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Douglas H (Dick) PERRY

FORESTS DEPARTMENT

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Date of interview:	30 th September 1984
Interviewer:	Tape recorded for the BHS by the author
Duration:	29 minutes
Transcriber:	Tanika Armstrong
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[] used for insertions which are not in the original recording.

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UPPER CASE indicates emphasis.

Dick PERRY

BUSSELTON ORAL HISTORY GROUP (INC)
TRACKING NOTES

File name: Perry, Douglas Humphrey (Dick)

Disc: One

Track No.	Summary: Forest Department		Track Time
1	Title	Introduction	2.16
	Introduction read by Margaret Dawson		
2	Title	Apprenticeship WA Forests Department. Mr Lane Poole	6.42
	Dick Perry recorded this interview 30/09/1984 in his 83 rd year. Worked for the WA Forests Dept 17/03/1917 to 27/07/1967. Mentions first two Conservators of Forests in WA, Mr Lane Poole and Mr Stephen Kessell. Jack Thompson and Dick first two apprentices appointed to Department; Dick aged 14 when he began. Hamel for four year apprenticeship. Mr Lane Poole was the architect of the 1918 Forestry Act. He supervised and carried out the mapping of WA forests. Dick worked in that area. Explains what information was recorded in that mapping exercise. Very extensive.		
3	Title	Mr Stephen Kessell	7.37
	When Dick was an apprentice Mr Lane Poole told him that three things a forester should always have in his pocket were a folding knife, a length of string and a box of matches. He laid the foundations and pointed the way the Department would go in the years ahead. Mr Kessell joined the Department as Working Plans Officer shortly before Mr Lane Poole retired. Took over training of field staff and apprentices. Mr Kessell was the second of the professional foresters. Talks of Charles Ahern an ex-serviceman with great knowledge of hardwood trees and logs. In 1922, while working at Ludlow, Dick transferred by Mr Kessell to Business College to train as a shorthand typist. Worked as secretary to Mr Kessell. Gave him a great insight into the working of the Dept. Very fair man. Spent a lot of time working out in the field collecting information.		
4	Title	Stories about Mr Kessell	8.02
	Relates some of the stories that Mr Kessell told him - prank at Oxford University; buying the men a beer at Sawyers Valley pub. Story about Barney Trainer. Story during Depression years - senior officer told to ride free issue bicycle and not to use vehicle. Story about Dr Stoate.		
5	Title	More Incidents with Mr Kessell	4.33
	Day in the Gnangara Forest with Mr Kessell and Dr Stoate		
	Total		29.10

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VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT

DISC ONE TRACK ONE

TAPE ONE SIDE A

The Busselton Oral History Group is fortunate to have this recollection of Mr Dick Perry [Douglas Humphrey Perry] which was recorded in September 1984, when Dick was in his 83rd year. We are unsure of its origins but it contains some very interesting information and gives an insight into early days of the West Australian Forest Department and the first two professional Conservators of Forest, Mr Lane Poole and Mr Stephen Kessell. Dick worked for the West Australian Forest[ry] Department for 50 years, from 1917 to 1967, starting as an apprentice at the age of 14. Mr [Lane] Poole was the architect of the 1918 Forestry Act. He supervised and carried out the mapping of Western Australian forests, and it was in this area that Dick worked. He explains the extensive mapping exercise, and what information was recorded. Lane Poole laid the foundations and pointed out the way the Forest[s] Department would go in the years ahead. Mr Stephen Kessell took over when Lane Poole retired; Dick was 17 years old at this time. Dick mentions Charles Ahern, an ex-serviceman with great knowledge of hard wood trees. In 1922, Dick was transferred [sent] to business college to train as a shorthand typist, and then worked as a secretary to Mr Kessell. This gave him an insight into the working of the department. He spent a lot of time out in the field collecting information. He relates some stories told to him by Mr Kessell and other stories relating to Barney Taylor [Trainer] and Doctor Stoate. Another story is about the use of bicycles instead of motorised vehicles during the [Great] Depression years. He ends the recording by describing how he took Mr Kessell and Doctor Stoate on an inspection of Gnangara Forest to review the growth of the Pinus pinaster variety of pine trees, on a very long hot day during the summer and how well Mr Kessell coped with this experience.

DISC ONE TRACK TWO

PERRY This tape records some reminiscences DH (Dick) Perry made on the 30th September 1984 whilst in his 83rd year. Dick spent his whole working life with the [Forests] department from the 17th March 1917 to the 27th July 1967; the span of half a century. I have been asked for some memories of Mr Lane Poole and Mr Kessell, our first two conservators. I was very young when I knew Mr Lane Poole, a boy of 14 and I think. Mr Lane Poole left WA [Western Australia] in my 17th year. Mr Lane Poole was regarded with respect and affection not only by his staff, but by many other people to whom he became known during his short stay in WA. He was the only professional officer in the department of course. At that time, the balance of the staff had been recruited from the timber industry. That's no reflection on them either by the way; there were some highly skilled and knowledgeable men amongst them. I felt they were quite a credit to the department. We certainly, Jack Thompson and I, as the first two apprentices appointed by Mr Lane Poole, regarded most of them that we met very highly and of course it was from these men that we learnt a great many of our own skills.

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I first met him when I came with my mother to Perth to be interviewed by him, having somehow got on to the short list with Jack Thompson, to be one of the first two apprentices appointed. I can remember him drawing me out, mainly on what knowledge I had of horses and this, of course, was right up my alley because my father was a very keen horseman and was extremely knowledgeable about horses; he could do anything with them. He had taught me to ride, and how to care for them, and how to look after my harness, and a whole heap of things. So I had very little trouble in, I guess, being quite vocal [chuckles] because I got onto something that I loved. Of course, as you would know, all of our work in those initial and very early years was very much involved with horses; we worked with them considerably and of course used them as transport. I can remember my mother telling me what a kindly, courteous and friendly man he was, and how easy to talk to and so on, and she was very impressed too. Always when he was visiting Hamel (Hamel was where I spent my first 18 months of my four year apprenticeship) he always liked to see us. He would ask us how we were getting on. And, did we like the work? And those sorts of questions, and was obviously very interested in our answers and also in our attitude to the job.

I suppose one of the things, apart from (of course) being the architect of the department, was the preparation of the 1918 Forest[s] Act and the getting this through Parliament with the help of the Minister was a tremendous undertaking for him, particularly when one considers all the pressures and skulduggery that was applied to him at the time to try and divert him from his purpose. However, the Act; of course that was all history, and it did finally pass, but not quite in the form that he wanted it. He supervised, and had carried out, the mapping of the forests of Western Australia; really the boundaries of our forests and what was in them was not known. Mr Lane Poole set up the classification camps and they ranged, at different times, in number; from about two to four. This work went on continuously, almost the whole of the time that he was here, I doubt if it was really completed when he left.

I spent about a year and four months on this work, still in my apprentice years. I started as a compass hand ... no that is not correct either, I first started off as a swamper in cutting the survey lines for the surveyors and learning how to use the theodolite and a prismatic compass and then gradually was promoted to running traverse lines with the prismatic myself. And finally, after much intensive training, to doing the assessment. When this work was completed we had the details of what was in the forest and where their boundaries were. We mapped the creeks and the hills, the topography generally, the soils, the species. Then the amount of marketable timber, the amount of timber that the country had been worked over, the amount of timber that was left on it, the unmarketable timber remaining, the marketable timber remaining, the state of the regrowth of piles and poles, generally describing the country of course and generally giving some idea of recording the state of the forest.

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DISC ONE TRACK THREE

PERRY On one of Mr Lane Poole's visits to Hamel, one of the things I can recollect him saying to me on one occasion (I don't know how the matter arose but I have never forgotten it) and which he said, 'a forester should always have in his pocket a folding knife, a length of string and a box of matches,' and I've always remembered that and I think more or less adhered to it. It was quite a bit of sound advice for someone who was spending a lot of time in the bush.

I suppose it could be said that Mr Lane Poole laid the foundations; he was the architect and laid the foundations, and pointed the way that the department would go in the years ahead. Mr Kessell joined the department as Working Plans Officer, shortly before Mr Lane Poole retired. He also took over the training of field staff, including the apprentice foresters. He was the second professional forester to join the staff, and undoubtedly was responsible for building the department into the very fine and efficient organisation it became under his direction. I suppose it could be said, but with hindsight of course, that although professionally trained, he had very little opportunity to gain experience in the practice of forestry. He was a young man, in his mid-twenties at that time, and he came here following a year at Oxford. He must have felt inadequate to the tremendous challenge he faced when taking Mr Lane Poole's place. He certainly rose to the occasion, and his achievements of course are now history.

One of his foresters, Charles Ahern, whom I worked under and was trained by him on classification work, was a returned soldier. He had joined up as a private with the 16th Battalion and rose by promotion on the battlefield to the rank of captain. He had been awarded the MC [Military Cross] and DSO [Distinguished Service Order] with bar. He had caught a machine gun burst into his chest and he had three small holes. I remember when he stripped off when I first saw them; he had three small holes in his chest, in the front of his chest, and a hole where you could put your fist in, in his back, where they came out. He was a skilled sleeper cutter and beam squarer and faller, and what he didn't know about hardwood trees and logs wasn't worth knowing. He was liked and respected by everyone. Unfortunately his war years had undermined his health; he became an alcoholic. Finally he overstepped the mark and Mr Kessell, following an inquiry, had to dismiss him; he had no option. Many years later, I can well remember Mr Kessell telling me that the hardest thing he ever faced whilst Conservator, was to sack Charles Ahern; and I bet it was too!

I think it was sometime in 1922, whilst still a forest guard, and in charge of the Ludlow State Forest, Mr Kessell had me transferred to head office and sent to a business college to be trained as a shorthand typist. His object was to have someone with field experience to act as his secretary for a few years until other staff could be recruited. Initially I wasn't very enthusiastic about this turn of events as I really loved my work in the bush. However, it was to open up all sorts of doors and expose me to a side of the Department's activities about which I was completely unaware. Again with hindsight, it was a golden opportunity,

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opening up all sorts of avenues. I learnt how head office operated in considerable detail and as Mr Kessell's secretary and 'man Friday', there was very little that I didn't become familiar with.

The chief (as he was always referred to) treated me very well. I found him to be a kindly and understanding man, who expected a lot from his limited staff, but often awarded praise where it was due. I know that some of the field staff particularly, thought he was rather a hard and unfeeling man but they usually hadn't paused to consider he was trying to run and build up a department during the years of hardship and depression. He faced a tremendous task; every three months he made a point of visiting a section of the region under his control and carrying out a fairly intensive investigation of field work in hand, and checked out how the local officers were functioning also. He made a point of meeting as many people [as possible].

My task was to collect the parcels of files sent to him by post from head office. At night, after tea, he would go through them and he would dictate letters and notes which I would type out the next day on a portable typewriter. Those letters that he said that I could sign in his name, I would sign and post and get away, but some of them of course were pretty important and he would want to see those and sign them himself. There were no typewriters in field offices in those days of course; all records were kept by hand. This procedure enabled him to return to head office and start work immediately, with no build-up of a pile of files during his absence, which is what had happened earlier. The system worked well, and I learnt so much with working directly with him.

DISC ONE TRACK FOUR

PERRY Now, to give you a few stories and incidents about the man himself. One he related to me was about his life at Jesus College at Oxford. To celebrate some important event, the students had obtained an enamel chamber pot, and during the night formed a living ladder over the dome and spire of the college. Then one hardy individual climbed up the living ladder of students to the spire and threaded the handle of the chamber pot over it. They then carefully climbed down and went their various ways. The next day there was great consternation on the part of the authorities. Attempts were made to shoot the chamber pot down with a rifle but, being made of enamel steel, this failed to work. It was finally recovered with the aid of a very expensive scaffolding. What part SLK [Steven L Kessell] played in this prank was not enlarged upon.

I recall another incident involving Claude [Kinsella] whilst still an apprentice. We were engaged in carrying out a telegraphical survey of part of the Mundaring Catchment and were camped at Hay Creek near the weir wall. This work involved a great deal of walking over very rugged country, up to 20 miles [30 km] or so in a long day. We walked to work in the Department's time and walked home in our own time, which meant of course that we might start anything from a seven to a ten mile [11 to 16 km] walk after five o'clock at night when we knocked

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off. There were none, or very few, tracks in that country at that time. Mr Kessell had decided to visit our camp and spend a day with us to check our work. Coming home that evening meant we would pass through Sawyers Valley. Actually, we had walked right around Mundaring Weir, travelling up the south side in the morning and returning by the north side in the evening. We were able to pick up a track into Sawyers Valley and thence along the Goldfields water pipeline, and back to camp. As we approached Sawyers (there were five or six of us in this party) Claude said, out of the blue, 'Gee, I'm dry as a chip and I haven't got a brass razoo with me. Has anybody got any money?' [Chuckles] None of us of course had any money with us; there was no reason to be carrying any at that stage. However Mr Kessell said, 'Don't worry chaps, I have some with me, we won't pass that pub 'til I've spent some of it.' In we went, and we each had a couple of beers at his expense. He kept up with us all day, and we were in very good shape. But, by the time we arrived back at the weir, he was pretty weary.

Another incident that I remember involved Assistant Forester Barney Trainer, who had come into head office for some reason or another, and I had met him just outside the Conservator's door in the passage and was talking to him when Mr Kessell came out of his office.

He greeted Barney, 'Good day Trainer, haven't seen ya in a long while, how are you getting on?' 'Oh pretty good sir, thank you.' 'That plantation of yours over at South Perth must be nearly planted up?' 'Yes it is sir; we'll finish it this year.' So Mr Kessell said, 'Well, we'll have to find something else for you to do, Trainer, otherwise there won't be very much to do over there I suppose once that's planted up.' 'That's right sir, but not to worry as I've found it takes very little to keep me busy.'

Well [laughs], not many chaps could have said that to the chief I don't think and got away with it. He put his head back and he roared with laughter; he thought it was a hell of a show. Of course Trainer was especially a very likeable chap and he had a very tremendous personality. Everybody liked him. Anyway, he made the chief's day for him.

Another recollection I have is of the Depression days when things were pretty tough. The Conservator had a whole lot of bicycles purchased and issued to the various divisions and districts, and we were given very strict instructions to use them whenever possible. One rather senior officer wrote back to head office to say that he couldn't ride a bicycle and he never had ridden one and he found it to be very inconvenient to have to learn to ride and he wanted permission to use a motor vehicle more often. Mr Kessell wrote back to him (because I saw the letter) in which he said that there were to be no exceptions. This officer was to forthwith learn to ride the bicycle and he would be expected to use it. He said it would probably be a very good experience for you and you will be able to view your job from another angle [laughs] – that became quite a saying in the Department for many years afterwards.

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Another incident that I remember involved Doctor Stoate, many years ago. He actually told me this story himself; in which he'd been introduced to a new instrument (I don't quite know, I think he had got it from someone in South Australia or Victoria) and he was very enthusiastic about this thing and saw great possibilities for it in use here, in assessment work and so on. From memory I think that it was something that measured the height of a bole of a tree and also [was] capable of measuring the mid-girth of a standing tree. Mr Stoate was subject to enthusiasms of course and he was very taken with this thing and he showed it to Mr Kessell. Mr Kessell said yes that he thought that it did have possibilities, but he said, 'Look Stoate, I wouldn't like you to let this blessed thing to interfere with your normal work. If you want to fiddle with it, well fiddle with it at weekends.' [Chuckles] Well Mr Stoate thought that this was a hell of a joke, not to let it interfere with his normal work [laughs].

DISC ONE TRACK FIVE

PERRY Another story worth relating, perhaps, occurred during the Depression years; five or six or seven years after the Gnangara Pine Plantation had been started. Mr Kessell had asked Mr Stoate if he would arrange for him to be taken out there, and he would like to inspect what had been going on. And of course in those days it was almost impossible to get those sorts of vehicles out to Gnangara at all. The sand was a very deep white sand, and the high pressure tyres just couldn't handle it, you just got bogged all of the time. I had cut a track from the Upper Swan Road through to the Eastern Boundary of the pine plantation through private property which saved about three miles [5 km] of walking. So Mr Stoate drove Mr Kessell out to the turnoff. I then ferried them in my Harley Davidson and side car out along my track through the bush to the Eastern Boundary of the plantation, and of course from there we started walking. Well, it was early summer, and it was pretty hot and the flies were dreadful. We had quite a day there. The chief was very keen to see the results of some of our fertiliser trials (which he had never seen) and also the results of some of the mycorrhiza [fungus on roots] work we had done, and also the results of the provenance trials with *Pinus pinaster*, which the first real trial out there was laid out in 1931 and the results were beginning to show up already. The differences could be seen by, I think, an untrained person. The chief was very interested in all of this work, we kept at it all day, hiking and tramping through the sand and up to headquarters and all over the place. He wanted to see everything that was of any interest, and we showed it to him and we had a tremendous day. But I always remember the comments Mr Kessell made to me when I ferried them back, finally, to the main road and they got in the car and of course went back to Perth. The chief said ... mind he had a fairly rough time, it was a very hot day and the flies as I've already said were dreadful, and they can be dreadful out there in the spring time. Wading through this deep sand that had been ploughed up and so on was quite a trial for him, but he stuck well to it.

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He said, 'Well, Perry, I think you are doing a tremendous job here. Keep it up, keep up the good work and, perhaps, in another five years perhaps I'll make another inspection. There is very little chance of getting me out here again for the period approaching the one I've just named.' So [chuckles] I thanked him very much and that was it. As I've said before somewhere on this tape, he always passed out praise when he felt like it was demanded and of course it was. I used to go out there on a Monday and camp out there, laying out experiments and trials in the heat and the flies, and the very primitive conditions were pretty difficult. But the work was very challenging and very rewarding, of course as it turned out ultimately. But I think that that's about the limit of the ... I could relate more, but I think that what I've done is pick out events which give you some idea perhaps of the two men as I knew them. I hope that it will be a help to you. Cheers.

END OF INTERVIEW

Dick PERRY