or vegetables grown then. When it rained in winter we planted a few pounds of peas, cabbage and cauli, lettuce and radish in furrows made by a single-furrow plough, drawn by one horse. We had them through the spring, then summer finished all that. The young fruit trees, which we used to plant, would die of drought or flood. In those days, the flood came right up to the house and the house had to be banked around by shovels in the late afternoon, to stop the water coming in during the night.

I remember my mother had a nice bed of violets and they were dug into the bank. I thought that was cruel, as I loved flowers and they were a minority. Mother also had a wax plant in a pot. I remember when I was about four years old growing a packet of pansies and I loved their little faces, all velvety and a delight to a child. We rarely saw other children in those days, and our grandmother who was eightyish, lived happily in our family and was my main companion. We had fun and games and she knitted socks for the children most of the time. At 84 years of age she passed to a higher life in one of those cruel heat waves.

My mother taught us all to say our prayers, and father read to us each evening round our log fire. After the day's work was finished, the thirty cows were all hand milked and hand fed with chaff. Up again early next morning, wood to cart for winter, water for summer. We had two six foot logs each day on the open fire, which was kept burning during winter. One log each morning and one each evening, as granny had rheumatism, and father did his best to keep us all warm and fed.

We always had milk, cream, butter and meat, until the winter came and the fowls stopped laying. We also kept pigs, and father killed about four pigs a year and a sheep each week later. A lot of pieces were given to friends and relatives, and pork or ham. Mother made the butter and there were times in winter when it took a long time to turn to butter, and in summer it was made before sunrise whilst it was still cool. There were no ice or fridges in those days. It was made by a butter pat or stick. Later we got a Chery butter churn and made a delicious cake with some of the buttermilk.'



John Wright

John has been writing about his experiences and events from his life story. He is currently up to 1968. The entire collection is really intended for his children and grandchildren but he has agreed to us publishing them. They are quite extensive so I have decided to break them up as installments to be published over the next few newsletters – a bit like Charles Dickens. So here is the first one:

Joining the CRB

Early in 1958 I was a junior draftsman with the Public Works Department in Spring Street. I was 17 and had been working there since the beginning of the previous year. When my boss told me I would be working full-time with him on mental hospitals and sanatoriums I decided to leave, as I found those places to be very depressing. Having recently seen a PWD proposal to improve the parking area outside the CRB offices in Carlton, I decided that I would join that organisation.

Following an initial interview with an immaculately, navy-suited Mr R.A.A.D. Bell, I attended a small office off the Board Room, where Bill Brake and several other officers grilled me on an amazing list of subjects - most of which would no longer be politically correct now, including how often I attended church and my relationship with my parents. Shortly afterwards, I received a letter saying I had been appointed. After the shambolic management of the PWD, working for the CRB was to be a major change.

Head office

The CRB head office was in Rathdown Street, Carlton in the Western Annexe of the Royal Exhibition Building, which was also occupied by the Motor Registration Board and the Transport Regulation Board.

In addition to its portion of the Western Annexe, the CRB also occupied a number of detached galvanised iron outbuildings at the rear of the complex, affectionately known as 'tin sheds'. The entire Annexe, including the CRB part was a virtual rabbit warren, with 12 ft. ceilings and tall, dark, timber panelling that must have been at least 8 ft. high. After the CRB moved to Kew in 1961, all traces of the Western Annexe and its outbuildings were removed.

Dandenong Division

Despite its name, Dandenong Division was located in Carlton and not in Dandenong. This confused lots of people who would tell us they had traipsed around Dandenong looking for it. Dandenong Division was one of nine regional divisions. When I joined the CRB, it began at Fawkner in the west and extended north up the Hume and Northern Highways to Tooborac, eastwards across to Seymour, Alexandra and Jamieson and finally south to Warragul and Wonthaggi. The built-up area west of Box Hill was shared between The CRB Metropolitan Division and the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works. Other divisions were Metropolitan, Bendigo, Ballarat, Benalla, Horsham, Traralgon, Warrnambool and Geelong.

In 1957, Melbourne's built-up area pretty much extended to Oakleigh and Box Hill in the east, and to Fawkner Cemetery in the northwest. Werribee, Ringwood and Lilydale were just modest country towns, although Dandenong, with its GMH and Heinz factories, was already a major centre.

The office


The Divisional office was at the eastern end of the Annexe, right next door to the Exhibition Buildings. So close in fact that it was possible to wander into that vast building when exhibitions were being held. A fellow draftsman and I once entered unchallenged through a side door wearing our dust coats, to a USSR exhibition that was being set up. A very pretty Russian girl poured us each a small glass of neat vodka, which generated surprisingly warmth in our tummies.

Above our office was the CRB library and a very small office occupied by the Traffic Commission, then managed by Mr J D Thorpe, who later became a Board Member. I spent some time in the library, poring over its amazing collection of books on automotive engineering from the 1920s. One of these described the advanced engine for the famous American Stutz Bearcat, a highly sought-after sports car, which had twin overhead camshafts, inclined valves and hemispherical combustion chambers.

Next to the Divisional office and separated from it by a high partition were the offices of Metropolitan Division and the CRB Chief Engineer, Johnny Mathieson.

Dandenong Division was a long, single, well-lit room divided up into glass and timber partitions. If anything, the furnishings seemed a bit more modern than the dim surroundings of the rest of head office. I sat at its western end - right beside the door connecting to the rest of head office. Just outside that door were the offices of Mr McKenzie, the Staff Officer and Miss Lillian Moon and other typists.





From my desk, I could see a collection of long sheds, which housed the specialist divisions of Traffic and Location, Bridge Division and Plans and Survey. On the wall behind me, somebody had left a wonderful map of the Gold Coast, showing all the canal developments from Coolangatta to Southport. It looked fantastic and I resolved to go there for my next big holiday. Beneath that map was a chart I was maintaining of the ladder positions of the VFL teams. This was long before South Melbourne was hived off to Sydney. It was the year (1958) that Collingwood lost the first 6 games and then went on to win the Premiership.

I could also see part of a staircase leading to the upstairs library. Once or twice a day, an extremely voluptuous, Swiss/French older lady with wonderful breasts would walk up and down the steps and smile enigmatically at me. She wore close-fitting clothing that emphasised her truly splendid figure. As a virginal 18-year old, overflowing with hormones, I found it difficult not to stare at her and I am sure she enjoyed disturbing me as thoroughly as she did. I fully believed the rumour that was going about, that she was already on to her third husband - the first two having died of exhaustion.

In addition to preparing locality and construction site plans to illustrate engineers' reports I was also a dogsbody. The position's previous occupant was a newly graduated engineer from night school, Anton Pommers. Anton, said to have been a WW2 Latvian fighter pilot with the Luftwaffe, had been a superb draftsman and illustrator, and I was to discover that senior management expected a similar standard from me.

As the most junior member of the office I was responsible for purchasing the office's tea and sugar from a gloomy old grocer's shop in Lygon Street, Carlton. There were no fancy Italian restaurants or boutiques lining that thoroughfare in 1958. The nearest things to cafés were narrow, dark shops with groups of old Italian men in them, sitting around tables in shirtsleeves drinking out of small glasses and talking about better times in the old country. Many women in Lygon Street wore all-black dresses, signifying their permanent status as widows. It was a very drab place and I always felt like a trespasser when I went there.

Some of my work was quite tedious. For some reason, all municipalities seeking new or replacement road signs on main roads, including old-fashioned wooden fingerboards, had to apply to the CRB for approval to erect them. Although the CRB was paying for the signs, it seemed an amazing lack of trust in the Councils' ability to manage such a simple matter. My job was to check these paper applications, which arrived by the hundreds, record them and submit properly worded orders for the parts to the Central Depot in South Melbourne.

I eventually graduated to more serious forms of road design, including the duplication of the Hume Highway through Kilmore (This part of the Hume later became the Northern Highway when the Wallan-Broadford Deviation was constructed). In this task, I was to be coached by the CRB's most senior draftsman, Dick Coulter. He patiently showed me how to prepare longitudinal sections at 100 to 1 scale exaggeration and use French curves (rather than mathematical grades and vertical curves) to ensure that the edges of the new road matched nearly all of the driveway entrances along the built-up section of the highway. Dick called the resulting design kerb line profiles "Queen lines".


Some of the officers

Harry George

The Divisional Engineer was Mr Harold Percival George, a tall imposing man, always expensively dressed, with a homburg hat and a well-trimmed black moustache. I understood he came from a wealthy background; had the dark, good looks of actor Tom Sellick and spoke like a classic Hollywood movie business executive. He oozed authority and self-confidence and was rarely around because he was often overseas attending high-level road conferences in the USA and elsewhere.

After obtaining my driving licence, I was sometimes dragooned into driving Harry to his luncheon appointments in the City when Jack Ryan was unavailable to do this. This involved me driving him in his very up-market vehicle, such as a Chrysler Royal or a top-of-the-line Vauxhall (and, as a novice driver, being terrified I would do something wrong), down Collins Street or Lonsdale Street or dropping him off outside Myers or the RACV Club in Williams Street. It meant sacrificing most of my 45-minute lunch hour, because I was usually required to pick him up again. There was no way of parking his huge vehicle in the crowded city streets, so I had to endlessly circle the block, desperately waiting for him to come out.

One day, I was driving him in his beautiful automatic Vauxhall Cresta to a lunch appointment in Collins Street. He had earlier lectured me about keeping my left foot tucked under the seat, so that I would not try to engage a clutch that was not there. I had become very good at not going for the clutch - until this day. We were gliding to a gentle halt neat Russell Street. Mr George had just donned his immaculate Homburg hat and was reaching for the door handle. Alas, my left foot shot out, unbidden in its relentless search for the clutch and found the brake pedal. The car stopped dead with a screech and Harry pitched forward into the windscreen, crumpling his precious Homburg. He didn't say a word. Just looked at me and got out.



On another occasion, I was grabbed to transport the Board Member, Caleb Roberts to the Melbourne University, where he was to give a lecture. Caleb was the only son of Tom Roberts, the famous Heidelberg School artist. He had served in the little-known War of Intervention, landing in Murmansk, Russia with British forces in an unsuccessful attempt to suppress the October Revolution. He was a very tall, athletic and energetic man with a prominent jaw who would stride about the Carlton office, always in a great hurry. One day, he tripped on a piece of loose carpet near the Board Room and put his head right through an office partition - knocking himself out. On another day, he was driving an expensive, new automatic car near GMH Dandenong when the traffic ahead slowed. He went for the clutch and hit the big brake pedal, stopping suddenly. When a driver who had rear-ended him got out of his car and came forward to talk to him, Roberts decked him with one punch, later claiming in Court that he thought the man was going to hit him, so he got in first.

Bill Brake

Next to Harry's office was that of the Assistant Divisional Engineer, Mr William (Bill) Brake, who had interviewed me in the Board Room. I later discovered that Bill had worked for the CRB in Bairnsdale when I was there as a child and had in fact been living in the Cremona Guest house - directly across the road from the Police Station where I lived. Bill was as sharp as a tack and had the broadest Australian accent I had ever heard. He was the first person I ever heard say "I was flat out like a lizard drinking".

Ian Rennick


Not far from Bill was Ian Rennick, who was responsible for right-of-way matters including land acquisition for road widening. Ian often talked about the days when the CRB was housed in the old Titles Office in the City, and seemed to be responsible for ensuring that most of Melbourne's major arterial Roads would have sufficient land reserved to handle future traffic. His knowledge of individual widening proposals and land acquisition cases was encyclopaedic and he eventually became responsible for all of these activities in Victoria as the CRB's Right of Way Engineer. Many of his contemporaries will remember his favourite expression was "...that kind of sort of thing".

Jim Shankland

Jim was a tall, older engineer whose specialty area was the periodic resealing of all main roads and highways in the Division. He once told me how dodgy contractors in the old days saved money when building roads in steep mountain country. The cheapest way of building these roads was to have a cross-section that was half in cut and half in fill. However, it was important to properly prepare the area beneath the fill to prevent it from sliding downhill. Dodgy builders would simply lay felled trees across the slope and build up the fill on top of them. When the trees rotted, half of the road would suddenly slide down the hill, but the contractors would be long gone by then. Jim said he had encountered this practice when working on the new Maintongoon Road, North of Eildon.

Admin staff

The typists were Gloria Brown and Mrs Fitzsimons, and nearby was the accountant, Bob Boucher, a small, older man who looked vaguely like comedian Lou Costello and told wonderfully wry jokes. Behind him were clerks Austin Humphries, Roy Callender and Jack Ryan. Austin was one of nature's gentlemen and had been a tailor in a previous life. Although he was just a little guy, the massive shoulders he sewed into his tailored sports jackets made him look like a weight lifter. Roy Callender was a very friendly man and a radio buff. He could talk endlessly about superheterodyne radios and rectifiers. He loved discussions, and regardless of any topic that might be in contention over morning tea, Roy would invariably take an opposing view - but always in good humour.



Jack Ryan (Tall Jack)

Jack Ryan (TJ) became Tall Jack after the Division moved to Nunawading in March 1969. This was to distinguish him from another, much shorter Jack Ryan (JC), who was Frank Docking's brother-in-law.

Jack Ryan was a tall, thin man in his mid-40s who told wonderful stories about his adventures in Australia in WW2. He told me that his thinness was a result of losing a lot of his bowel after barely surviving a flying fortress crash in the Pacific.

For a humble clerk, Jack seemed to spend a lot of time out of the office driving official vehicles on private purchasing errands at unspecified special warehouses at ridiculously cheap prices for very senior people, including members of the Board - whose names Jack frequently dropped. No one ever seemed to take him to task for not doing any clerical work because, I suspect, he knew where all the bodies were buried. Jack was also Harry George's personal chauffeur.

Jack would often call by my desk, beer on his breath, to confide the latest bit of high-level gossip in hushed tones of great seriousness. One always felt greatly privileged to be the recipient of such confidential information - even though he told the same stories to everyone. Jack knew more lurks and perks than anybody living, and always knew "this cove" that could get anything done or sell you whatever you wanted for next-to-nothing. I never had the money to find out.

I remember the first time I worked overtime. Jack and I were the only people there and he suggested that he knew a great place for 'dinner' - namely the local pub, where we each downed 3 large pots of beer in rapid succession. I was useless for work after that. Walking back to the station later that night, Jack dragged me into his favourite pub in Russell Street for a few more beers.

Frank Hopwood and Jim Symons

There were two English engineers - Frank Hopwood and Jim Symons (Jim was tragically killed on the Hume Highway in 1968). Frank related his frustrations as a military engineer trying to reconstruct the Italian railway system in World War 2. The retreating Germans had dynamited rail bridges between tunnels on curving alignments, and Frank was using Bailey bridge sections to repair them. This was a difficult task, because launching a Bailey span required a straight section next to the bridge. Jim also told wonderful stories about his amusing adventures working in outback Nigeria.

Tom Saville

Tom Saville was possibly the oldest engineer in the Division at the time. His was a success story of personal advancement, having risen from being a ganger on road works to being the supervising engineer for the Bass, South Gippsland and Princes Highways. Tom was getting close to retirement and I knew his reaction times were dreadful from recent staff tests. My time was 0.36 seconds. Tom's was one second. In addition, Tom also had a depth perception problem, which he kept to himself. I would prepare Tom's accident reports for him. On at least one occasion Tom managed to get his CRB vehicle sandwiched between a parked car and a tram in Cotham Road.



Ray Adams

Ray Adams looked after the Hume and Northern Highways. He was in his 50s and had the most amazing bushy eyebrows. He was to mentor his replacement, the late Maurice Johnson who was tragically killed on the Calder Highway in the early 1970s. I accompanied Ray on many trips to Pyalong and Seymour. He always wore a brown sports jacket and was friends with the famous Aboriginal pastor, Doug Nichols, who we would sometimes meet on our trips.

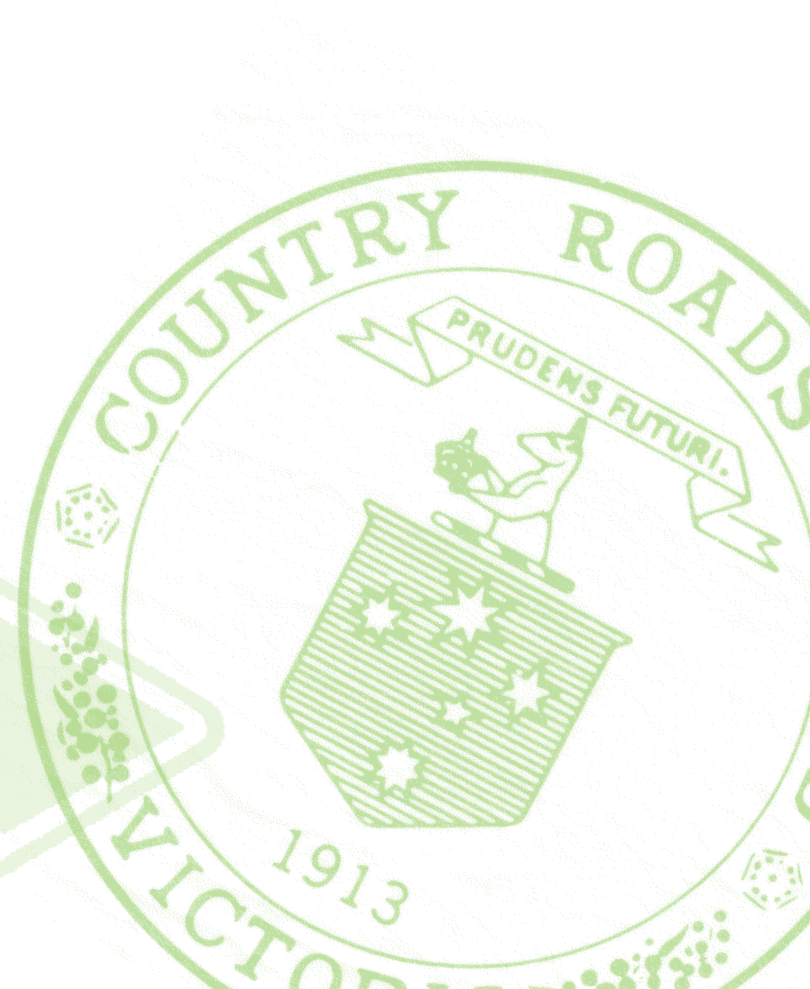
Ray was an excitable driver and we became involved in at least one terrifying incident in his CRB utility returning from Pretty Sally Hill. Travelling at the then legal limit of 50 miles per hour we were overtaken by another, faster vehicle. Ray decided to give chase - although he had no authority to apprehend the driver, but the other car was far more powerful and quickly outdistanced us. The Hume Highway north of Melbourne had only two lanes then. Travelling at 80 mph we came over a crest and were confronted in the distance by two large semi-trailers coming towards us. One was overtaking the other, which meant that there was no road left for us. Ray hit the brakes and after slowing to 60 mph we kept right on going because our brakes had 'faded' from the heat and we were going too fast to change into second gear. I could see my last moments approaching and shut my eyes. Ray managed to pass on the narrow, unsealed left hand shoulder without losing control.

Ray's finest hour came a few years later when he was driving alone up Pretty Sally Hill and a wasp entered his car through the open quarter vent. In his efforts to dispatch it, he crossed the white line and an oncoming driver hit seven wooden guide posts trying to avoid him. It was rumoured that the Board presented him with a large fly swatter with the advice that he carry it at all times in his vehicle.

David Emery

The first person I worked for was David Emery, who looked after the Maroondah Highway and the Yarra Glen-Yea Road. My first outing to the country was with David and Jock Anderson from Plans and Surveys to visit major roadworks on the southern side of the Great Dividing Range near Castella. The first stage of the Yarra Glen - Yea Road was being constructed in steep, sidelong country from Dixon's Creek to the top of the Range near Mt Slide. Bulldozers were pushing huge boulders over the edge of the road formation to tumble down like wrecking balls through beautiful tree-fern gullies. "They'll grow back" I was told.

When this route to Yea was completed a year later, it quickly became the favoured link from outer eastern Melbourne to Sydney. It was the last, entirely new northerly route ever to be constructed out of Melbourne before the Wallan-Broadford Deviation of the Hume. When David left the CRB his position on this job was taken over by another young engineer, Barry Nolan.



Merv Williams

Later, we were joined by Merv Williams, who came from the Department of Works in the Northern Territory. Merv took his responsibilities very seriously. On one of our trips he stopped at an isolated roadside café near Wandin. Like most businesses, the shop owner had placed advertising signs on the road verge and on the boundary. Merv then told the lady owner that not only were these signs illegal, but if they were still there the next time he came by, he would cut them in half with a chainsaw. He then asked the dumbfounded woman for a chocolate milkshake.

On another trip, we were descending into Narbethong where a road contractor was clearing trees for changes to the road alignment. Merv started swearing as soon as he saw the extent of the clearing - which was far in excess of what had been specified. Jumping out of the car, he confronted this huge man with massive arms and a black bushy beard, who towered over him.

Looking up, Merv gave him a huge serve, which may have also cast doubt on the guy's parentage. I saw the guy stiffen and say: "What did you just say?" And Merv repeated it. I thought "Merv is going to die and I'm going to be killed straight afterwards". I can remember backing away and wondering if I would have time to reach the car to escape and report the murder, when Merv practically shirt-fronted the fellow, poking him in the chest while ranting about his contractual transgressions without taking a breath. I don't think anybody had ever been game to say a bad word to this guy in his entire life, and he was flabbergasted. We got back in the car, me shaking, and drove off.

Sometime in 1959, Merv and I made the long drive up to Kevington via Woods Point in a clapped-out Land Rover. There was half a turn of slack in the steering and the brakes had to be pumped to work. I took my turn at driving with my heart in my mouth.

Our mission was to carry out a route feasibility study for a deviation of the Mansfield-Woods Point Road between Kevington and Gaffney's Creek. At a place called Picnic Point, the existing gravel road was pinched between the flood-prone Goulburn River and steep sidling country and was frequently flooded. The only real option to avoid flooding was a new road on higher ground. One possibility was an old bullock trail that wound its way through the hills and avoided the problem area. It was overgrown and barely accessible to cars and would need to be significantly improved if it were to be used as an alternative to the main road. It was called the Flourbag Hill track.

We arrived at Kevington Hotel late in the afternoon, and were the only guests staying there. Merv arranged for cut lunches and thermoses of coffee for the long day's work ahead of us. The hotel's electric power came from an old, thumping single-cylinder diesel generator that was mercifully switched off, along with all of the lights in the ancient hotel, around 9.00 pm. We had single beds in a big room out the back, where we could hear the nearby Goulburn River gurgling through the open windows. I remember my ancient wire mattress bed almost touching the floor beneath me. Nevertheless, I got to sleep, which was just as well...


The following morning dawned bright and sunny, and after a hearty breakfast we drove south towards Woods Point to locate the overgrown beginning of the Flourbag Hill track. I remember stopping at the tiny mining settlement of Gaffney's Creek, where we entered a small, general store to purchase some item that Merv wanted. On the wooden counter, amongst other items of hardware, I was intrigued to see an open, wooden box of gelignite sticks, each individually wrapped in waterproof paper - obviously, part of the buyable stock. I was almost tempted to buy one.

After driving some distance along the overgrown Flourbag track, we started walking. I was carrying a small tomahawk, a compass and an inclinometer. Merv had a notebook and a pencil. Before doing any actual surveying, we decided to explore what appeared to be an old bullock track that branched off the one we were to survey. Merv thought it might be an even better alternative and was determined to explore it.

It was mid-morning when we discovered that the track suddenly ended at several derelict wooden huts at an old gold mining site. I marvelled at the 20-year old headlines of old newspapers scattered about the floor. There was no point in further exploration because the heavily timbered country rose steeply in all directions. I was thinking about morning tea with fruitcake and coffee in our jeep and said as much to Merv, who then uttered the fateful words: "We'll take a shortcut back to the jeep".

We started up this very steep slope. Merv's intention was clearly to walk along the ridge to its intersection with the Flour Bag Creek track at the Flourbag saddle. He was the boss and he was supremely confident in his own judgement, so I kept my mouth shut.

Lunch time came and went without lunch and without any sign that we were approaching the saddle. The country was getting steeper. I could see many wombat burrows and marvelled that these hardy creatures could travel thousands of feet down the steep slopes to access water in the gullies. I was getting very hungry.



It was late afternoon before Merv finally admitted, after much deliberation with the compass, that we were either walking along the wrong ridge or were walking the wrong way on the correct ridge. We were somewhere on the northern flank of Mt Terrible. In the far distance to the north we could just see the heavy earthworks of the Eildon-Jamieson Road, which was then being constructed by Thiess Brothers. Despite Thiess being the major builder of the roads for the famous Snowy scheme, this road would send them broke. There was no question of us walking there. It was too far away.

Around 4 pm we decided it would be necessary to cross over to the adjacent ridge. Our descent soon found us trapped in a steep gully that was completely overgrown with bushes and vines, which tore at our clothes and skin. By the time we reached the narrow, dry stream at the bottom, it was nearly dark. We commenced an equally steep climb up to the distant ridge, now walking in pitch darkness with only the luminous hand of the compass to guide us. I was terrified of emasculating myself on a jagged stump hidden in the darkness or breaking my leg in a wombat hole.

At last, we reached the ridgeline, but were disappointed in not finding the track. It was midnight, we were hungry, thirsty, cold and exhausted and we decided that we would not continue any further in the darkness. We were both shivering, as we had on only relatively light clothing. I had no matches to light a fire. In the faint light, we could see a large hollow log. We enlarged a hole in it with my axe and we climbed in, mindless of snakes and spiders and cuddled up to share warmth and promptly went to sleep.

Around 2 am we were wakened by the repeated sound of a distant car horn. We scrambled out, quickly realising it was a search party. The horn sounded again, and when it stopped we yelled out and were heard by the searchers who illuminated us with a powerful light. We were running towards them when a loud-hailer commanded us to stop, advising us there was a 600-ft. drop between them and us. In the darkness, we had missed the track by no more than 50 feet during our climb up. Had we kept walking we may well have tumbled over a cliff.

It turned out that when we failed to arrive at the hotel for dinner (or tea as it was then called) the management went out looking for us. It was already dark when they found our abandoned Land rover with our food still in it. We were told that there were three separate search parties looking for us - the CRB road patrol, the SEC and the Forest Commission. We returned to the hotel and after soup, sandwiches and warm drinks for us and all of the searchers, we fell into our beds at 4 am.

At 7am the following morning, still stiff and sore and exhausted from our ordeal, I was awakened by Merv, who told me that we had work to do and to get cracking. Merv was wonderfully fit and was a keen tennis player. It was as if nothing had happened the previous day, and that we had gone to bed at 9.00 pm as usual. I was flabbergasted but had no choice but to comply.

We drove to Lockwood, forded Moonlight Creek and found the southern end of the track. We left the track and started driving straight up the slope until the front wheels started to lift off the ground. Merv declared that we would walk up to the saddle we had been looking for on the previous day and commence surveying a new route down to the Creek. It must have taken us an hour to climb up to the saddle, and when we got there, Merv discovered that he had left his pencil in the Land Rover. He told me to go down and get it. I had had enough and told him that the pencil was his responsibility and point blank refused. As soon as Merv was out of sight I lay down in the sun on a nice, warm rock and had a wonderful hour's sleep.

Frank Buturac

Frank arrived in 1959 and was the Division's first dedicated surveyor. He was a fascinating man from Yugoslavia, who had endured the horrors of war and its aftermath of starvation. For reasons he never revealed, Frank joined the French Foreign Legion and spent some time serving in Northern Africa – where he became familiar with anti-terrorist operations.

He was transferred to the French East Indies and arrived in Hanoi. On his journey inland, things went seriously wrong for Frank. He was in a Jeep driven by a Vietnamese French Army officer. Up ahead, Frank saw a pile of what looked like horse droppings on the road. Frank commanded his driver to drive around them, because Algerian insurgents frequently hid explosives in them. His driver laughed at Frank and continued to drive straight ahead. It was the last thing he ever did. Frank survived and spent a long time in hospital before being invalided out of the service.

Over the years, Frank and his crew must have carried out thousands of surveys in Dandenong Division.

Bruce Hamilton

Bruce joined the CRB later in 1958 and sat at a desk in front of me. He had previously worked as a draftsman for a company that manufactured stainless steel milk tankers and came from Noorat in the Western District. Like me, Bruce also attended night school on an engineering course. Until I left the CRB in September 1963 to move to Brisbane, Bruce and I were good mates, both at work and socially.

To be continued.



TRIVIA AND DIDACTIC WHIMSIES

Donald's deal

A young man named Donald bought a horse from a farmer for \$250. The farmer agreed to deliver the horse the next day. The next day, the farmer drove up to Donald's house and said, "Sorry son, but I have some bad news, the horse died."

Donald replied, "Well, then just give me my money back." The farmer said, "Can't do that. I went and spent it already."

Donald said, "Ok, then, just bring me the dead horse." The farmer asked, "What are you going to do with him?"

Donald said, "I'm going to raffle him off." The farmer said, "You can't raffle off a dead horse!"

Donald said, "Sure I can. Watch me. I just won't tell anybody he's dead."

A month later, the farmer met up with Donald and asked, "What happened with that dead horse?"

Donald said, "I raffled him off. I sold 500 tickets at five dollars a piece and made a profit of \$2495."

The farmer said, "Didn't anyone complain? Donald said, "Just the guy who won. So I gave him his five dollars back."

Donald has now moved to the White House.

A couple of bridges to cheer you up!



The Royal Gorge suspension bridge in Colorado is the highest bridge in the USA – 1,053 ft above ground





A long way to go: Trift Bridge in Switzerland is the longest pedestrian-only suspension bridge in the Alps at 557 feet in length



If you are heavy footed, you may wish to find an alternative way across the rivers in Vietnam. Monkey bridges include one giant log for your feet, and another smaller one for your hands

