

WHAT IS A GOOD FOREST ?

EX-FOREST WORKER PERSPECTIVES FROM THE WOMBAT STATE FOREST

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This thesis is my own work except where stated otherwise

……..

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ABSTRACT

Underlying the global rhetoric for a more sustainable forestry, there is a growing acceptance of the need to consider the social aspects of forestry. Research on human constructions of forests can provide crucial understandings of people's preferences and values in respect to forests that is lacking at present. These understandings are useful, not only in guiding forest planning and management, but in helping under-represented stakeholders to express their views on forests. In turn, this can encourage their participation and the acceptance of their perspectives by others, and hence help reduce polarisation of issues.

The Wombat State Forest in Victoria was selected as a case-study because community forest management is currently being introduced to the area. The aim was to investigate the perspectives of one particular forest interest group—that of ex-forest workers. This research involved individual in-depth interviews of nine ex-forest workers, to explore their perceptions, experiences, views and underlying values in relation to the Forest. Relevant literature was also used to support the interview data.

Although these workers saw the Forest primarily in terms of a 'used and managed' entity, they were concerned for the Forest in more than a narrow economic way. They all had deep connections with parts of the Forest and placed strong emphasis on the need for consideration and care within it. There was a strong belief in the need for practical knowledge and experience in the forest. And most were very concerned that the Forest had been mismanaged over the last 30 years. All felt frustrated and helpless that they had been portrayed in a negative light in the media and were being blamed for overlogging. These feelings appeared to be exacerbated by their working class situation and their lack of voice.

The results suggest that these ex-workers have many perspectives that have gone unheard in the past. Also, it is proposed that if people were to understand perspectives of groups such as ex-forest workers, on a deeper level than portrayed in the media, then this may improve the chance of groups working together towards developing and reaching common goals in forest management. The knowledge and skills held by these ageing workers from their long experience of selective harvesting and nurturing in the Forest, are about to be lost, unless studies on those aspects are conducted very soon. It is suggested also that research on people's sense of place and values towards a region could help stakeholders realise that there is common ground, particularly concern and attachment towards the same place (the forest). Consideration of this concern and 'sense of place' should be given more emphasis in the current processes to initiate community forest management (currently being introduced) in the Wombat State Forest.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CFM	Community Forest Management
CNRE	Conservation, Natural Resources and Environment
DNRE	Department of Natural Resources and Environment
DSE	Department of Sustainability and Environment
FMA	Forest Management Area
LCC	Land Conservation Council
RFA	Regional Forest Agreement
WSF	Wombat State Forest

.



Plate 1: Forest view from Trentham (northern Wombat Forest)
(Photo: L. Petheram).

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

SETTING THE SCENE

Around the world, forestry is undergoing a marked change, not only in forest practice and management, but also in societal attitudes towards forests. It is driven largely by a new environmental paradigm that strongly emphasises more sustainable management of natural systems. Forest managers are increasingly required to incorporate social, economic, political, ethical and environmental components into forestry practice. And greater effort is being made towards understanding human relationships with the environment—as forest agencies strive to take into account the range of people's interests in forests and their use and management.

A general trend towards more participatory approaches to forest management has come with this greater recognition of human dimensions in forestry. This has been particularly marked in lower income countries, where millions of local people are very dependent on forests for their livelihoods. In recent years, the trend has spread to many industrialised countries and now appears to be gaining momentum in parts of Australia. Various communities around Australia are strongly interested in taking a more active role in the decision-making process of forest management, than they have in the past. The main factors influencing this trend in Australia appear to be pressure from environmental organisations and disillusionment of local communities with the way some forests—particularly native forests for commercial timber production—have been managed.

At the initial stages in developing participatory forest management, it is important that all the participants understand how others use and view the forest. Without such an understanding, some may be excluded, misrepresented or their interests overlooked in management. One public forest in which a more participatory approach is being considered is the Wombat State Forest (hereafter referred to as the 'Wombat Forest') in central Victoria. As in most forest areas, there are various stakeholders with different interests. One group in the region that has had relatively little input into recent debate on forest

management and practices are ex-forest workers. Many of these ex-workers are elderly but have remained as residents in and around the Wombat Forest. Despite the wealth of experience that these older forest workers possess, their voices largely go unheard nowadays in debate about future management of the Forest. On the contrary, forest workers have been represented in a negative light in the media over the past decade or longer. Their image is often associated with a ruthless timber harvest mentality that is unconcerned with the forest and its future health.

This study explores the way that ex-forest workers perceive, experience and value the forest. It sets out to provide forest workers with a voice, and to provide a deeper understanding of their views than is commonly portrayed in the media. It is intended that the information gained can be used to further our understanding of human aspects of forestry, to help different stakeholders find common ground and to guide future forest management.

1.1 Research purpose

As suggested by Maxwell (1996) and Mascarenhas (1999), studies arise from three types of purpose: personal, practical and research.

Personal purposes have been the main driving force for me to undertake this study. These are a combination of beliefs and interests, including a fascination with human constructions of the natural environment, a belief in the right of all people's voices to be heard, and an interest in more sustainable and participatory approaches in natural resource management. I also believe that social research in the Wombat Forest is very important because it represents a unique situation; that being, the first Australian forest in which 'community forest management' will be applied.

Practical purposes are those that are designed to accomplish something, meet a need, or change a situation. This study is intended to contribute to a better understanding of older forest workers' perspectives in the Wombat Forest than exists at present, and play a part in recording some of the history of the Forest and hence help improve future forest

management. The idea of conducting this study arose partly from views expressed by members of forest interest groups local to the Wombat Forest. They have stated that outside researchers commonly plan their research without consulting the local community, and that the topics chosen for research are not always useful to them. It therefore seemed appropriate to speak with local forest groups and agencies, and to select a topic considered suitable by them. A priority topic suggested was to document the views of older, ex-forest workers.

Research purposes are those that are focused on understanding something and designed to gain insight into a situation or process. The research purposes of this study are to gain a deeper understanding of older, ex-forest workers' views, underlying values and their constructions of nature within the Forest. This purpose is explained in greater depth below.

1.2 Aim, research questions and hypothesis

The overall aim of this Honours research project is to study the way that ex-forest workers in the Wombat State Forest perceive, experience and view the Forest and its management.

The overarching question is:

- *What are these workers' perspectives[1] of the Forest and forest management?*

Within this research question are five sub-research questions:

- *What do they believe are the biggest problems in the Forest?*
- *How do they believe it has changed over the time they have known it?*
- *What are their beliefs and feelings toward the Forest?*
- *What do they regard as a 'good' forest?*
- *How do they believe the Forest should be managed?*

[1] The use of the word 'perspectives' in this thesis is taken to incorporate the workers (1) perceptions (of the forest and themselves), (2) their views (and underlying values) and (3) experiences (which relate strongly to their sense of place). These components are all intertwined and influence each other.

Embedded within the research questions in the thesis is a hypothesis that:

- *Workers value the Forest in more than a narrow, economic (instrumental) way.*

1.3 Research approach and process

This study draws on *symbolic interactionist* and *critical theories* for its framework. The research process combined techniques from the social sciences: mainly semi-structured in-depth interviewing and grounded theory methods to analyse the data. Secondary data sources were also used, such as literature on Australian forestry, public participation, community forest management, human constructions of the environment, and the Wombat Forest.

As researcher, I spent six weeks in the study area interviewing forest workers and gathering background information. The recorded interviews were transcribed to a word processor, and the qualitative data from these interviews was analysed using manual coding techniques drawn from grounded theory.

1.4 Outline of chapters

In Chapter 2 relevant literature relating to Australian forestry, participatory forest management, community forest management and human-environment relationships are reviewed. Chapter 3 describes the method used and Chapter 4 provides background to the case study forest (Wombat Forest). Results from the interviews are explained in Chapter 5, and this is followed by discussion and conclusions in Chapter 6. The thesis design is illustrated in Figure 1.1.

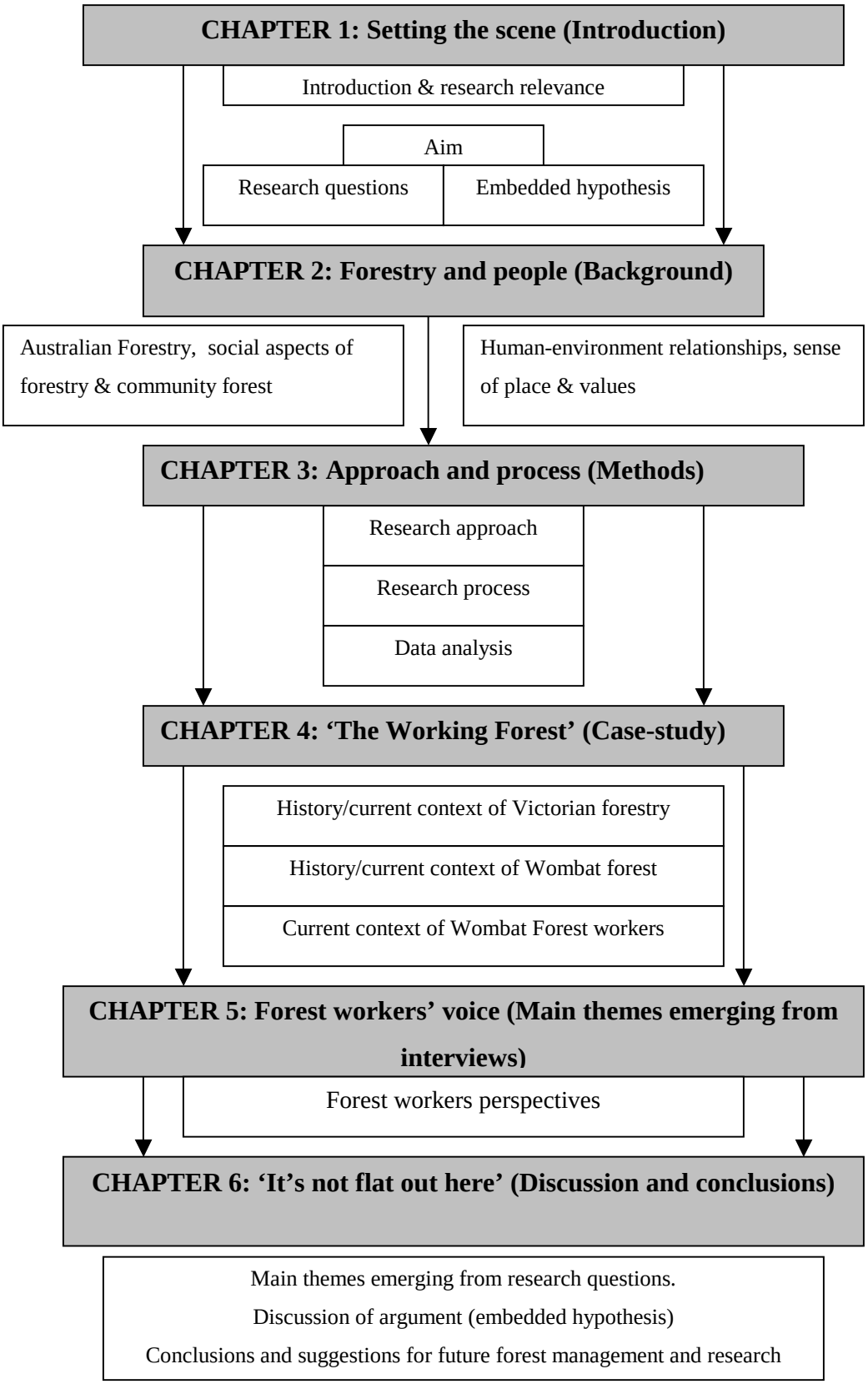


Figure 1.1 The thesis design

Chapter 2 BACKGROUND

FORESTRY AND PEOPLE

The first part of this chapter provides a brief background to Australian forestry, explains the trend towards community-based forest management, and discusses the relevance of research into social aspects of forestry. The second part of the chapter will review previous research on human-environment relationships and on human constructions of the environment, such as the concepts of 'sense of place' and 'values' in the context of forests and forestry.

2.1 Australian Forestry in context; a transition

As noted in Chapter 1, forestry has been undergoing a marked transition globally and in Australia (Dargavel *et al.* 1994, Dargavel *et al.* 1999, Florence 1993). Change is occurring, not only in forest practice and management, but in societal attitudes towards forests and forestry (Kanowski 1998).

In Australia the change appears to have arisen largely in response to environmental conflicts over land-use decisions (Bartlett 1986). Over the last few decades a very polarised debate has arisen concerning 'conservation versus industrialisation' of resources. A conservation movement, which was first concerned with forests a century earlier, arose again as a new generation of environmentalists loudly challenging forest agencies and the forest policies of governments (Dargavel *et al.* 1999). The ensuing conflicts between groups have often become hostile, some even involving physical threats and violent action between protesters and loggers. Such disputes have also sometimes pervaded within and between government bodies (Dargavel *et al.* 1999).

In response to this growing conflict over the use of the land and resources, the Commonwealth and State Governments made commitments towards change in forest policy from the 1990s, in various reports and public inquiries. In 1989, the Federal Government established a specialised Resource Assessment Commission. Its inquiry into the forest and timber industry in 1992 recommended that a fully representative system of reserves should be developed and complex issues addressed from region to region (Resource Assessment Commission 1992). However, conflicts between state governments in the federal system were a limiting factor, so an Inter-Governmental Agreement on the Environment was implemented. A National Forest Policy was agreed between Commonwealth and State governments (Commonwealth of Australia 1992), and then a major inter-governmental planning activity was implemented, the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) process.

The RFA process was intended to provide a comprehensive assessment of natural, cultural, economic and social values of Australia's forests, but many academics and community groups believe these goals were not met (Slee 2001, Stephen 2002, R. Baker *pers. comm.* 05/06/03.). Many authors have commented on the RFA process and its pros and cons (e.g. Mayers and Bass 1999). Some believe that the process 'if nothing else was ambitious' (Stephen 2002:1), or there was too large a gap between intention and outcome (Slee 2001). Some have also claimed that some of the RFA assessments and agreements, particularly in East Gippsland and Tasmania, have proved inadequate in resolving conflicts between groups or even between Federal and State Governments (Dargavel *et al.* 2000). Some believe the process has been limited by time and resources, and that the intent to involve the public has sometimes resulted in confusion (Buchy and Race 2001).

O'Brien (2003) argues that forest policy worldwide needs to better incorporate social, economic, political, ethical and environmental considerations. Some claim that more participatory approaches to forest management are the key to resolving conflict associated with the forest sector (Mascarenhas 1999). However, the development of participatory approaches is still a relatively new concept in the realm of natural resource management in industrialised countries (Coakes 1998) and more research needs to be conducted to

understand its implications (Buchy and Race 2001). It is clear that the changes facing forestry need to be addressed by changes in forest management, and an important part of this process is to develop an understanding of perspectives of the various forest stakeholders (O'Brien 2003).

2.1.1 Social aspects of forestry

With the re-orientation of Australian forest management away from emphasis on timber harvesting towards multiple uses and values of forests, there is a growing need for social research within the forestry sector (Williams *et al.* 2001). Many issues concerning forest management cannot be addressed through the physical sciences alone. Bengsten (1994) and Manning *et al.* (1999) claim that people are an important component of forestry and that this (often neglected) aspect needs special consideration in research and development.

Social science research can assist decision-makers to understand the wider context in which decisions and policies need to be made, thereby resulting in better informed decisions that are more responsive to a changing social environment (Weiss 1980, Bengsten 1994). There is also a growing recognition of the need to deal with the process of social change more effectively, as well as to actively involve a wide range of stakeholders in decision-making (Fisher 1999).

2.1.2 More public participation

In more developed countries there has been relatively little public involvement in forestry (Tindall and Lavalee 1999) but since the 1970s its advocacy has grown. This may be the result of a combination of increasing interests of the public in environmental issues, their desire to become more involved in policy-making processes, and the recognition by governments that involving the public (or community) can bring benefits, such as avoiding or reducing environmental conflict (Mascarenhas 1999, O'Brien 2003).

Public participation can occur at different levels, and can mean different things to different people (Buchy and Race 2001). 'Community forest management' (CFM) is a term used increasingly for forms of participation in which various community stakeholders collaborate to manage forest (Haley 2001).

2.1.3 Community forest management

Community forest management (taken here to be broadly synonymous with the terms; community forestry, joint forest management, or collaborative forestry) arose in lower income countries mainly as a means to support community development and local livelihoods (Race *et al.* 2003). However, the concepts of community forestry are gaining popularity in some industrialised countries (Haley 2001, Kusel and Adler 2001).

Community forest management can take on many forms, depending on the country and context. In simple terms, it implies forest management by agencies in collaboration with, or even controlled by, local community (Petheram *et al.* 2002, Roberts and Gautam 2003). This type of management is collaborative and allows local and other community stakeholders to participate, to varying levels, in making management decisions that affect their livelihoods or interests in the forest.

Recently, in Australia, there has been discussion about implementing CFM in some forest areas (Race *et al.* 2003). In 2003 the Victorian government made an announcement that the Wombat State Forest, in central Victoria, would be run by community forest management on a trial basis (Thwaites 2003). This case will be discussed further in Chapter 3 (*Case Study: 'The Working Forest'*).

Despite the increase in community engagement in forest management in Australia over the last 30 years, the level of public participation remains quite low and is dominated by top-down attitudes and models (Buchy *et al.* 1999). Consequently, implementation of community forest management may be an ambitious task and underestimated by some of its proponents. Race *et al.* (2003) contend that it has some unpredictable components, and that

limited time, misunderstanding of intent and lack of socio-cultural sensitivity are all factors that need to be carefully considered before implementation. The same authors state that a better framework for people to understand, articulate and address the complexities of 'cultural/symbolic and functional' relationships with forests and forestry is needed (Race *et al.* 2003:186).

In order to implement a more participatory approach to forest management, thorough analysis needs to be conducted of different people's perspectives of forests and forest management. Such 'stakeholder analysis' can help to improve understandings of various groups that use or have interests in the forest or other resources (Grimble *et al.* 1995).

O'Brien (2003) claims that a deep understanding of stakeholder's perspectives, and how and why preferences for use and management develop is important to forest managers in addressing different interests and anticipating and handling potential conflict:

> There is a need to be more aware of the range of values people hold rather than assume that it is known what people value, or underestimate the diversity of values and their importance to people (O'Brien 2003:6).

Research on how people construct their environments, and on their underlying connections and values towards forests, seem crucial at this stage of change in forest management.

2.2 Constructions of the environment

Understanding how people 'construct their environment' can provide valuable insights into their preferences and behaviour towards natural resources (Cantrill 1998). In turn, this insight can help guide natural resource management. Forests are part of the natural environment, so theories applying to human-environment relationships can be applicable to forests.

One definition of the environment is: 'surroundings, especially those affecting peoples lives' (The Oxford Paperback Dictionary 1979). From a traditional ecologist's point of

view, the environment is the sum total of all the external surroundings that may influence organisms. Many environmental psychologists and human geographers would add that it consists of 'human built' as well as 'natural' landscapes, including socio-cultural and historical factors (Carr 2002).

People and the environment can be viewed in the context of a mutually constitutive relationship—in which each is reinforced and 'shaped' by the other.

As Carr (2002: 23-24) puts it:

> The environment is both naturally and socially constructed. It is not a fixed thing waiting to be discovered, rather, an evolving thing that we come to know through increasing contact and interactions. Nature and culture, people and the environment are not at different ends of yet another set of dichotomies, but are mutually defining elements or agents of the same planet.

From a *symbolic interactionist* perspective (described in section 3.1), the meaning that people bestow upon the environment can reflect their social and cultural experiences (Eisenhauer *et al.* 2000).

In the last few decades the importance of the relationship between humans and the environment has been increasingly recognised in the realm of natural resource management (Eisenhauer *et al.* 2000). Researchers from a range of disciplines, such as environmental psychology, anthropology, geography and sociology, have attempted to investigate the complex relationship and have approached its study in many ways.

Two concepts that are relevant to this study are people's 'sense of place' and people's held 'values' towards the environment. These two concepts have been studied both individually and together in human-environment research. In North America, the concepts have been applied to forestry (e.g. Tindall and Lavalee 1999), but within Australia they have been considered mainly in the broad field of natural resource management (Winter *et al.* 2003).

To date, human-forest oriented studies in Australia have mostly focussed on social impact assessments of forest areas, especially during the Regional Forest Agreement process, and

there have been a small number of studies on human responses to forest landscapes or features (Purcell and Lamb 1984, Lamb 1994, Williams 2002).

2.2.1 Sense of place

The way that people connect emotionally and symbolically to an area has been termed a 'sense of place' (Agnew 1989). Cheng *et al.* (2003:88) explain that places:

> …are not merely the physical backdrops of human action. Places constitute those actions, helping people find order and meaning in the world.

Sense of place is thought to be shaped by a number of influences, including social, cultural political and biophysical meanings and processes (Canter 1977, Sack 1992). It is also thought not to be static, but changing, adaptive and subject to cultivation over time. As geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1977:6) states, 'what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value'.

Although the connections that people develop with place can be 'difficult to uniformly define and measure' (Cheng *et al.* 2003:88), study of these relationships can be very valuable in understanding how and why individuals behave and view natural resources and their management in a particular way:

> The place perspective suggests an expanded role for natural resource social scientists as giving voice to meanings and values that may not otherwise be expressed in natural resource decision-making processes (Cheng *et al.* 2003:87).

People's connections with a place can shape their values, and in turn these values can shape the way a person may develop connections with a place. A person's sense of place and values are thus inextricably tied and difficult to separate, and so their study can inform each other.

2.2.2 Values

O'Brien and Guerrier (1995:xiv) describe values as the 'reasons we give for justifying proper conduct'. Their formation is complex and constantly changing. O'Brien (2003:5) states that they are formed out of a combination:

> of social process of dialogue and debate and influenced by the social, cultural, historical and geographical relationships between society and the individual. They are constructed between individuals and institutions and are informed by ethical and moral judgements and by creating priorities in ideas and belief systems.

Research on values has generally fallen into the social science epistemologies of *positivism, interpretivism* or a combination of both. *Positivis*t researchers (e.g. some economists) follow similar methods to those used in natural and physical sciences and tend to apply measurement and quantification to test social phenomena (More *et al.* 1996, Hanley 2001). *Positivist* preferred approaches include surveys and largely depend upon statistically valid samples. Economists mostly concentrate on different characteristics of value, such as: 'use' value in the active use of a forest (e.g. timber or recreation), 'option' value, representing potential future forest use, and 'existence' value, representing the benefit people gain in knowing of the existence of forests, whether they use them or not (O'Brien 2003). On the other hand, *interpretivist* approaches attempt to take into account richer aspects of social and cultural values, that may not be captured by *positivist* ones (O'Brien 2003). *Interpretivists* prefer qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews and discussion groups. And a large emphasis is placed on how people construct their worlds within society and culture, and the meanings that people and communities give to their world.

Much of the research on forest values to date has focussed on 'held or ideal' values (Rokeach 1973, Bengsten and Xu 1995, McFarlane and Boxall 2000). And there has been much debate over whether the nature of held forest values is *unidimensional* or *multidimensional.* More traditional *positivist* research with its 'philosophical roots in utlitarianism' (Bengsten 1994:523) appears to follow a *unidimensional* view of value. This reflects a belief that all values are 'reducible scientifically to a single measure of utility'

(McQuillan 1990:16), which can act to oversimplify peoples complex held values. More realistically a *multidimensional* (or pluralist) view holds that held values cannot be reduced to a single dimension. O'Brien (2003) supports this view and states that values are multiple, sometimes contested and able to change over time as humans have new experiences or are influenced by others.

Held values have also been referred to as instrumental (or use) and intrinsic (or non-use) values which are interwoven and difficult to separate (Cheng *et al.* 2003). Some studies attempt to separate different people into these categories according to their use or views of forests (e.g. Winter *et al.* 2003). However, Bengsten (1994) emphasises that instrumental and intrinsic values are not mutually exclusive and Cobb (1980) warns that the distinction between the two should not be misunderstood.

Beyond instrinsic and instrumental values, various typologies have been developed, many of which are very generalised, and these tend to oversimplify the complex nature of values. Bengsten and Xu (1995) developed a four-way category system, and Rolston and Coufal (1991) a ten category classification. The depth of the meaning of values is lost in some of these categorisations and some researchers have criticised them for being misleading and incomplete (Brown and Reed 2000).

Research into how and why values develop may help in addressing forest conflicts. It is possible that conflict over forest management may stem from assumed individual and collective differences in held forest values (Brown and Reed 2000). Brandt (1992) emphasises that a greater insight into values may not eliminate conflict, but may help manage conflict. And Bengsten (1994:528) believes that values research may:

> help illuminate the true nature of environmental conflicts and help resource managers and policymakers distinguish between fundamental value differences and value disputes for which the prospects of resolution are much higher…Clarifying the value systems of groups of forest stakeholders could similarly facilitate conflict management and resolution.

2.3 Summary: community forest management, place and values

Globally, forestry is undergoing a major transition, as it moves towards a greater emphasis in more sustainable practices, multiple uses and values, and public participation in forestry. These changes have brought about increasing recognition of the need for human research within forestry. In Australia there has been some discussion of implementing community forest management in some areas. However, in introducing participatory management models, it seems important to gain an understanding of stakeholders' forest uses, and also their perspectives and underlying connections (sense of place) and values towards a forest.

Sense of place and values are relatively unexplored concepts in Australian forestry. It is contended here that their consideration in studying people's perspectives towards forests and forest management may play an important role in understanding more deeply, the current and potential social, cultural and political factors in managing any particular forest.

The following chapter describes the research methods adopted in this study.

Chapter 3 METHODS

APPROACH AND PROCESS

This chapter describes the research approach and principles used to guide this study as well as the principles and methods used to collect and analyse the data.

3.1 Epistemology[2]

In justifying the choice and use of methodology, researchers need to specify the assumptions that they make about the reality that they bring into their work (Crotty 1998). These assumptions reflect the researcher's theoretical perspective; that is the theory of knowledge, or epistemology, that is rooted within the theoretical perspective.

Two paradigms that reflect my assumptions of reality and strongly influence this research are *symbolic interactionism* and *critical theory*. Denzin (1992) purports that elements of *symbolic interactionism* and other theories (such as *critical theory*) are not mutually exclusive because they share some similar values and can therefore be compatible in research.

Blumer (1969:2) states that in *symbolic interactionism*:

> …the first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them…The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters.

Thus, *symbolic interactionism* has three main premises; that individuals act towards things on the basis of meanings they have developed for them, these meanings are developed from

[2] Epistemology 'refers to the nature of knowledge claims, and to the question of what counts as knowledge: what is the relationship between the knower and the known' (Punch 1998:170).

social interactions, and individuals use an interpretive process to adapt to things within their environment (Blumer 1969, Flick 1998).

Critical theory has many features, but it usually gives rise to an 'ideologically oriented inquiry' (Guba 1990:23). It is related to a concern with issues of power, domination and emancipation, and is a transformative process that is 'overtly political and value-laden' (Kincheloe and McLaren 1998:264). It follows the assumption that knowledge concerned with human behaviour is shaped by the cultural and historical context of social interaction (Smith 1993).

The way that *symbolic interactionism* and *critical theory* attend to the study of power suggests that they can be compatible and so have been combined in this study to shape the research approach, process and data analysis.

3.2 Qualitative research

This thesis explores forest workers' perspectives of the forest. Thus it is necessary to use an approach that is able to explore human complexities in a holistic and comprehensive fashion (Punch 1998). A qualitative research approach was therefore adopted. This is an enquiry process that allows 'understanding of a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words' (Goode and Hatt 1952: 331). The data in qualitative social enquiry are the words obtained from interviews with respondents.

3.3 Case-study

The research follows the strategy of an 'intrinsic' and 'instrumental' case-study design (Punch 1998:150). A case study is an attempt to look deeply at a situation within its natural setting (Punch 1998). Goode and Hatt (1952:331) state that:

> The case study then is not a specific technique. It is a way of organising social data so as to preserve the unitary character of the social object being studied.

According to Yin (1989) case studies can be used to assist in the construction of knowledge about a phenomenon under study. He emphasises that the method offers the opportunity for great richness in the description of what is happening, in this case the way workers perceive the forest and its management. It also opens the possibility to move beyond description (e.g. of the forest) to allow the development of conceptual links, for example, between the concrete events (of work in the forest) and their meanings to the participants.

In this study, an intrinsic case study strategy is used to provide a better understanding of a particular case (i.e. ex-forest workers' perspectives of the Wombat forest). And instrumental case study strategy is used to provide insight into the issue (i.e forest management and implications for community forest management in the Wombat forest) (Punch 1998). Stake (2000) suggests that cases should be selected mainly on the basis that they represent the greatest possibility for learning about the issues of interest.

3.4 Generalisability

Case studies are often criticised for their lack of statistical validity and inability to test hypotheses or make generalisations. The 'typicality' of cases selected can also cause concern. Mitchell (1983) argues that case studies involve logical inference (not statistical inference) and are a reliable and respectable procedure for social analysis. Gummesson (1988) suggests that case studies make it possible to reach a fundamental understanding of the structure, process and driving forces within a case, rather than a superficial establishment of correlation or cause-effect relationships. Some case studies are intended to be only case-specific and generalisation to a wider context is not appropriate (Punch 1998).

3.5 Research design

At the initial stages of this study I reviewed literature from a wide range of areas, including Australian forest history, forest values, Wombat State Forest, community forestry, participatory management, social science theory and practice. Through this process key themes and issues emerged, and these were used to design the study and the fieldwork. The research design is outlined in Figure 3.1.

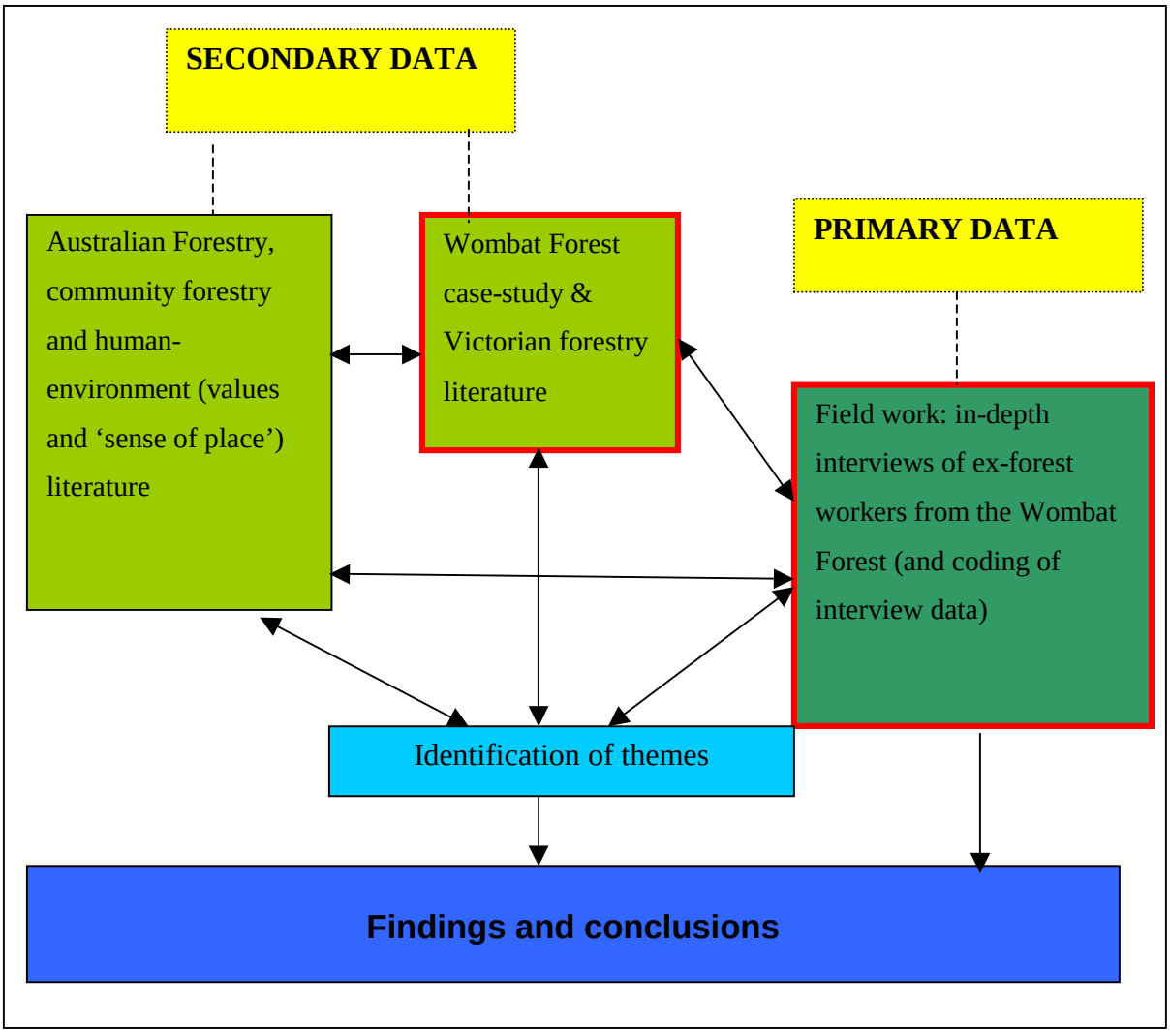


Figure 3.1: The research design.

3.6 Methods for verification

Creswell (1998:2003) identified eight criteria to assist in the verification of a study (listed in Appendix 1). It is recommended that at least two of the eight verification criteria be engaged by the qualitative researcher (Creswell 1998). This study has employed three of Creswell's criteria: triangulation (or crystallization), peer debriefing and clarifying researcher bias.

3.6.1 Crystallization

Traditionally, literature on qualitative research methods has referred to 'triangulation' as an important component of verifying research. Triangulation involves the gathering of data from as many different sources as possible, about the same topic. In this study, the tenent of Richardson (1994) and Denzin and Lincoln (2000) is followed, that of 'crystallization' as an alternative 'lens though which to view qualitative designs and their components' (Denzin and Lincoln 2000:392). Richardson (1994:522) explains the image of the crystal as combining:

> …symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change and alter, but are not amorphous.

To 'crystallize' the data, various sources have been used in this study: mainly in-depth interviews with ex-forest workers and previous literature on a wide range of subjects.

3.6.2 Peer debriefing

Before conducting interviews, proposed questions were reviewed with the assistance of several postgraduate students and supervisors. Mock interviews were conducted before going to the field, to provide practice in interviewing.

3.6.3 Clarifying researcher bias

Every effort was made to approach this study in a neutral and objective fashion. However, all researchers bring particular ideologies and belief systems into their research, so that

absolute objectivity is impossible. Guba (1990) argues that the findings of research may vary according to the values of the researcher. For this reason, I believe it necessary to provide a brief account of my background to provide the reader with an understanding of potential biases I may have brought to this study.

I have studied zoology, ecology and other subjects related to natural systems, and my attraction to this research topic developed mainly from a strong interest in sustainable approaches to natural resource management. I have a strong interest in people, in a behavioural sense, and believe that it is a democratic right for people's voices to be heard. Through living most of my life in rural Victoria, I feel comfortable in a rural setting and feel empathy towards people who live and work on the land. At the same time I have a strong affinity for nature and I strive to follow an environmentally conscious lifestyle. I am also a member of a university environmental organisation and a volunteer at the Australian Conservation Foundation. I feel that this mixed background has provided me with an open mind towards different people and their different worldviews and values. However it is inevitable that some of my background and beliefs could influence the way that I designed this study and have interpreted the results.

3.7 Data collection

3.7.1 Primary data—in-depth interviews

In-depth interviews were used to gather primary data from the forest workers. Taylor and Bogdan (1984:77) define in-depth interviews as 'face-to face encounters between the researcher and informants directed toward understanding informant's perspectives on their lives, experiences or situations, as expressed in their own words.

Semi–structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with individual forest workers from the Wombat State Forest, over a period of 4 weeks in May/June. Semi-structured interviews are in-depth interviews in which:

> there is no fixed wording or ordering of questions. Rather the content of the interview is focussed on the issues that are central to the research questions (Minichiello *et al.* 1990:105).

3.7.2 Sampling

Nine ex-forest workers who were willing to be interviewed, were selected for this study. Initially a key informant from the Daylesford community compiled a list of forest workers' names. From this list several of the workers were contacted by telephone. Some individuals were not available, but interviews were arranged with others, and from those interviewees a process of 'snowball sampling' began (Minichiello *et al.* 1990:225). In snowballing, people who fit the criteria specified for the study are contacted and asked to provide the names of friends or contacts who also fit the criteria. The new names are added to the list and the people are interviewed if and when available (Minichiello *et al.* 1990). The criteria used in this case, are shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Criteria for selecting interviewees in this study

Criterion
Older than 40 years
Worked as a forest worker for more than ten years
Lived in the Wombat State Forest region for more than five years
Available during the period of the study (May/June)

3.7.3 Conducting the interviews

Nine interviews were undertaken from a much longer list of possible names. Usually only one interview (1-2 hours) could be conducted per day because of travel and other logistics. Transcription of the interviews from audio tape to word processor was completed on the same day wherever possible. A list of the respondents names and their backgrounds is shown in Table 3.2.

Interviewees were initially contacted by telephone and asked if they were interested in participating in the study. If they expressed interest, then they were sent a Cover Letter, Information Sheet and Consent form (shown in Appendix 2). If individuals agreed to be interviewed, a suitable time and place familiar and comfortable for them was arranged.

Table 3.2: List of interviewees

Name	Background	Age	Date interviewed
Bill McCashnee	Retired forest worker. Trentham	Mid 80s	17/05/03
Vern Howell	Small sawmill operator (firewood, and hobby timber). Trentham/Daylesford	Late 60s	20/05/03
George Howard	Retired forest worker and sawmiller. Howards End/Koorinchiboora	Early 80	22/05/03
Ron Horoughan	Retired forest worker. Daylesford	Late 70s	30/05/03
Frank Brody	Retired forest and property worker Trentham	Late 70s	31/05/03
Gary McIntosh	Ex-forest worker, current lobbyer (supporter of CFM). Originally worked on family private forest land NSW	Early 50s	01/06/03
Ross Baker	Ex-forest and sawmill worker. Currently firewood seller, timber poster and timber golf club maker. Originally non-local police officer	Late 50s	05/06/03
Brian Bouse	Older sawmill owner, Daylesford (and ex forest worker).	Mid 80s	10/06/03
Harold Suckling	Older forest worker, currently unemployed, Koorincheiboora.	60 years old	10/06/03

At the start of interviews, respondents were reminded that I regarded them as co-researchers with valuable information to provide to this study. During later interviews I showed interviewees flow charts of main themes that had emerged during earlier interviews and asked them their opinion of these themes. This showed interviewees the respect that I felt towards them and my genuine interest in their perspective.

Interviews varied in duration from 40 minutes to two and a half hours, but averaged one hour. Most were conducted in the interviewee's house or property (e.g. sawmill or yard). During and after some interviews we would drive or walk through parts of the forest, and the interviewees would show me favourite, 'good 'and 'bad' parts of the Forest. Being in the Forest helped trigger some memories and stories for the workers which helped me develop a greater understanding of the context of the Forest and their views towards it.

The questions asked were guided by a list of topics, relating to the research questions. This format was chosen to allow an exploration of pre-determined issues, while allowing other issues, specific to the interviewee, to emerge (examples of questions are listed in Appendix 3).

3.7.4 Establishing rapport

Throughout the interviews I tried to convey understanding and respect towards the interviewees, to allow them to see that I appreciated their input and was interested in their 'story'. A map was taken into the interview and interviewees were asked to point out areas relevant to discussions throughout the interview. This form of interaction was intended to help create rapport with the interviewee by reducing the 'power differential' (Mayhut and Morehouse 1994:98). Visiting the forest with the workers helped to further establish rapport and trust.

3.7.5 Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance for this study was granted by the Australian National University Ethics Committee prior to conducting interviews. Interviews only took place if the interviewee had signed the Consent Form indicating their agreement to the conditions of the study. The Consent Form gave the interviewee the choice to be assigned an alias if they wanted to remain anonymous. All the interviewees wanted their real names to be used against statements they had made, so aliases are not used in this thesis.

After the interviews, all respondents were sent a copy of a transcript of their interview and asked to make corrections if required. Some returned edited transcripts and others did not return the transcripts with any changes. On reading the transcript, one respondent asked that his name not be associated with one particular statement he had made (in Section 5.2).

3.7.6 Secondary data: review of literature

A variety of secondary data, from historical records, government policies and statements,

reviews, research and other literature, were incorporated within this study to provide 'crystallization' of data. It was difficult to obtain much literature on the history of the Wombat Forest and much of this information was informal and difficult to access.

3.8 Data handling and analysis

The data obtained from interviews was analysed using manual coding techniques drawn from ideas taken from examples of grounded theory (e.g. Minichiello *et al.* 1990). Grounded theory analysis was chosen because it allows a search for an understanding of these workers' perspectives, through building a theoretical framework of what was 'going on'. In grounded theory, this is achieved by identifying 'core categories' at a high level of abstraction, yet grounded in the data (Glaser 1978).

Interviews were transcribed from audio cassettes to digital format. This typing to word processor software was done as soon after the interview as possible, usually on the same day, so as to maximise recall of all non-verbal events and body language associated with the words (data). After most of the interview transcripts had been typed, conceptual categories in the data were identified at a first level of abstraction (open coding) (Minichiello *et al.* 1990). A different coloured piece of paper was assigned to each theme and attached to the transcript. The next step involved identifying relationships between these categories (axial coding). This was done by placing related themes together in flowcharts and recording notes to describe relationships for each. Next, these relationships were conceptualised and accounted for at a higher level of abstraction (selective coding). Coloured pieces of paper were again attached to transcripts.

These different steps in coding were not necessarily conducted sequentially, but were conducted in an 'overlapping' and 'concurrent' manner (Punch 2000:210). An example of working sheets from this manual coding procedure is shown in Figure 3.2.

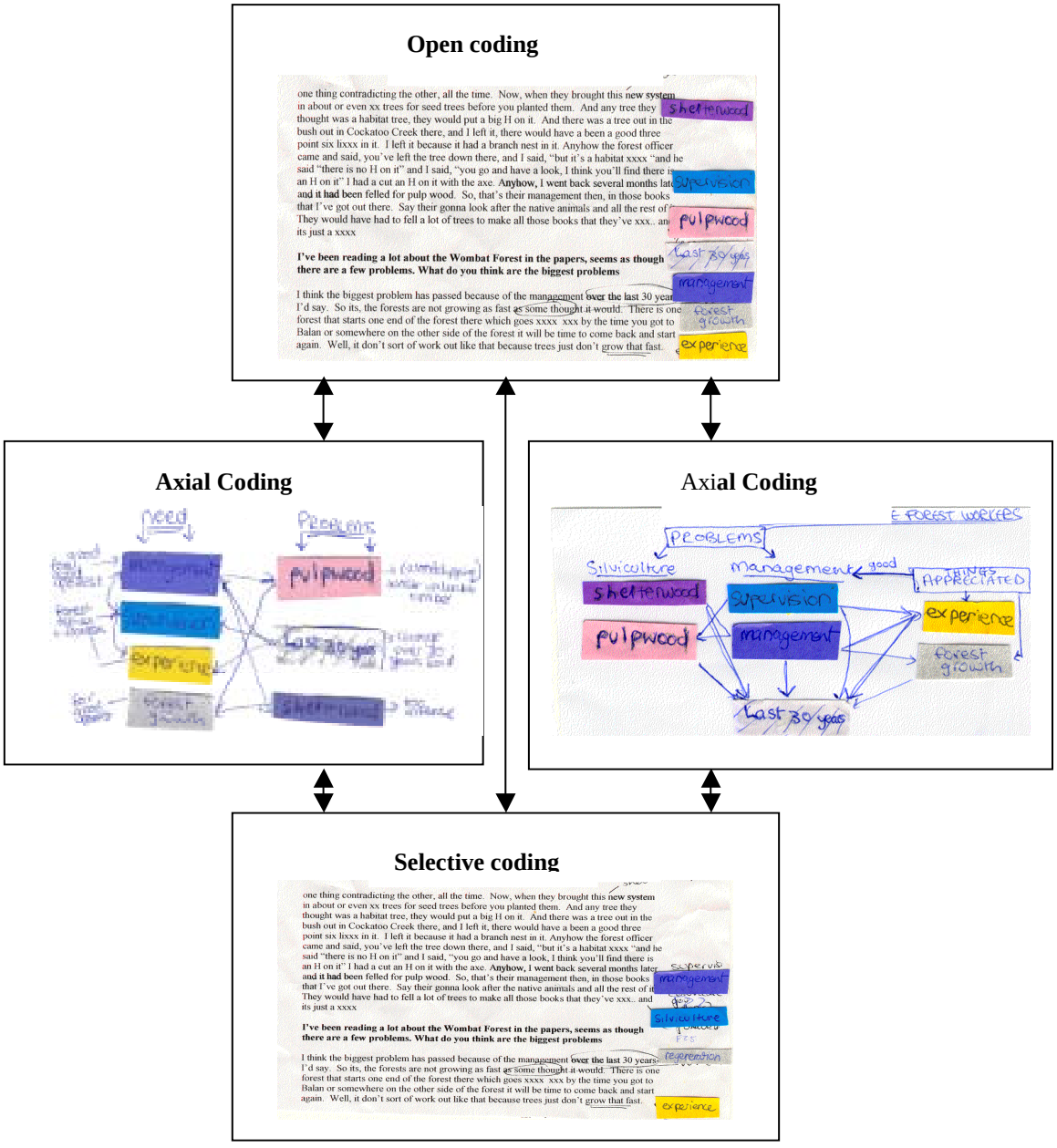


Figure 3.2 Section of an interview transcript, showing stages of manual coding (open, axial and selective coding).

Throughout the process flow charts and diagrams were drawn (and discussed with others) to encourage lateral thinking. Coding was started after the first few interviews, but carried on throughout the field research period. The early initiation of coding helped to establish themes, that could be followed in later interviews. Completion of coding before leaving the field research area enabled me to re-contact interviewees about issues that needed clarification or further information (as much as the time available would allow).

At the final stage of analysis, new transcripts were printed and placed into folders, and themes and notes were written onto plastic covers for each transcript page (shown in Figure 3.3). Themes for each interview were assigned a number and this was added to a spreadsheet. The spreadsheet (shown in Appendix 4) showed which themes emerged for each interviewee, and how many times during each interview. This process helped to thoroughly identify different themes, their predominance and their relationships to each other.

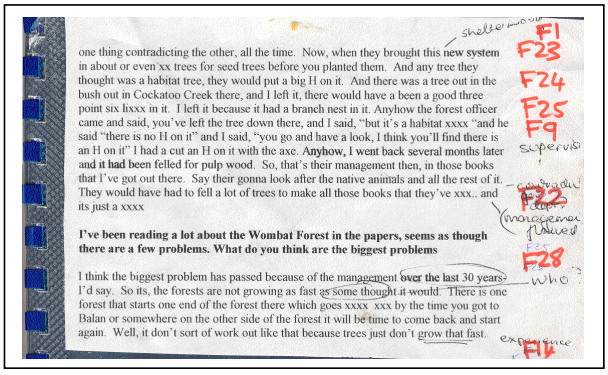


Figure 3.3 Section of an interview transcript, with number codes (codes correspond to those in spreadsheet, in Appendix 4).

3.8.1 Field diary

An important part of the data management was the keeping of a field diary, in which all names, events and techniques, reasons for choice of techniques, ideas and changes in techniques were recorded.

These records were valuable later in recalling details of research activities, sequences of events, addresses and other details. Theories on peoples' perceptions and ideas for literature and other information sources were also noted in the field diary.

3.9 Summary

This chapter has summarised the epistemological approach taken in this study, the research design, and the methods used in data collection and analysis. The following chapter outlines some of the key themes and issues that emerged from the in-depth interviews with the forest workers.

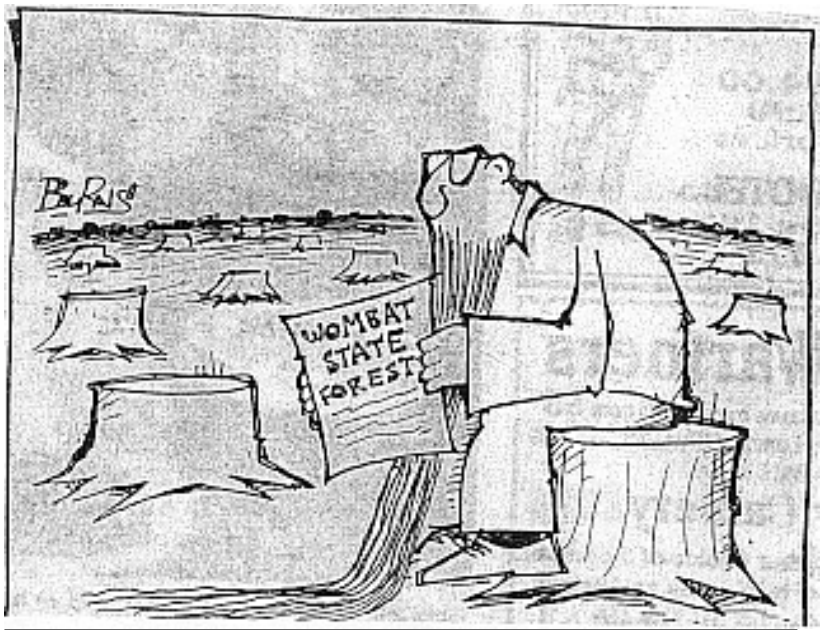


Plate 2: A cartoon on the Wombat State Forest (from *The Ballarat Courier* 28/10/94).

Chapter 4 CASE-STUDY 'THE WORKING FOREST'

4.1 Wombat State Forest as a case-study

The Wombat State Forest was chosen as a case study because it is entering a unique situation, as a pilot area for community forest management in Victoria. It will be the first Australian forest in which this approach has been applied. The case also represents a controversial forest area, rich in human, natural history and resources, and hence offers opportunity for learning through case-study research (see Section 3.3).

This chapter commences with a brief overview of forestry in Victoria, to provide background to the case study forest. Following this is a summary description of the Wombat Forest, including a brief history and outline of the current management situation. The workers and ex-workers of the Wombat Forest are introduced, as a local group with interests in and knowledge of the Forest, whose views have not been previously studied.

4.1.1 Change in forest management approach in Victoria

Victoria played an active role in the development of conservation and management of public land, long before the National Forest Policy Statement of 1992 (Slee 2001). In response to policy and process failures in the 1960s, the Land Conservation Council (LCC) was established in Victoria. This Council made recommendations on the allocation of public land throughout the state and sought community views in doing so (LCC 1977, Dargavel *et al.* 1999).

The LCC was formed to act as an umbrella organization for all conservation groups and to offer the government advice on conservation. This occurred after a successful but arduous campaign by conservationists in 1969, to conserve the Little Desert area (north western Victoria) from the development of a rural settlement scheme (Robin 1998).

The LCC's recommendations resulted in significant changes to Victorian forestry areas, through the creation of new national parks, modification of state forest boundaries and the introduction of public consultation. It appears to have been effective in allocating land regionally, but was thought by some not to adequately take into account state-wide allocation of timber resources or their sustainable use (Dargavel *et al.* 1999).

By the 1980s there was a need for better forest policy and replanning of the sawmill industry (Dargavel *et al.* 1994). The Forests Commission, Lands Department and National Parks service were amalgamated into the Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands (hereafter referred to as the 'Department'), to integrate regional management of all state public land. During this time the organisational structure of forest management underwent dramatic, yet inevitable changes in the move from a 'dominance in timber production' to the integration of economic, environmental and social aspects (Dargavel *et al.* 1994).

In 1984, Professor I.S. Ferguson conducted a public inquiry and made recommendations for the planning of forest industry, policy and improvement of the management planning process (Ferguson 1985). From this the government was able to produce the Timber Industry Strategy (Department of Conservation Forests and Lands 1986), which specified a series of targets for management actions: economic viability in providing wood, environmental sensitivity, sustainability for all forest values, and incorporation of public participation (Department of Conservation Forests and Lands 1986). Forest management plans for each of Victoria's fifteen forest management areas were prepared and these specified fourteen key management criteria to be met (Slee 2001).

Over the last 20 years, the Department has undergone many name changes and today is split in two and named the Department of Sustainability and Environment, and Department of Primary Industries. Over the years, this State Department, together with the State and Federal Governments, has been heavily criticized over forest management policies—especially by environmental groups concerned about over-logging of native forest and low priority being placed on conservation. Many disapprove of departmental decisions on timber licences and wood chipping, and often the Government is accused of only meeting conservation objectives to attract parliamentary votes (Wombat Forest Society 2000, R. Baker *per. comm.* 05/06/03).

One controversial forest area in Victoria that has received much media attention over the last few decades is the Wombat State Forest. There has been increasing pressure on the State's forestry agency by conservation groups to reduce (or cease) logging in this over exploited forest. For many years this criticism was met by strong resistance from the forest agency, state government, large saw mills and timber industry groups. Some environmental groups mounted very active protests over logging in the Wombat, and some protests have become violent. However, in early 2002 a major policy statement was released, demonstrating the Victorian Government's intention to develop a sustainable timber industry. It stated that this would be achieved by improving forest management in collaboration with the community to encourage the long-term future of the forest and its regional communities (Bracks and Garbutt 2002). In particular, the Government focused on developing options for discussion by communities associated with the Wombat State Forest, as a pilot Program. The following year, the new Minister for Sustainability and Environment announced in January 2003 that the Wombat State Forest would be run by community forest management; the first forest in Australia to have this status (Thwaites 2003).

4.1.2 The Wombat State Forest – a brief outline and history

Literature on the Wombat Forest history and current situation is restricted mainly to formal policy reports and assessments of the Midlands Forest or West Victorian regions, but little is available of the Wombat Forest itself. Only a history of the sawmills and tramways of the Wombat Forest area has been published (Houghton 1980). Some responses to policy documents have been written by members of the community and ex-foresters, but many of these are informal and difficult to access (Endacott 1996, O'Marra 1999, Wombat Forest Society 2000).

The Wombat State Forest is located in mid-west Victoria (Figure 4.1) and covers approximately 51 780 hectares, with many sections of forest—surrounded by farm land. The Forest straddles the Great Diving Range at an elevation of 275-875 metres and is at the headwaters of six of Victoria's important river systems (Morgan 2000). It also covers a number of 'Special Water Supply Catchments'. These catchments supply surrounding towns, and also Melbourne, Ballarat and Geelong (Petheram 2002).

The dominant trees are eucalypts, the most common being Messmate Stringybark (*Eucalyptus obliqua)*. In drier areas, Narrow-leaved Peppermint, (*Eucalyptus radiata),* with Manna Gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis)* or Candlebark (*Eucalyptus rubida*) tending to take over from Messmate Stringybark-dominated mixtures (Institute of Foresters 1995)

The Wombat State Forest has played a significant role in Australia's forest history since the onset of the gold rush of the mid-1800s (see timeline, in Appendix 5). During the gold rush days there was an insatiable demand for firewood and slabs, mining props and building materials (Institute of Foresters 1995). At that time, timber was obtained in an unrestricted and exploitative manner and there was little responsibility shown in the use of fire (Australian Forest History Society 1992). Anderson (1999) claims that by the end of the 1800s, unsustainable practices had 'ruined' the forest.

Figure 4.1: Wombat State Forest map (tenure, catchment management boundaries, local government boundaries and water catchments (DNRE 2002)

In 1865 an inquiry into the controls and regulations of use within the Forest concluded that forested areas in west and central Victoria (Wombat State and Mount Macedeon Forests) should be reserved as State Forest (Ligar *et al.* 1865 cited from Kellas and Hateley 1991).

However, it was not until the establishment of a Royal Commission in 1898 that uncontrolled cutting ended. The Forest was closed in order to regenerate. In the nearby Creswick Forest, a forester/bailiff (John La Gershe) was appointed initially to prevent people from cutting young trees, and later to undertake thinning and some planting (Taylor 1998).

During this time thinning prescriptions were applied, to remove poorer quality stems, favouring Messmate Stringybark. This system was referred to as a 'selection system', and was not designed specifically to promote regeneration (Institute of Foresters 1995).

In 1919, the Forests Commission of Victoria was established to protect and introduce systematic management in the native forests, with 'independence from political interference' (Kellas and Hateley 1991:212). The Commission continued the rehabilitation of the Forest by thinning and improvement fellings—removing excess seedling and coppice growth.

Following World War II, the demand for timber once again rose. Small groups of mature trees were harvested in a Group Selection System. In the resulting gaps, logging slash was burnt to encourage seedling regeneration. By 1948 the selective system was re-introduced, but was based on thinning from below (Kellas and Hateley 1991).

From 1963, growth of the Forest was monitored from a series of Continuous Forest Inventory plots. In the late 1960s these plots indicated that the selective system was not meeting sustainable forest management objectives. So, in the early 1970s a form of two stage clearfelling, known as shelterwood, was implemented. Troupe (1966:29) describes shelterwood systems as:

> high forest systems in which the young crop is established under the shelter (overhead or lateral) of the old one; the latter at the same time affords protection to the soil

The new system involved a first harvest that released established regrowth, and retained only the best overwood trees. A later second harvest, removed the retained overwood trees (Kellas and Hateley 1991).

After the implementation of the shelterwood system, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources was established. And in the early 1990s the system was modified, from a low intensity to a higher intensity system, in which fewer seed trees remained and a shorter period was allowed before the second harvest.

In 1996 the Midlands Forest Management Plan (in which the Wombat Forest was included) was released (Department of Natural Resources and Environment 1996), and this was followed by the West Victoria Regional Forest Agreement in 1999 (Joint Commonwealth and Victorian RFA Steering Committee 1999). These have both been widely criticised, mostly by conservationists, but also by local residents and ex-foresters (Wombat Forest Society 1999, Endacott 2000).

In 1989, as part of the Timber Industry Strategy, harvesting operations in the Midlands Region became 'syndicated' to become the Midland Logging company, later called Central Victorian Forestry Co. Pty Ltd. And in 1990 it was decided to allow milling and chipping companies to administer all logging works in the forest Some believe that under this system vested interests soon resulted in 'favouritism, discrimination and dismissals' amongst contract workers (Duclos 1996:14). Inevitably at this time, there was much restructuring of timber receivership within sawmills (Duclos 1996).

The new system created greater pressures on smaller sawmills, which resulted in many closures (H. Suckling *pers. comm.* 10/06/03). Many in the timber community considered the syndication as 'favouritism' and were surprised and confused by these changes (G. Howard *pers. comm*. 22/05/2003). This time period was also marked with greater technological advances in equipment and machinery (Kellas and Hately 1991). And as a result, job losses within the timber industry across Australia were substantial at this time. It has been calculated that in the period from 1965 to 1985, wood production from Australian forests increased by 40 percent, while jobs in the industry were cut by 40 percent (Resource Assessment Commission 1991), as shown in Figure 4.2.

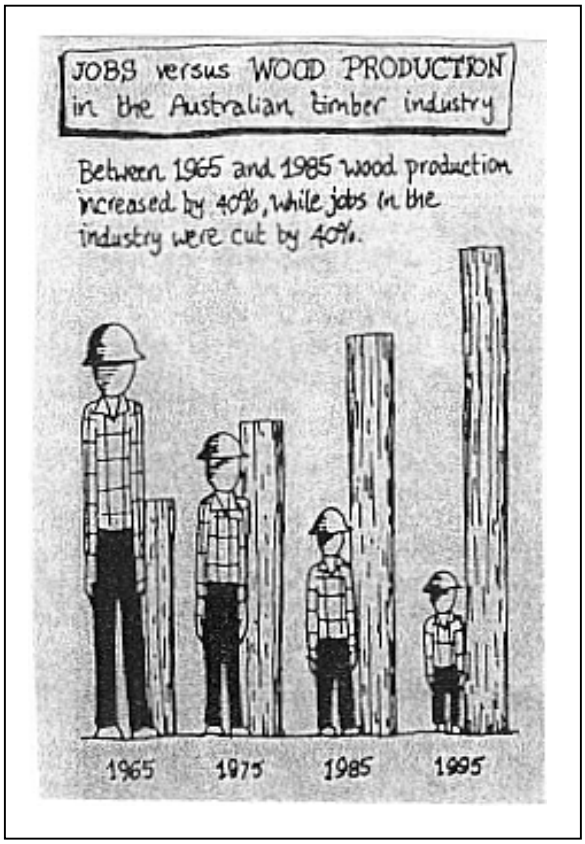


Figure 4.2: Jobs versus wood production in the Australian Timber Industry (from Resource Assessment Commission 1991:121)

Twenty years after the shelterwood system was launched, approximately 80 percent of the Wombat Forest had the first cut completed. Many who oppose the shelterwood system believe this stage should have taken up to forty years to complete (Anderson 1999). And many members of the community believe that the forest requires an even longer period of recovery—and hence lower rates of logging (L.Duclos *pers. comm*. 23/05/03).

The Wombat Forest has a long history of exploitation, but it was mainly in the last 30 years that debates over its use have become acrimonious. Many believe the biodiversity features of the forest area to be very fragile and are concerned about the future of threatened flora and fauna in the region. In the region, 47 percent of land has been placed in conservation and special protection reserves (Joint Commonwealth/Victorian RFA Steering Committee 1999, Petheram *et al.* 2002). In 1994 a group of timber workers and their families concerned about seemingly unsustainable logging practices formed the 'Wombat Forest Society'. This group still exists, and together with other local and wider environmental groups, appears to have had a profound influence on decisions about management of the Wombat Forest (Nelson 2002).

Over the past 10 years the Society has been involved in energetic lobbying for more sustainable forest practices. Communication of interests by all stakeholders in 'open and respectful debates' has been encouraged by the Society. And they have also discouraged blockading of forest workers, with one exception during the Bullarto direction action. The action involved a dispute over forest areas reserved to protect the endangered Powerful Owl (Nelson 2002). The Society have also attempted to pressure the Department and politicians to release forest management data but have repeatedly been refused access, so developed their own analyses and audits to monitor departmental processes. Using a satellite image and data from various sources, group members calculated that the sustainable yield of timber from the forest should be no more than 8 600 cubic metres annually; while the department was issuing licences for 41 000 cubic metres of timber (Miller 2002). These mis-calculations on the part of the forestry agency were later verified by government sources, and this led to a cessation in woodchipping and temporary moratorium on logging in January 2003 (Lees 2003).

4.1.3 Recent changes in management approach for the Wombat Forest

A Steering Group (Wombat Forest Community Consultation Steering Group) formed in mid-2002 to investigate how best to seek community views to ensure increased participation in sustainable forest management for the Wombat Forest, and Victoria as a whole. This Group commissioned a consultant group to undertake a review of Community Forest Management. That review provided information through a discussion paper on principles of collaborative management, and was used at community meetings in late 2002 and 2003. The Department also enlisted the advice of Dr Don Gilmour, an Australian forester with extensive experience of community forestry around the world (Wombat Forest Community Consultation Steering Group 2002).

Following the announcement that community forest management was to be implemented in the Wombat Forest (by Minister Thwaites 2003) a 'community forest management' entity is currently being developed. The initiative is being led by the Department of Sustainability and Environment, which has employed an ex-president of the Wombat Forest Society, to help lead and facilitate the 'start-up process' for collaboration. The structure of the community forestry entity is not yet decided, but various alternatives are being discussed. The state forestry agency is likely to retain certain major responsibilities for forest management, for the foreseeable future. However, it appears that there is some internal conflict between groups in favour of some logging and other groups opposed to all logging.

In recent years the number of tourists to the Wombat Forest (and Hepburn Mineral Water) area has greatly increased, as has the population of resident newcomers attracted to the Wombat region in search of a more rural and alternative lifestyle. Many of the 'newcomers' are very active and vocal concerning environmental issues (RFA Steering Committee 1999). This has resulted in many divides between different groups within the community (B. Bouse *pers. comm.* 10/06/03).

One community group, supporting community forest management has designed a collaborative 'restoration forestry' trial at a local degraded forest coup at Glenlyon (Ralph 2003). However, some others are refusing to participate in community consultation meetings or in silvicultural trials; some even propose preventing forest reclamation trials from going ahead (Lees 2003). The Actively Saving Trentham Group, for example, opposes the implementation of community forest management, as they oppose logging and are calling for the Forest to be turned into a National Park.

4.1.4 Forest Workers of the Wombat State Forest

The Wombat Forest Society has expressed concern that little is known about the views of various users of the Forest, and that the knowledge held by some groups is being ignored or lost (L. Duclos *pers. comm.* 16/05/03). One group that has been painted in a very negative light by non-local and some local media are the forest workers. Thompson and Tracy (1995) state that, traditionally, forest workers have been among the most exploited of all workers in Australia. However, the situation has worsened over the last few decades. Many are not only very poorly paid, plagued by unsafe working environments and threatened by job insecurity, but also bear the brunt of much blame for over-logging.

The voice of the forest worker has been largely unrepresented in the forest management debate. Some Wombat Forest workers have been able to voice their opinions by writing letters to the editor in local newspapers or Wombat Forest Society newsletters, but many, especially older workers, have had little education and do not feel confident articulating their perspectives in this way. To date, there have been few studies investigating Australian forest workers' views and constructions of forests (Watson 1990, Thompson and Tracy 1995, Pearce 1996,), and none in the Wombat Forest region.

Nowadays there are few younger forest workers in the region, and those that do work, tend to live further away and travel long distances to work in the forest. Most of the forest workers that remain in the Wombat Forest region are elderly and have retired from officially working in the Forest. Many of these workers have worked almost 60 years in

the Forest and still use it for other purposes (e.g. firewood and hobby crafts). Their forest experience and knowledge is extensive, so their perspectives could provide crucial insights, not only on human-environment relationships, but for future forest management in the region.

4.2 Summary

The history behind the Wombat State Forest is long and convoluted, and little formal literature describing its past or current situation exists. Many of its forest stakeholders have had little opportunity to voice their views and concerns relating to forest issues. One of these groups, older ex-forest workers, in particular, has had little input in the forest debate, despite their extensive experience in the Forest. Research into understanding these workers' perspectives and constructions of the Forest may also provide useful insights for future forest management. The following chapter attempts to provide a voice for these workers by presenting some of their perspectives towards the forest and forest management—information gained from in-depth interviews in this study.



Plate 3: Ex-forest worker and forest view from Trentham (northern Wombat Forest) Bill McCashnee, deceased August 2003 (Collage: L. Petheram 2003).

Chapter 5 MAIN THEMES EMERGING FROM INTERVIEWS FOREST WORKERS' VOICE

This chapter of 'results' is divided into five sections: G*reatest problems, Forest changes, Beliefs and feelings towards the forest, A 'good' forest and Preferred forest management,* corresponding to each of the five research questions of the thesis (see Section 1.1). Under each section the results are arranged under sub-headings of the themes that emerged from analysis of the interview data As some themes occurred under two or more question topics, there is a degree of repetition between sections.

Although none of the nine interviewees were employed in the Forest at the time of the study, they will be referred to as 'workers' in this thesis. All the workers wished their names to be associated with views and statements expressed in interviews, so their initials after quotations in the text refer to actual names of respondents (see Table 3.2).

5.1 Greatest problems in the forest

A variety of issues were raised by interviewees when asked their views about the greatest problems within the Forest. Some of the issues echoed those commonly found in letters to the editor of the local paper (*The Hepburn Advocate*) and in other media reports about the Wombat Forest, but some unexpected themes did emerge. Most of the issues mentioned were associated with forest management and changes in management in the last 30 years. The most common issues are summarised in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Main problems identified by interviewees in relation to the Wombat Forest.

Issue	Details
Mismanagement of the Forest	Lack of forest maintenance (e.g. in proper burning and thinning) Miscalculations of sustainable yields Immoral intentions ('corruption') within governmental departments—leading to forest exploitation Lack of field experience of departmental officials. Inappropriate logging (shelterwood regime too intense, and waste of valuable timbers for woodchipping)
Pressures from timber industry	Export of woodchips Timber mill 'syndication'
Miscommunication	Media mis-portrayals of timber workers and others. Public and conservation groups ("greenies") not understanding the situation and placing blame on loggers Too many different opinions with the community Lack of communication between managers and community/workers did not know 'what was happening'.

Almost all interviewees believed the Forest had been mismanaged in recent years. Most said there was a considerable lack of maintenance and supervision, which were identified as crucial requirements for 'good' forest management. Many expressed distrust towards federal and state governments, and speculated on governments having ulterior motives. Some even talked of 'corruption' within the Department of Sustainability and Environment (SDE) as a significant force:

> The idea we're getting is that this is the cheapest, nastiest way we can manage the bush to get the most money out of it for the least input…(VH)

Practical forest experience of forest officers in government departments was thought by some interviewees to be minimal, and this was considered to be a problem in the management of the Forest. All interviewees believed that the forest had been overlogged to a certain degree. Further, the implementation of an intense shelterwood regime and the taking of valuable timber for woodchipping was thought to have contributed significantly to this overlogging.

Many thought that demands from overseas paper companies for woodchips and the syndication of timber mills were also causing many problems within the Forest. Two of the younger interviewees believed that the problems in the Forest were derived from the increase in minimum log length allowed for woodchipping, which meant that good quality timber was being taken inappropriately for woodchipping:

> I do think a lot of the blame, well I don't know whether it is blame, is the pulp wood [woodchip] going into longer lengths. When they went into longer lengths, the forestry decided well we'll only leave seed trees and grow a new forest. That's fair enough, you can get patches of pretty good forest out of that, but there are a lot of patches that aren't growing (HS).

Most interviewees expressed a concern that forest workers were inaccurately portrayed and referred to in a negative light. Some identified the media as culprits in this public misperception. Others claimed that 'greenies' (conservation groups) did not fully understand the forest or the workers' views or situation and were unnecessarily placing blame on them.

5.2 Forest change (over the last 60 years)

As in their response to questions on problems (Section 5.1), most interviewees described forest change in terms of forest management, rather than change in the Forest itself. The changes that people described corresponded with many of those that were raised as problems within the Forest.

Many brought up the cessation of the Forest Commission and the introduction of the Department of Lands and Conservation and then the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (now Department of Primary Industries and Department of Sustainable

Environments) as the most important changes and problems in management. The introduction of 'integrated logging' (also referred to as 'syndication') associated with this change-over was considered by some as a significant change. Most believed that the change in forest management had resulted in a worsening situation over the last 30 years.

One worker noted, on several occasions, the difference between the Forest Commission and the Department's relationship with the community:

> Once upon a time we had a terribly good rapport with the Forest Commission …Where they [Forest Commission] would help out, they would be understanding and they would let you cut their trees that were probably going to fall your way if a wind storm came or they were defective or anything like that. And okay, you had to pay royalty, but they were pretty sympathetic to what you were about. Now most of that has gone out the window… (RB).

The change in management was thought to have resulted in reduced timber stand improvement (which was previously achieved through controlled cool burns and thinning), reduced supervision and lack of overseers in the forest.

> The timber just isn't there now, it wasn't policed right. Not enough ground work was done, not enough supervision (GH).

The view that forest officers in recent times do not have enough practical experience to be able to properly manage and make decisions about the forest was expressed. Some were also offended by legislation and regulations that have been introduced in recent years:

> A terrific old bloke that I worked with said to me one day when he got off his skidder and I think we were having smoko or something and I got off mine, Anyway he said ...the damn trouble is, when we were talking about all these new laws that are coming out of the bush, he said the laws are made in a flat office on a flat table, it ain't flat out here! (RB).

There was a belief by some interviewees that forest workers nowadays are not given the forest experience and education that is needed for proper forest practice. One interviewee was appalled by some examples of modern forest practice he had witnessed:

> They got a young man that had never worked in the forest before…I had to go back cleaning up after him, pulling logs out of the heads of the tree... In my opinion he should never have been allowed in the forest right from the start. And I spent a whole week cleaning up after him. And I've got photos here somewhere of where he felled trees straight in the creek, in Cockatoo Creek. When I was felling I would always wait for the wind in the right direction to blow the trees away from the Creek…But a lot of those blokes went out in the bush they just felled trees, it wouldn't matter which way they were leaning they would just fall them.[3]

[3] This worker did not want to be identified with this quote.

Many of the interviewees expressed a deep concern about the inappropriateness, as they saw it, of high intensity shelterwood in many patches of the forest. Some thought the previous method of 'tree selection' was more appropriate for most parts of the Forest. Almost all interviewees thought the use of valuable timber for woodchips was wasteful and contributed towards overlogging of the Forest.

Many talked of different pressures that had been placed upon forestry in recent years. Some were distressed, not only by government, but increasing pressures by overseas exports:

> I believe that the Japanese that are demanding the woodchips, put enormous pressure on the government to supply them and then so the government put enormous pressure on DNRE to find the logs and so it went down the chain, they got what they wanted (RB).

Some interviewees talked about pressures over recent years through public blame (of forest workers) from media manipulation and 'green' arguments. One interviewee explained the change brought about by the presence of 'greenie' activists:

> We had the pick of the bush in my time, we only took trees that needed to come out, no such thing as greenies then. Blokes in the forest were greenies, but not ones that would climb in trees like greenies now (GH).

Another talked of the frustration he felt with being blamed for overlogging in the Forest:

> Look, that is another thing that incenses me, this green lobby or people that are looking that way. Just because you may have a chain or an axe in your hand, you're a chainsaw massacre you know, you just blindly run through the bush just lopping down trees, right, left and centre and nothing could be further from the truth! (RB).

The negative public perception of forestry and forest workers was mentioned by one interviewee as a major change that has caused problems within the forest industry:

> Basically the damage that has been done to the Wombat Forest isn't damage to the trees, it's damage to the human perception of forestry, it's taken the biggest beating…(VH).

5.3 Workers' beliefs and feelings towards the Forest

Almost all interviewees referred to the Forest in terms of a managed entity and talked of the need to log or use the Forest. They also talked of the Forest still being crucial to their lifestyle. All forest workers were opposed to the idea of the Forest being turned into a National Park and being 'closed', 'locked up' and hence the risk of it becoming unkempt

and ‘overgrown’. However, at the same time they, all talked very fondly of the Forest and appeared to hold a very deep concern for its future.

5.3.1 Feeling good in the forest

Even though few of the interviewees openly expressed emotional feelings towards the forest in responding to interview questions, many talked of the need to care for the forest and how they enjoyed spending their spare time in it. One older worker talked of the relaxed feeling he gets when spending time in the Forest:

> Makes me feel free and easy and it relaxes me (BM).

Another worker, who had recently lost his job working in the Forest (due to the moratorium on all logging in the Wombat Forest), stated how much he missed the Forest.

5.3.2 Caring for the Forest

Almost all emphasised the need to care and tend for the Forest. Many mentioned the need for consideration when in the Forest:

> I might need a pole for a shed or something. I walk around, it might take me about half and hour to find a pole I want. There might be 20 that are suitable, but I like to see them grow on into a future tree...(RB).

Almost all believed that there needs to be better forest management. The interviewees who mentioned possible ‘closure’ of the Forest were concerned that no one would be able to look after or ‘care for’ the forest if it were to be turned into a National Park:

> And in terms of a National Park, who is going to look after it?
>
> The problems we have now is there is no-one in Hepburn National Park, we have a ranger…Things that never ever hurt anything you got rangers running around prosecuting people for. In the meantime the bush is getting absolutely overgrown there is so much litter on the floor of the forest. So if a fire came through it would scorch everything. You know it won’t just be a controlled burn, it would scorch everything.
>
> To me, it’s an easy way out for them they reckon ‘Oh make it into a National Park or a Regional Park’ instead of having all your forest officers out here in Daylesford. You know we used to have a lot here that are just about all gone. ‘Oh if we made it a Regional Park we would only a have to have a ranger this, that and the other thing’ (RB).

5.3.3 Feelings of helplessness (as logging intensity increased over the years).

Many seemed to feel helpless because they did not have any control over management decisions (eg., silviculture, woodchipping, level of supervision, forest maintenance)—the things that were thought to be contributing towards overlogging. Some talked of the community and workers needing more consideration and input into management decisions:

> Yeah we were always sent into coupes and I was always saying what the hell are we doing in here, don't worry about that it was only one available and if you didn't do it you missed out. (HS).

This feeling of helplessness was made much worse by the blame being placed upon the workers by media, conservation groups and the general public. Some talked of the helplessness of trying to be involved in lobbying and attending meetings:

> We went to meetings, but only knew how to fell trees, those fellas would talk you backwards (GH).

5.3.4 Feelings towards other groups associated with the forest

All but one worker interviewed appeared to distrust the government and some believed that 'corruption' may have been prevalent within the DSE. Again, some talked of the need for more practically experienced forest officers in DSE to improve management.

Most talked of their frustration with more extreme conservation groups. Many believed 'greenies' to be hypocritical and sometimes ignorant of the situation in the Forest:

> All the people that are aligned to the Green, think that's fantastic, that's great. But you know, I'm a member of the local fire brigade and I've never ever, ever seen one of these green activists at a fire. So I mean if we had a fire, who is going to save it? And why should in years gone by, all the loggers and their families and the farmers and everybody, they're the ones who stop the fire, they're the ones who save the towns…But you know what I mean, this thing that really incenses me they can scream about all these things, but when it comes to the crunch they will not get in there and have a go (RB).

There was some sympathy with the views of the environmental movement, but not with all their actions:

> But look, you are not going to please everyone all the time. And I s'pose it's indicative of a good society where people are allowed to criticise. But I do feel, without being too critical that there is a lot of ignorance on the part of the, or the people that do the criticising. By the same token there may be some very good ideas. I s'pose there is nothing wrong with anybody expressing an opinion. But I do get uptight when I hear them going out and sabotaging logging equipment or tying themselves up to a tree or going into a mill and

chaining them up to the equipment. I think that's stupidity. It's not going to achieve anything. (FB).

5.3.5 Fascination with forest growth

All interviewees mentioned forest growth and regeneration. Many seemed to be fascinated with the ability of the Forest to grow naturally and talked much of checking up on regenerating in old coupes[4] and also about growing their own trees:

> I do that just because I like trees and I've ended up doing this [sawmill business] just because I like trees. Sort of can't help it. I only do this to satisfy my other obsessions you know. Grow more trees (VH).

Many expressed a lot of faith in the regeneration capabilities of the forest and greatly valued this property of the forest:

> So I guess we are lucky we've got forests and they are a real asset, because once we take something out something is replaced again (BB).

5.3.6 Dislike of waste

Almost all interviewees seemed to hold a distaste for waste in the Forest. The importance of using all parts of a tree or not allowing valuable timber to be wasted was brought up by many of the interviewees:

> You know a lot of future trees and things were taken…that might have only been 8 or 10 inches at the butt and they didn't look perhaps like a good tree, but a lot of trees as they grow become something. I don't say something that's got rot in it or something that is really defective, no it will never grow into anything that has a good tree, but just a nice small little tree. It might be a bit insignificant well once that's gone that's your regeneration for the next…so anyway I think the woodchip part of it was the main mismanagement (HS).

5.3.7 Fear of fire in the forest

Many respondents talked of the importance of controlled, proper, cool burns in the Forest, and they also emphasised that uncontrolled fires were very frightening:

> Biggest enemy of the forest is fire. Disastrous…[it] ruins a forest…Boils sap on big trees (BB).

> It [fire] just went hop, hop through the bush for miles ahead of itself. That was a frightening sight…I never like to see fire out of control. It is a very deadly and dangerous thing (RB).

[4] Coupe is an area of land set aside for logging (Oxford Dictionary 3rd edition, 1997).

Some even talked of their fear of tourists and a larger population moving to the region, which they believed was creating a fire hazard in the forest.

5.3.8 Offence

Some expressed anger at the introduction of rules and regulations in the Forest. They believe that some of these rules insult the way they care for the Forest:

> I just have a passion about the bush and where we live. Just like with these permits and things. I get incensed if the council send us a letter to clean up for fire hazard …Because we do clean up, we don't need a letter to tell us. And out in their land, it's rubbish and yet they're sending me a bit of red form saying we require you to clean up…

> He [park ranger] goes around and fines people for getting off a track or doing a bit of gold panning in the creek, which is something traditionally every kid did of a Saturday or Sunday when they were small. Things that never ever hurt anything you got rangers running around prosecuting people for. In the meantime the bush is getting absolutely overgrown there is so much litter on the floor of the forest (RB).

5.3.9 Traditional beliefs and values

Several interviewees mentioned the importance of tradition and local timber community customs in working in the Forest:

> There is a sense of carrying on something generation after generation. It is more than just making a living. And they know and I know that lots of times they we're meeting pretty hard times, they kept going. And they could have just chucked it in and said right let's get out of it and they didn't do that because there was a sense of pride that is was a family business and that sort of thing you know.

> I wouldn't hesitate if…I needed someone to come in and contract for me, I wouldn't hesitate to get a [member of the] family in (RB).

It appears that workers felt a strong loyalty to the community in which they had worked for so long.

5.3.10 Contemporary environmental beliefs

Some, mostly younger interviewees, brought up more abstract values like conservation, biodiversity and sustainability. One interviewee, who is actively involved in lobbying, emphasised the importance of conserving water catchments in the Forest.

5.4 A good forest

When asked their views about the properties of a 'good' forest, most interviewees answered in terms of good management and care. Many expressed the belief that a good forest needs to be maintained and managed well:

> A good forest is like a good farm, you gotta look after it. Burn it off in Spring to keep it safer. Here they wouldn't burn it enough, sometimes but not enough (GH).

Other characteristics that were associated with a good forest was a well stocked forest, with growing and healthy trees:

> A forest chock full of big trees! (FB).

All interviewees believed that the forest should not be closed to logging ('locked up') and that it needed to be utilised, and cared for properly:

> A good forest is a healthy forest, a forest that is well timbered and the trees are growing healthy. And it's maintained in a good condition. And along with that I think on behalf of maintaining trees in a healthy condition, it needs to be managed and logged, so it just doesn't get overlogged and into overgrown wilderness (RB).

One interviewee who was involved in lobbying for more sustainable logging expressed the importance of conserving water in a good forest:

> Water…not only water quality but water quantity because it's so scarce and so precious in Australia…particularly in the Wombat where the headwaters are the six river system, it's the number one issue. Then you've got the mineral springs on top of it. Quantity and quality of water has got to be number one now…(GM).

Preferred forest landscapes were also mentioned by some interviewees. Those who talked of a good forest in terms of landscape aesthetics talked of a forest with different patches of forest and a forest with trees not too closely spaced together. One interviewee used a description of forest landscape to describe his idea of a well managed and thus 'good' forest:

> …if you can imagine a slight melding of an old growth forest that has got really big old two to three hundred year old growth trees possibly spaced every forty metres. Other understory and smaller trees in between. Some not very close together. Compared to a typical forest around the Wombat, that is a result of clearfelling a hundred years ago where you've virtually got single aged, single species sawlogs reasonably close together, I think somewhere in between those two is nice. So you've still got your scattered old growth trees of two to three hundred years of age, you've still got a reasonable supply of good sawlogs, but if in doubt it still has understory. It's not an old growth forest, it's a managed forest…I know it can be done, it's just it's a much smaller return for industry, but it's sustainable, you don't have all these problems… (GM).

5.5 Preferred forest management

Almost all interviewees believed that forest management needs to improve. Only one interviewee believed that the Forest had been managed well in recent years.

There was a strong belief by all that turning the Forest into a National Park and hence 'closing' it would be a waste and would not provide for a good forest. Parts of the Forest had already been 'closed' and some talked of these parts of the Forest as neglected. Most emphasised the need to keep using the forest, while caring and managing it properly. In particular, the older interviewees stressed that there needs to be better forest maintenance (such as thinning and proper cool burns) and also more supervision in forest management:

> The timber just isn't there now, it wasn't policed right. Not enough ground work was done, not enough supervision. Some areas shouldn't have been cleared (GH).
>
> Burn it off in spring to keep it safer. Here they wouldn't burn it enough, sometimes but not enough. They need to burn it to get 'em to shoot…(GH).
>
> They need to thin, and then it will grow like anything (BB).

Some talked of the importance of practical experience and knowledge in the forestry profession, for forest managers, officers and workers in forest management. And although the workers believed that the Forest needed to be managed, their ideas of management were usually associated with tending and care in the Forest, rather than policies, rules and decisions made in 'offices' away from the Forest.

Almost all believed that the shelterwood system and use of valuable logs for woodchipping was inappropriate and many believed that this was the fault of the government and its departments managing the Forest. Some talked of harvesting the Forest according to each type of forest patch:

> They should have done the patches different but they did every area just the same (BB).

And some believed that the Forest should return to a form of selective logging, that had existed in much earlier times.

5.5.1 Community management

When asked about the Wombat Forest being run by community forestry there were mixed opinions. Some thought that the government was 'taking the easy way out' by leaving forest problems with the community. Many were not entirely sure what community forestry entailed:

> I've heard about it and I don't understand what they are talking about (FB).

Some believed that Community Forest Management meant that the community would run the Forest completely on their own. One interviewee had heard that it was the running of the Forest by 'activated' people only:

> Depends what you mean by community forests...there seems to be some discussion going now about some activated group, not a selected group and not with a definite aim…And if you just really get an ad hoc group of people like that and give them something as big as the Wombat Forest, which is bigger than most people can comprehend…(VH).

Many thought that community forest management was unlikely to work because of the diverse range of opinions held in the community:

> Personally I don't think it will ever work…I have heard that there are some organizations that have all these different ideas (RH).

Many thought that the community should have much more input than there had been, but not full authority or responsibility:

> Well that's fair enough too I s'pose, but you've got a government department in forestry itself and I think they're the ones that should run it. I'm not against people putting ideas in as long as they don't take the running of it from the department itself. Suggestions should always be welcome (FB).

> ...it [authority] should be substantial but not all encompassing that's for sure. They can't do that, so I think we need the community to have authority to make decisions in management, but the Department taking responsibility for those decisions which is a hard thing to see would happen…I mean things have gone on in the past, the Department is responsible for, it doesn't seem to have mattered…(GM).

> I really think, I really think that those things are up to the government to run (RB)

Some seemed suspicious of others having too much responsibility:

> ….authority needs to be watched you know. It can't be given to the wrong person…it's like giving a box of matches to a baby (RB).

The idea of re-introducing overseers and more supervision was brought up by many of the interviewees. Several even suggested that one of the main local proponents of community forest management (Tim Anderson) should act as an overseer to workers and/or government officials:

> That is what should be brought back I think, a forest officer to go through and mark the trees to be removed. Say Tim Anderson go and check up on what's going on. It's no good everyone going in and saying do this and do that, and everyone having a different opinion. Because I've seen enough out at the meeting at Bullarto…It's no good everyone having a different opinion and everyone saying something different. Need someone to go and mark the trees that need to be taken out. And someone go and check up on him after it was removed (RH).

> I think the likes of Tim Anderson checking up on the department management would be as good as any (GH).

The need for government support if community forest management was to be implemented was emphasised by many. In addition, the need for more consideration and more open communication with the community and workers was stressed:

> For the community forest situation to work well, they need help I s'pose from the government in that there needs to be…laws or things laid down in relation to the logs and strictly adhered to. And no back pocket or under the counter deals. Everything has got to be out in the open and I see that as a real problem for a little community trying to manage a big forest (RB).

> …I really think it's really a case of working with the Department and the Department not being blinkered and say no-one is going to stop us, which has been a bit of what has gone on. And say yeah, okay we can see your thoughts here (RB).

> …I think the massive changes that the contractors and the sawmillers will have to take is massive….substantial anyway…For the community forest situation to work well, they need help I s'pose (GM).

A few of the interviewees believed that, for better management, there first needs to be admission by bureaucrats of the mismanagement that has occurred:

> The first thing that has to be said is that if foresters in this country are actually going to get over it they are going to have to say to the people who have said no we don't want to buy any of your services. They have to say to them, we're sorry what we were selling wasn't correct…I saw the fella who designed the silviculture in the Wombat Forest, less than 2 weeks ago and he is still defending what he has done...unless the university can say at the highest level we need to change what we are doing and produced forestry that people actually want to buy, then you can forget it (VH).

5.6 Summary

Although the perspectives of the Forest differed between workers to a certain degree, most described the Forest, its problems, changes and management in a very similar way. The few differences in response may be a reflection of differences in the worker's background, or age. For example, one worker has little interactions with other older forest workers now, and so had little knowledge of processes currently occurring, whereas some were considerably better read and more exposed to people outside of the timber community.

Despite the few differences, all the workers talked fondly of 'their' forest, and expressed deep concern for its future. Generally, they seemed very frustrated with the management of the Forest over the last 30 years, and felt helpless and offended that they had been misrepresented and their true voice had gone unheard.

In the following chapter, an attempt is made to explain some of the main themes that emerged from the interviews and also to describe the workers' constructions of the Forest, and of themselves. These explanations represent interpretations from the researcher's epistemological stance, that of a *symbolic interactionist* and *critical theorist.*



Plate 4: Painted, dead tree personified, at Trentham (northern Wombat Forest) (Photo L. Petheram).

Chapter 6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

'IT'S NOT FLAT OUT HERE'

This final chapter is presented in two main parts. The first part explains the main themes that emerged from the study (under the research questions); *Using yet caring for the fores;, Practical knowledge and experience; Fascination with regeneration/dislike of waste; Forest values and sense of place; Change and perceptions of change in the fores;, Defence, frustration and helplessness;, Power, money and relationships*. In the second part, the conclusions of the research are presented, the research limitations discussed and suggestions made on the implications of the findings for those involved in future forest management; *Through the lens of the forest worker; Limitations and further research and Towards common ground: A new lens.*

Elements from *symbolic interactionism* and *critical theory* were used to provide meaning to the results that emerged from interviews and background literature.

6.1 Forest worker perspectives

6.1.1 Using, yet caring for the forest

A consistent and striking feature of the interviews was the emphasis placed by forest workers on the importance of 'using' the Forest. However, accompanying this belief was the importance placed on caring and tending for the Forest. The workers' view of a 'good' forest reflected that of a natural forest—one that was to them—well managed and not a 'mess' (overlogged or overgrown). But to these workers, a good forest (and perhaps natural forest) are concepts associated with a 'working' forest:

> A good forest is a healthy forest, a forest that is well timbered and the trees are growing healthy … it needs to be managed and logged (RB).

The respondents all related well to the concept of a 'working' forest, and they felt very much part of the Forest and responsible for it. These connotations of a working forest help to explain many of the responses to questions in interviews (e.g. on problems, good forests, and forest management).

Most of the interviewees had started working in the Forest at 14 years of age, and are now quite elderly, so have had extensive forest experience (up to 65 years). Discourse and interactions with fellow workers and overseers in the Forest and with other workers and neighbours (eg. in the local pub), would have played a large part in shaping their constructions of appropriate behaviour. It seems that many characteristics of perceived appropriate behaviour from their working lives (e.g. hard work ethic, masculinity, traditional and family values, importance of practical experience and knowledge, and consideration for the Forest) have extended into and guided their current lives. Although the relative strength and balance of these characteristics may have been changed over the years, most workers still appear to live out the legacy of 'romantic axemen' (Watson 1990:65) especially in defence against the anti-logging arguments of conservationists.

6.1.2 Practical knowledge and experience

The workers' practical knowledge of the Forest seemed to play an important part in the construction of their identities, a finding confirmed by Watson (1990), who states that the forest gives them 'place in the world'. The workers' extensive living and working experience in the forest has allowed them to witness it from 'within', making them feel as though they can legitimately understand the forest and all its complexities. They admit to having difficulties in accepting new rules and regulations that apply to the forest. A worker related a comment made by his friend about the introduction of new forest policies:

> They are made on a flat table in a flat office, well its not flat out here! (RB).

The possession of practical knowledge is not only used to help construct their own identities, but those of others as well. The workers would often contrast their practical knowledge with that of conservationists and (current) forest officers, who they perceive to

have little or no forest knowledge drawn from experience. In the past, the possession of practical knowledge may have provided the workers with respect from the community and even from some forest officers, and possibly provided a form of power. Nowadays workers feel the importance of forest knowledge and skills is often overlooked, yet the older workers continue to take pride in their knowledge and to emphasise its importance. At the same time they appear hurt and frustrated that this knowledge and skill no longer appears to be valued in Australian society, and concerned that younger workers do not place as much importance on it as they believe they should.

6.1.3 Fascination with regeneration, dislike of waste

The deep fascination shown by all interviewees for the regeneration of plants, trees and forest stands (Section 5.3.5) is closely allied to their view of a good forest as a working forest. Witnessing vigorous regeneration may provide a form of personal fulfilment and assurance that the Forest is still growing and healthy after a harvesting exercise. Also, in such an insecure profession, the continuation of this growth may help to indicate the continued security of their work and livelihoods in the Forest.

The dislike of waste was expressed in different ways by different interviewees (Section 5.3.6). Workers emphasised the need for considerate and appropriate logging and silvicultural practices. This reflects not only their strong belief in traditional values developed from a rural working lifestyle, but also their care and concern towards the Forest and its health.

6.1.4 Forest values and sense of place

Despite their common view of the Forest as something that needs to be used, the workers were very opposed to over-exploitation of the forest. It became very clear also that workers view the Wombat Forest and its resources in much more than a narrow, utilitarian and economic way.

The way in which these workers construct their environment (the forest), seems to be largely influenced by their past working lives. From the point of view of a *symbolic interactionist*, these constructions are derived from experiences and interactions from their life in the Forest, in which particular meanings are linked with specific places. The workers would have been exposed, not only to the biophysical aspects of the Forest, but the social, cultural and political aspects. Cheng (2003:90) states that 'places inform who we are and therefore how we are to behave; in short, to be somewhere is to be someone'. It became very clear in interviews that all these workers have strong connections to parts of the Forest with which they are familiar, through their working and home lives. These connections to forest places have helped shape many different types of values that are difficult to separate because of their interwoven nature.

Some respondents still derive economic gain from the Forest (such as firewood or woodworking) but most revealed (indirectly) that they enjoyed being in the Forest for its own sake. From reading the interview transcripts alone, a reader might assume that these workers' views towards the Forest are dominated by mainly utilitarian (or instrumental) values (see 'typologies of values' in Section 2.2). The interviewees tended to use few descriptive, emotive or abstract terms in their responses to questions about the Forest. However, to the interviewer in the field, it seems likely that this tendency may be related to the workers' manner of expressing themselves, rather than a lack of more intrinsic values held towards the Forest. The way workers expressed themselves tended to be through stories and experiences that they and their family members or friends had lived through.

Traditional behaviour for forest workers was typically 'masculine' which does not usually include emotive expression of feelings towards their environment. However, most workers did become quite emotional when talking of their concern about current problems in forest management, especially overlogging, inappropriate woodchipping and perceptions of the blame placed upon forest workers in recent years.

As discussed earlier, the workers placed high importance on the need for skilled care and tending for the Forest. This is reflected in a comment made by a worker, about selecting a timber post in his own private forest patch:

> I walk around, it might take me about half an hour to find a pole that I want. There might be 20 that are suitable, but I like to see them grow on to grow into a future tree (RB).

From the perspective of a *symbolic interactionist*, human actions towards the environment are based upon meanings they have given the environment. These workers acted in a considerate and caring manner when in the Forest, indicating that they feel respect and concern for it.

Because they had an average of 40 years' experience working and living in the Wombat Forest, it is inevitable that these workers would have developed deep connections and attachments to it. Clearly they had also developed inseparable, intrinsic and instrumental forest values even if they did not express these well with descriptive words. Bengsten (1994) and other researchers support the view that instrumental and intrinsic values are not mutually exclusive. And Cheng *et al.* (2003:90) propose that these two broad categories of values are 'both part and parcel of the meanings people may assign to a place'.

6.1.5 Change and perceptions of change in the forest

In their responses to questions about change in the Forest, most workers referred to change in management (Section 5.2), rather than to the structure or form of the Forest. This same emphasis on management also emerged in expression of their views on the greatest problems in the Forest (Section 5.1). There were some contradictions between workers over dates and other details of certain events and management changes in the period between 1970 and the 1990s. The vagaries of memory alone are inherent in any history rooted in oral sources, but this period was characterised by very rapid change (see timeline in Appendix 5), which may have caused confusion over events and processes in the lives and minds of the workers.

The changes to institution and practices described earlier, (Section 4.1.2) appeared to be substantial from the 1970s onwards. During this time there were not only changes to managing departments and silvicultural practice, but to policy, rules, processes and societal attitudes. Technological advances in equipment and machinery (Kellas and Hateley 1991) which led to a greater move towards mechanisation. When logging became 'syndicated' in 1989, contracts from overseas export companies were implemented for woodchips, and the shelterwood system became more intensive (Anderson 2003). By this time, most of the interviewees had finished working. More workers were being contracted by multiple amalgamated mills, receiving 'payments by results' and supervision consequently decreased. The nature of the contracting system may have led to less emphasis on team work, less worker and forest officer interaction, and greater emphasis on individual labour and self-reliance. This, in turn, may have led to a more production-oriented attitude in forest workers than in the past. The more independent working style, the amalgamation of mills, job insecurity and other factors may have led towards feelings of less power and more anxiety associated with uncertain future among the forest workers.

It was not only changes in logging practice, management and industry, but also changes in societal attitude that marked these years. The growing conservation movement closed in on the timber industry and blame was increasingly levelled at the timber workers by conservationists, the media and then the general public. They were no longer seen as the 'romantic axemen' but became demonised as 'forest butchers' and perpetrators of 'chainsaw massacres'. The combination of all these changes would have had profound effects on the forest workers, and their constructions not only of the Forest, but of their own identities.

By the end of the 1990s most of the interviewees had formally stopped forest working, although some had stopped working much earlier. There have been very few younger forest workers in the last decade. Although no workers under 40 years of age were interviewed in this study, it was learnt that many current younger workers live quite long distances from the Forest. Interviewees stated that there is less emphasis placed on practical experience and knowledge in the Forest than in the past—when forest workers

started in the forest at 14 years of age. It also seems likely that younger workers do not have as many interactions with other members of the forest community, workers or forest officers, because of the changed nature of forest work and living greater distances from the Forest. Also, their home and work lives are further separated—and so logging practices might not be as confronting as they would be closer to the Forest.

These factors in addition to the media portrayal of forest workers, would have a strong influence in shaping the younger forest workers' constructions of their identities and the Forest and how they behave in the Forest. However, these are only assumptions; specific research needs to be done to understand more about contemporary forest workers' perspectives and how these may have changed over the years.

6.1.6 Defence, frustration and helplessness

The interviewees displayed a strong sense of frustration and anger about being blamed for overlogging in the Forest. When discussing this blame, most became quite upset and defensive. They were upset that the wider Australian community should see them as responsible for degrading the Forest:

> Just because you may have a chain or an axe in your hand, you're a chainsaw massacre you know, you just blindly run through the bush just lopping down trees, right, left and centre—and nothing could be further from the truth! (RB).

Watson (1990:65) reports that forest workers in Australia have constructed an image of the environment that defends the label of 'forest butcher' that is often applied to them. In this image, the timber workers insist that forests are renewable because trees regrow after logging, and that their practical knowledge and history within the forest is in contrast to conservationists theoretical forest knowledge. Most workers (from northern NSW) interviewed by Watson either denied the forest had been destroyed or stated that that over-exploitation was over and 'in the past'. Watson follows a 'radical history' standpoint, originating from the Popular Memory Group (Popular Memory Group 1982, cited by Watson 1990:69), that views the study of history as constructions of the past, rather than

recovery. In this theory, there is a popular memory that is often reflected by a dominant memory, which indicates the power of dominant groups in society.

In this study, the Wombat Forest workers' strong faith in regeneration was apparent, possibly gained from many years of witnessing the Forest regenerate, but also probably developed as a defence against conservationists' arguments (the dominant memory nowadays). However, in contrast to Watson's (1990) interviews, all workers (except one) admitted that current logging practices were inappropriate and were destroying the Forest. Further, all believed that the recent silvicultural systems used were too intense and that the Forest had been over-exploited for timber by the larger sawmills, woodchipping export companies and the state government.

Class relationships are reported by Watson (1990:xx) as a 'single thread' moving through a 'diverse tapestry, and knotting together many elements' of people's cultural worlds. He states that class relations are a fundamental component in influencing people's lived experiences and are crucial in providing 'intellectual resources' which people use to give meaning to those experiences. In this study, the workers' feelings of helplessness could also be explained by class struggle. Their lack of power in society and associated low level of formal education could have added to the frustrations felt about their voices not being heard, being unable to communicate, and being isolated from management information and decisions about forest management. One worker remarked about attending meetings to appeal for better forest practices:

> but we only knew how to fell trees, these fellas would talk you backwards (GH).

It could also be argued that the workers were unable to do anything about changing the management of the Forest because often they were unaware of the situation, and certainly they were concerned about losing livelihoods for themselves and their families. Many workers felt far from satisfied about the way that Forest was being managed:

> We noticed it tended to be going down…and you'd wonder what's going on (GH).

6.1.7 Power, money and relationships

These workers' emphasised strongly that departmental managers and government have not been managing the Forest properly in recent years. These views on mismanagement by departmental agencies and government may be well founded, as evidenced by recent admission of mis-calculations of sustainable yields and other management *faux pas* (Vanclay and Turner 2001). However, workers' contentions about mismanagement may have been further reinforced by other factors—such as distrust bred from a lack of transparency and communication by management, and differences in 'class' between the workers and the departmental officers, government officials and politicians.

An older forest officer who had lived in the region in the past, held the view that the Forests Commission had the trust of local stakeholders, including timber cutters (N. Endacott *pers. comm.* 27/0503). Also in the interviews, a few workers claimed that forest workers had quite a good rapport with the Forests Commission, and forest officers:

> Some of them *were* pretty good officers, pretty good blokes too (HS).

> We had a pretty good rapport with the Forests Commission...they were pretty sympathetic to what you were about. Now most of that has gone out the window (RB).

It is possible that their recall of this rapport could result from some mythologising of the 'good old days'. However, it is more likely that good rapport existed in the past because the workers had more interactions with forest officers in their working and home lives (forest officers lived within the community). Greater interactions could have allowed a degree of mutual respect to form, which may have made the workers feel more empowered.

In relation to community forest management, many of the interviewees did not believe that the community should have full authority over the Forest:

> I really think that those things are up to the government to run. I don't think they [the community] are big enough or powerful enough entity without corruption coming into it (RB).

The prospect of the community developing roads, running water systems and other responsibilities seemed daunting to some, but deeper than that, there seemed a general

distrust of people and processes. Many brought up the subject of 'corruption' within groups of people and individuals: the government, Department of Sustainability and Environment, larger sawmills, some contract workers, environmental groups, Midways, overseas exporting companies, and even the US Government. It seems that the workers associated three types of people with susceptibility to become corrupt: people from a different class background (e.g. environmental groups); people making good money on their own (e.g. some contract workers 'looking out for their own interests'); and those with greater power (e.g. government and large sawmill owners). This distrust may have stemmed from helplessness felt in their class position, of being in a dangerous, underpaid, unrecognised and exploited profession.

All believed they (the workers) deserve greater input and more respect within forestry management:

> I don't know where you would get a balance in the community, you would if the forest workers could get up more groups. And that would come as a big bite across the table. Workers miss out on a lot you know…(HS).

Almost all interviewees discussed differences in perspective between themselves and conservationists ('greenies'). Studies on partisanship of environmentalist groups suggests that many members are well educated, from middle class, non-working backgrounds, almost the opposite extreme to the forest workers (Jones and Dunlap 1992; Bjerke *et al.* 1998, Winter *et al.* 2003). Watson (1990) states that this middle class is a not a distinctively new class, but a 'fraction' of the working class. These differences in class relations, whether from within their own working class or between a new distinct class could also be used to explain in part some of the differences in perspectives between the conservationists and workers. One worker was very surprised that the 'greenies' were not working and that they were 'climbing trees':

> They must get paid for doing that sort of thing? Or maybe, I guess they might just be on the dole. But I reckon, that there is some department behind them and telling them to do that (GH).

From discussions held in the course of this research, I believe that the animosity and misunderstandings between the workers and 'greenies' may have begun as distrust arising

from different class backgrounds. Then gradually this could have been accentuated through other differences and pressures, such as those arising from the urban/rural divide, and certainly pressures from the polarisation of issues and misrepresentations by the media, politicians trying to 'win votes', change in public perception of forestry and restructuring of the organisational and industrial aspects of forestry.

6.2 Conclusions

6.2.1 Through the lens of the forest worker

It is clear that the forest workers interviewed had a strong affinity and connection with the Forest, developed from their living and working lives. Even though the workers believed that the Forest should be used, they believed this should be done in a skilled and caring manner. The fact that the Wombat Forest Society, a group concerned with the conservation of the Forest (see Section 4.1.2), was created by concerned forest workers, confirms the notion that many workers around and within the Wombat Forest, are and have been concerned about the Forest in more than a narrow economic way.

Most interviewees perceive that there had been many negative changes in the Forest and its management, in the last thirty years and were very concerned that it had been mismanaged. The workers felt frustrated and helpless that the Forest had been overlogged, and they felt hurt that the general public and conservation groups have blamed them. Their frustration is a result of major changes within forestry: the struggle of being in an exploited group within a labour working class, and increasing pressures and misunderstandings from media, conservation groups, government, general public and industry.

They understand that the Forest is complex and unpredictable, so placed a large importance on practical forest experience. They believed that a 'good forest' is healthy and growing and managed well and for 'good' management, there needs to be more consideration for the Forest, and for the community and workers and greater worker input.

In summary, the key findings from this research is that the Wombat Forest workers:

- held a deep concern for the Forest and its future, developed from years of working and living in the Forest;
- placed a high importance on managing and using the Forest and believed this was synonymous with caring for the Forest;
- saw the forest as a complex environment, and believed practical knowledge and work in the Forest (e.g. thinning and burning) is a very important part of its management;
- believed that dramatic changes in management, political processes and societal attitudes have contributed towards major problems in the Forest;
- had feelings of frustration and helplessness, which were exacerbated by their working class situation, their lack of voice and the negative image painted of them by the media and environmental movement.

These workers' perspectives are not only useful for developing deeper understandings of human-environment relationships, but their practical knowledge could include valuable information about forest management. They would have many technical forest working skills that could be very useful for designing new silvicultural methods and forest practices in the Forest. Also their caring attitude towards the Forest could be incorporated into new approaches towards more restorative and sustainable forestry.

It seems also important that these workers' voices be documented and properly represented. Two of the workers on the interview list for this research, passed away within a few months after the fieldwork was conducted. Many of the remaining workers, including those not interviewed, are elderly and are the only remaining people in the community who have witnessed the Forest at such close quarters for such extensive periods. It is urgent and important to document and consider their perspectives before it is too late.

6.2.2 Limitations and further research

This study was intended to investigate the perspectives of ex-forest workers in the Wombat State Forest; it was not designed to represent the views of younger, current workers, or workers from other forest areas. Further research on workers of different ages, and those from different regions, is thus needed. Forest workers are only one of many groups whose perspectives are important to future forest management. Research involving indigenous peoples, conservation groups, general community, older foresters, departmental officials and other stakeholders will be essential if managers are to fulfil their task of managing for multiple use and multiple values. It would have been helpful to have been able to have drawn on detailed studies about the Wombat Forest and its history—had such information been available.

The main constraint in conducting the research was the limited time available for field work. While interviewing nine respondents produced considerable information on perspectives, and revealed major themes relating to the Forest and its management, it would have been valuable to have had more time. This extra time could have been used to interview new respondents, but it would have been especially valuable to return to more of the respondents after the interviews had all been transcribed and coded to check the interpretations and concepts that had emerged from the data.

6.2.3 Towards common ground: A new lens

It is clear that for a future sustainable Wombat Forest, various interest groups will have to work closely together. However, from local press reports and observations, it appears that the general community is quite divided. Groups in the community appear to have divergent views about the implementation of community forest management. Some extreme conservationists are very opposed to this concept because they believe there should be no logging in the Forest at all and that community forest management will allow the continuation of logging.

It also seems that there has been much distrust and scepticism towards forest department officers. Departmental support and financing is crucial for the success of future forest management, so trusting relationships between workers, community and forest officers need to be formed if community management is to succeed. Also, public understanding of the process being adopted to develop a model of community forest management seems to be poor, or inconsistent.

If interest groups were to understand each others' perspectives on a deeper level than at present, or than portrayed in media or in political statements, and if people had a clearer idea of the proposed management approach, then they may have a better chance of working together and hence in developing and reaching a workable, collaborative management model. It is proposed that research on people's sense of place and their values towards a region could assist all parties to understand and better accept the differences, and that there may be a degree of common ground—that is, concern and value towards the same place.

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APPEDENDIX 1

Eight criteria to assist in the verification of a qualitative study

(from Creswell 2003:196).

1) Triangulate different data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes.

2) Use member-checking to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings through taking the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate.

3) Use rich, thick description to convey the findings. This may transport readers to the setting and give the discussion and element of shared experiences.

4) Clarify the bias the research brings to the study. This self-reduction creates an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with readers

5) Also present negative or discrepant information that runs counter to the themes. Because real life is composed of different perspectives that do not always coalesce, discussing contrary information adds to the credibility of an account for a reader.

6) Spend prolonged time in the field. In this way, the research develops and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study and can convey detail about the site and the people that lends credibility to the narrative account.

7) Use peer debriding to enhance the accuracy of the account. This process involves locating a person (a peer debriefer) who reviews and asks questions about the qualitative study so that the account will resonate with people other than the researcher.

8) Use an external auditor to review the entire project. As distinct from a peer debriefer; this auditor is new to the researcher and the project and can provide assessment of the project throughout the process of research or at the conclusion of the study. The role is similar to that of a fiscal auditor, and specific questions exist that auditors might ask.

APPENDIX 2

Information sheet, cover letter and consent form sent to interviewees.

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APPENDIX 3

Examples of questions asked in the interviews (May 2003).

Tell me a bit about yourself? (how long have you lived around here, do you have family around here, where else, what did you do before?)

What work did you do in the Wombat Forest ? (whereabouts)

(how long did you work in the forest, how old when started, did your job change over the years?

Is the Forest the same or different to when you first started working in it/saw it?

(how?, for good or bad?)

I've read a lot about the Wombat and its problems what do you think are the main problems?

(Are there any conflicts about the Wombat Forest within the community?

Do you have any favourite parts of the Forest [showing map] where and why?

(Would you ever spend time in the forest when you weren't working? Do you spend time in the forest now? How does it make you feel?)?

What do you think is a good forest?

Are you worried/concerned about the forest?

What do you think about the way the Forest is run at the moment?

(Has it changed a lot, How do you think it should be managed, What do you think about ban on all woodchipping in Wombat, What do you think about Community Forest Management, What do you think Community Forest Management is?)

(Do you think if CFM goes ahead, what should the community be responsible for? (eg water, roads etc as well)

APPENDIX 4

Spreadsheet of main themes emerged from interviews (see Section 3.4).

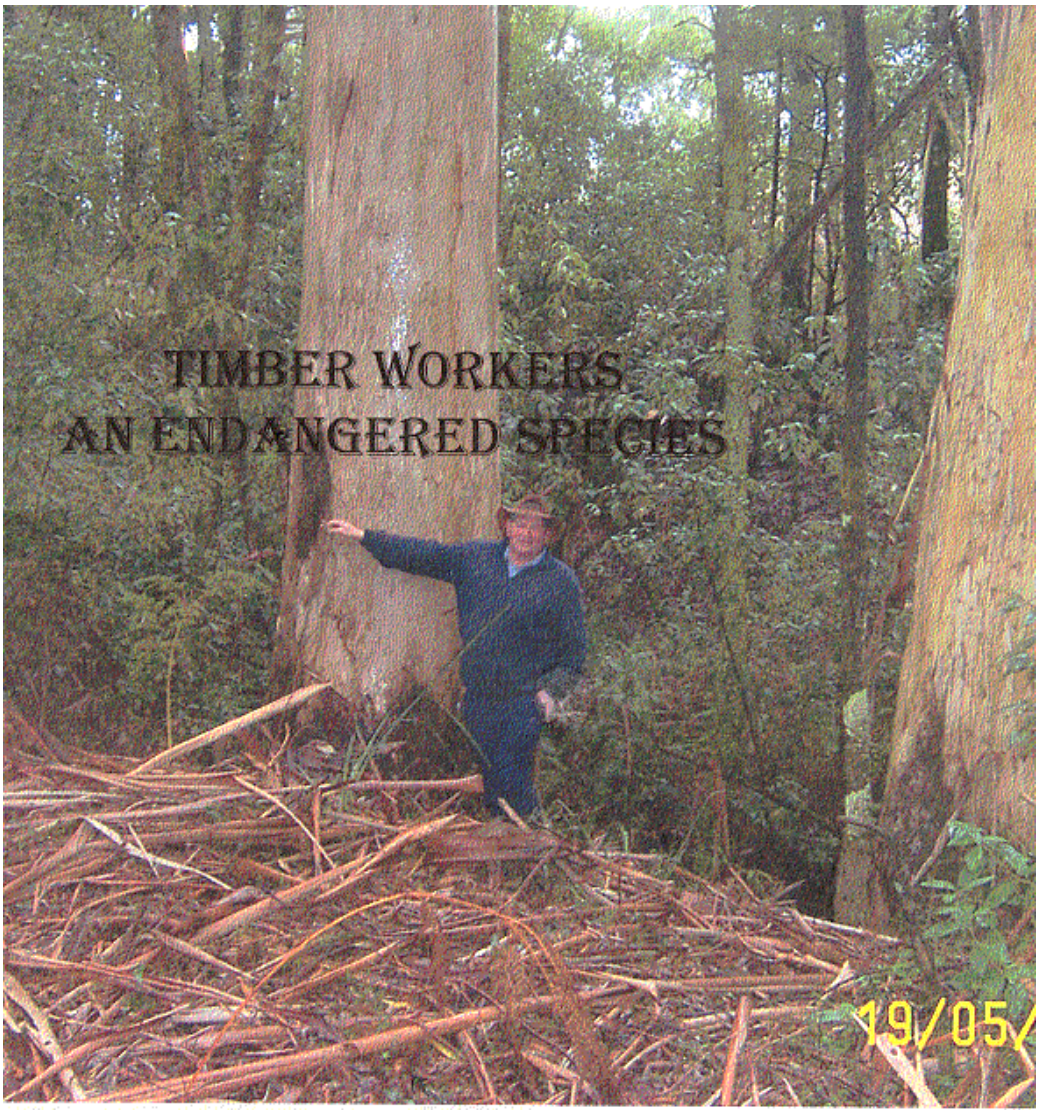
6.2.3.1.1 KEY
Letters = Interviewee letter (e.g A is Ross Baker) Numbers following letters = Theme code from each interview (e.g A6 is 'government irresponsibility' in interviews with Ross Baker). The letters and numbers are written on coding transcripts, see coding under Section 3.2). *** x = number of times the theme emerged during an interview (e.g A6 theme occurred six times in the interview with Ross Baker).** **# Note if a letter is present without a number, then the theme was alluded to, or spoken in conversation (and not recorded) by the interviewee.**

APPENDIX 5

Wombat State Forest historical timeline (since European settlement) (Adapted from diagram by Peter Stephen in Petheram *et al.* 2002:50).

APPENDIX 6

Written piece by one of the interviewees, 'Timber Workers: An Endangered Species' (Harold Suckling 19/05/2003, 3 pages).



ENDANGERED SPECIES: TIMBER WORKERS

BY

HAROLD SUCKLING

I started the day at first light. You made sure there was enough petrol and oil for a day's work. Breakfast at home before daylight. You'd never leave home without a packed lunch, a thermos and a clean pair of underpants.

We'd dodge a few kangaroos and wallabies on the way to work. It wouldn't be quite daylight when you got there and you'd have a cup of tea before starting work. The birds would be whistling first thing in the morning. You'd look to see which way the wind was coming from because you'd work with your back to the wind for safety. You needed to know the wind direction so you'd know which way the tree was falling. And you'd check which was the head of the tree was leaning, and where the heaviest branches were.

We were equipped with two-way radios to tell the crew if there was any danger.

You'd put a day's work in no matter what the weather was like, you'd try to anyhow. You'd be wearing your safety gear – a pair of cut-proof pants, steel –capped boots and helmet. You'd wear ear-muffs, and there was a screen to come over the hat but I never used it much because of the glare and because you couldn't spit through it. The gear was very warm and uncomfortable in summer.

You had to put with a lot of pests – march flies in the summer, snakes, jack jumpers , red inchies, flies, spiders and leeches. For the leeches you always carried a small bottle of methylated spirits. They'd come up over your boots and socks and bite your legs. The leeches would jump off you dancing some mornings, they might have been .05, or higher.

You had to protect your dinner against the blowflies, just in case the blowflies got it. The buggers would get it on you many a time and you had to go without dinner. Bees got me on the wrists and cheek. They had stings as big as crowbars. I'd get out and get someone to get the sting out if I couldn't get it out myself. We had chainsaws that wouldn't idle properly but I remember I was using the chainsaw once and when the bees bit me, I

dropped it on its side and it idled on me for an hour – it wouldn't stop. The bees' wings kept the motor cool.

In the summer we'd always have sandwiches but in winter time we'd cook our lunch on an open fire. We'd have bacon, eggs, a little bit of steak, sausages, bull boars. Bull boars are made of beef and pig – it's a recipe passed down from the goldrush days, a Swiss-Italian recipe. You had to make sure your day's work was nearly done before dinnertime (1pm).

We'd knock off around 5 or half-past. You were buggered at the end of the day. We could stop at the hotel them and brag about the day's work – how big a tree we felled that day. You always felled trees at the bar than you did in a day's work. The skidder driver always pulled more at the bar than I felled in a day.

That went on for 44 years.

I wouldn't have swapped it for anything. There was the fresh air, the open spaces. If I would have had my time over again I would have kept the Greens and the Government out of it and I would have still had a job.



An example of what happens on a foggy morning – you fell the stumps of the trees you felled the day before.