

THE STORY OF *“RIDGECREST”*

THE WESTERN DISTRICT BAPTIST ASSOCIATIONS CHRISTIAN
EDUCATION AND CONFERENCE CENTRE

BURRENDONG DAM
MUMBIL
NEW SOUTH WALES

AUTHOR E.V. GRAHAM B.E.M.

DEDICATED TO

“All those whose labour of love helped accomplish the “Impossible”

The building of “Ridgecrest”

The bricks, the mortar, the fibro, the wood, the beautiful view, the fun and the games are only incidentals; a means to an end - That the good news of the Gospel may be made known to mankind and God’s name glorified through that place.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the following who contributed to this publication in the following ways.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Coloured slides and coloured prints were supplied by my wife Rae Graham, Bob Copleston, Vic Turnbull, Brian Graham, Geoff Benson, and the “Ridgecrest” collection. *{This version does not show those photos, but you can see some of them on the Ridgecrest web site.}*

TYPING: My daughter-in-law, Brenda Graham, for many hours on the Word Processor.

PROOF READING: Evan Elliott for the untold hours and burning the midnight oil; putting in full stops, commas, correcting spelling, re phrasing the King’s English, paragraphing and censoring some of my more libellous statements. If you thing this doesn’t read one hundred percent like Eric Graham writes, thank Evan.

This current edition was typed as a direct copy from the book by Marj Mullins from Parkes, thanks Marj.

The “Ridgecrest” Story

By an Eye Witness

One who saw it all happen and played a part, along with many others, from the very beginning through the planning and the action that has given us “Ridgecrest” until we see it as it now stands today in 1982, the tenth anniversary of its opening.

Just two scripture verses that motivated, encouraged and sustained our labours:

Psalm 127, “Except the Lord build the house they labour in vain that build it.”

David’s injunction to Solomon as he commissioned his son to his God-given task” (A Paraphrase of 1 Chron. 28.20)

“Be strong and courageous and get to work. Don’t be afraid of the size of the task for the Lord my God is with you. He will not forsake you. He will see to it that everything is finished correctly.”

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All profits from the sale of this book go the “Ridgecrest” Board of Management to form part of an “Investment Portfolio” to provide for future development.

Author's Note

It had been suggested by many that the "Ridgecrest" story should be written, and that I was the logical person for the task. I have procrastinated for years. I do not willingly take up the pen for any task, but because memories start to fade I realized that much would be lost that would be of interest personally and historically to those who follow on.

I had a minor problem and I guess in the ultimate it is only between the Lord and myself. I was very much involved and in the ten years between the thought and the commencement of the work I kept on dreaming and scheming when others appeared to surrender to the frustration of what seemed years of inactivity. Then came eight years of doing, thus making eighteen years in all. Were you as involved as I, how would you set down on paper the motivation, the dreams, the scheming, the accomplishments, without it seeming like a great ego trip of I, I, I, I?

I have thought of writing in the third person, but how does one express the thinking that leads to actions without the author becoming obvious. So I decided to write the "Ridgecrest" story as seen through my eyes and to set down the part I played (I believe under the hand of God) as accurately as memory permits and aided by notes from reports, etc.

I leave the judgement of the thoughts and motives and the written story to Him who knows the innermost thoughts and feelings of the human heart and mind, and with the thoughts conveyed in the followings 2nd and 3rd verses of that well known hymn:

ROCK OF AGES

Not the labours of my hands can fulfil Thy laws demands;
Could my zeal no respite know, Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone; Thou must save and Thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress, helpless look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly; Wash me, Saviour, or I die.

Eric V Graham
22.11.1982

"For the sake of those whose names have been mentioned and out of whose minds and mouths I have conjured up thought and words and who, because of this would like to "Sue" me, let it hereby be known that all characters in these pages are only a figment of my imagination, and never really existed!!!!!!!"

The Author

Preface

This is a book that just had to be written. It is the story of the achieving of the impossible. It is the story of men and women who simply did what couldn't be done. In these pages you will find vision and purpose. You find determination and sweat.

For my part, I suspected the sanity of the author when, as part of the inevitable committee, I climbed up to the "Ridgecrest" site for the first time. Not only did I fear for Eric's sanity, I feared for my own life! Just how much clambering and climbing upwards can the human body take? In order to survive, I took my eyes off the mountain we were climbing, and just focused on Eric's boots. Undaunted, and untiring, they just kept stomping on. Before them the mountain was flattened. I have since seen those boots 'stomp' on, or at least through, impossible barriers. Like government departments, and commissions, like councils of the local kind, and committees of the Baptist kind.

The passing of the years, and being a witness to a good deal of the events of this story, have banished all doubt from my mind. Eric Graham is quite mad! Don't take my word for it. Ask anyone who was involved in the events described! His grasp of the English language is so poor! There are some words that he doesn't comprehend at all!...like 'no' and 'can't' also 'don't' and 'stop'. Yes, quite mad!

But where would we be without these madmen? Where would the Church be without such people? "Ridgecrest" IS because of the dedicated, resourceful madness of the author! His unbounded enthusiasm (read also slave-driving tactics) inspired many to super-human efforts. The stories of the land, the road, the buildings...and the money. It is really super-human, for this is the story of God-inspired people demonstrating their faith, and their concern for others.

That the Graham family has more or less survived all this is a miracle in itself. "Ridgecrest" came into being because many people gave so much. None gave more than Eric and Rae Graham.

It needs to be said that Eric Graham, possessing many talents as he undoubtedly does, could never be called a diplomat. Dreamer, inventor, innovator, builder, earth mover...all these and more...yes. Diplomat...no. And this book is not written as an exercise in diplomacy. The raw frustrations show, and there were many of them, let me assure you. Indeed, on that subject, the half has not been told. But the achievement is here, too; and the joy. Not just the achievement of one man. Indeed, I want to tell you that the author's won part in this epic is very much underplayed by him. Certainly this **IS** his achievement. But it is also the achievement of a group of churches, formed together in a District Association ...the achievement of people of faith... the kind of faith that has strong legs and strong hands... and pretty deep pockets.

This is the story of a group of Christians who wanted others to hear The Good News. And others **HAVE** heard.

The work of “Ridgecrest” will never end. Not in the sphere of time, anyway. There will always be ‘maintenance’ (almost a dreaded word); there will always be development. The cottages and old school buildings will be replaced. So their story must be told.

AUTHOR’S NOTE

This preface was written by the Rev. Don Eagle, a much loved Pastor, who, together with his wife Daph, served for fifteen years in three churches in the Central West, and for many of them was also Area Superintendent.

Dreaming and Scheming

Part I

1960 – 1970

The Western District Baptist Association of New South Wales is an area bounded by Bathurst in the east, Broken Hill in the west, Cowra in the south and Mudgee in the north. Besides churches at those centres there are others at Orange, Millthorpe, Molong – Manildra, Bournewood, Yeoval, Wellington, Dubbo, Cobar, Forbes, Gollan, Trundle and Parkes. Christian camping for the area commenced in 1947 with a camp at Bathurst. It developed, nurtured by the “Christian Endeavour” Young Peoples organisation, into an annual Easter Camp for the 12 to 20 plus age group. With attendances of up to 150 it was held over the four days of Easter and rotated around the showgrounds of Bathurst, Orange, Dubbo, Parkes and Wellington. The Lord blessed the work with countless numbers of young people coming under the sound of the Gospel. Conversions, commitments and rededications followed and many western young people found a lifetime Christian partner at these camps. My wife and I, who were converted at and soon after the 1959 Billy Graham Crusade, took part in varying capacities in the last two or three camps held at Wellington Showground.

Conditions on all showgrounds were very primitive. Route marches had to be taken from the pavilions, where campers slept, to the inadequate number of toilets and cold showers. Dining rooms were without gauze and cooking was often done in the open with inadequate borrowed equipment. Sleeping was on ex army, ambulance stretchers, about 68cm x 1.67m with a palliasse filled with straw and a pillow as hard as rocks. This set the scene for very uncomfortable nights. Often early morning Bible Study sessions were done to the distracting clip clop of horses’ hooves as horses were trained by the local trotting and race horse owners. On one occasion in Wellington we had to vacate much of the camp while a race meeting was held on the Easter Saturday.

Despite all the privations and difficulties, people look back at the wonderful time they had in fellowship with one another and their Lord.

It became obvious that the Easter camp was becoming too big and covered too large an age range for proper teaching by study leaders. For workers, conditions were too primitive; a change had to be made.

At the Western District Baptist Association meeting in 1960 it was decided that a committee report on the advisability of obtaining a permanent camp site, possibly in the Molong shire, which would be central to our area.

At that time I was a Field Officer in charge of Burrendong Foreshores, an area of 22,663 ha surrounding the proposed Burrendong Dam, which was to hold three and half times as much water as Sydney Harbour and have a surface area of 8,900 ha (Sydney Harbour is 5,666 ha)

The dam would be surrounded by this large area of crown land with rugged mountain ranges, pine-clad hills and magnificent scenery. This place would have all the attributes needed for a permanent camp. Water, mountains, fishing, swimming, boating, hiking, and often at sunset the most wonderful display of the beauty of God's handiwork ever witnessed.

In 1962 at the Annual Meeting I took along maps, facts, figures and a dream, and promoted Burrendong as the ideal site for a permanent camp. I even had the spot picked out. The idea was accepted and it was decided to apply for 5 ha on the right hand side of the public road on Fashion Mount, an area overlooking the dam with a water frontage. The area to the left of the road, about 500ha, had been designed as a public recreation area and, NOTE WELL, was to be managed by a trust of local men including the Wellington Shire President and one other councillor.

All the land around the Dam had been resumed from the farmers by the Water Conservation and Irrigation Commission and was under the control of the Soil Conservation Service. Any land that was set aside for public purposes was handed over to the control of the Lands Department which was not always noted for its efficiency. There was one exceptions to the blanket control, the Education Department had applied to W. C. & I. C. and had been given an 8 ha lease on Stockyard Creek for a National Fitness Camp, as it was then called. Later, much to the chagrin of the Public Recreation Area Trust known as "Burrendong Park Trust", this area was extended to about 80ha.

Other groups saw the potential of the Dam for youth camps and other recreational activities and applications for land were made by groups such as Scouts, The Salvation Army and various other Christian denominations, the R.S.L. and some service clubs.

Innocent of the forces at work against us we pushed along with our request for a camp site and the paper file began to grow. We were led on by half promises from the Lands Departments and many times we were assured that a decision was imminent. We were told that an area running south from the site we had selected was to be cut up into suitable blocks for other groups. We lobbied parliamentarians, the Premier and others. Red herrings were thrown in our way and then finally the cause of the delay emerged.

The Park Trust (local Wellington men including the two shire councillors) were opposing any other public development or access to the Dam. They wanted everybody who used the Dam to go through their park and pay the fees levied.

Why weren't we making any progress? In the Lands Department the District Surveyor is a very influential person and the Undersecretary of the Department is even higher up the ladder, and every time these gentlemen came to Wellington they were guests at official dinners or barbecues and consequently wine and dined at public expense by either the Burrendong Park Trust or the Shire Council. How do I know? I attended several of these functions.

What chance did small groups such as we have? None at all as evidence by the reported statement attributed to the Wellington Shire President, chairman of the Burrendong Park Trust, quote –

“That the Council could not prove that this type of development (Youth camps) was desirable”. c.f. “The Wellington Times”. 29th July, 1968.

It turned out that even though the Trust controlled more country than they could use or develop in the next one hundred years, they had their eyes set on obtaining control of all the country between the Burrendong Park and Mookerawa Waters Park and with this in mind even made moves to have the Department of Education moved from the Stockyard Creek area but this failed. The opposition continued even after we commenced moves to purchase our present site.

The camp committee which was established to push things along reported to the Association in 1965 that “a land grant was imminent”. Little did it know that there was more chance of getting a lease or licence to start an opium den than land for a Youth Camp.

In 1966 the village of Mumbil, or more correctly the W.C. & I.C. cottages at Mumbil were to be sold by the W.C. & I.C. The commission put a price of \$500 on each of the workmen’s cottages. Names of those wishing to buy were placed in a hat together with street numbers of cottages. As these were drawn out so they were matched.

The association, expecting the “imminent” grant of land, decided to purchase fourteen cottages, if funds could be obtained. The Wellington Men’s Society had earned quite a considerable sum of money through blisters, sweat, blood and I’m not sure of the tears, cutting iron bark strainers and stays in the Beni Forest near Wongarboon (Dubbo) to fill a contract that John and Allan Bennett had undertaken. The Men’s Society, together with the Wellington Church, provided \$4,000 of the \$7,000 needed. Donations from Parkes Church and several other sources made up the balance. (This is where memory fails and I don’t know where to look at this stage for details.)

Bob Turnbull of Wellington attended the sale and we found ourselves the proud owners of fourteen – three bedroom fibro workmen’s cottages scattered around Mumbil. Because of the method of allocation, by drawing out of a hat, the land was included in the house price.

By 1968 the message had finally penetrated out thick heads that we weren’t going to get any land. The final red herring was the disposal of sewerage waste. At this time the Park Trust was catering for crowds of up to 12,000 at long weekends and during holiday periods. They had pit toilets, many of which were below the eventual top water level of the Dam, and other crude arrangements. However, for one hundred young people at a Youth Camp there seemed to be an insoluble problem! We even offered to build septic tanks and cart effluent away in tankers, but the Lands Department and Trust didn’t want a solution. As far as I am aware our application is still with the Lands Department, probably around in a filing cabinet designated “sewerage effluent”.

In desperation a meeting of the Association Executive, Rev. Don Eagle and myself was held. The houses were being vandalised, windows and fibro broken etc. What does one do with fourteen unoccupied houses slowly being destroyed by vandals in a village called Mumbil?

The suggestion was made that we move other houses onto another block where there were already three adjoining houses and call it a Youth Camp. I didn't think there was room for 14 houses. Besides, I was appalled at the suggestion but didn't have any alternative at that stage. We all left the meeting sad of heart and with no real solution to our problem.

I decided that anything would be better than having the houses jammed on to a small block in the village of Mumbil and that, perhaps, if we couldn't get a waterfront site we might be able to get a private site somewhere in the vicinity of the Dam. My first approach was to John France of "Tara" who had land close to the Dam with good water views. However, it turned out that I wasn't the only dreamer. John had a village planned for the area. Later he had surveys done and plans drawn up but the dream bubble burst and came to nothing.

There was a small 16 ha farm called "Bonada Creek" with a house on it on the left hand side of the Burrendong-Mumbil road west of the Mumbil rubbish tip. The price of this farm was around \$40,000. An area of crown land running down to Eagle Beagle Creek from the eastern side of the rubbish tip appeared worthy of investigation.

Besides the above there was a big round ridge on the top of the range between the "turn off" and the Dam. This property was owned by Ron and Col Hansford, and there were several sites also belonging to the Hansford brothers giving good views of the Dam on the eastern side of the same road.

I approached Col Hansford, who was sympathetic to our cause and aim of providing recreation and training for young people, but, ("No thanks! We don't want a Youth camp and public in the middle of our property. We have suffered enough with our other property, adjoining the Mumbil village where people have helped themselves to free mutton and lamb. Besides that, stray dogs have wrought havoc with our flocks.")

I suggested we might investigate buying the "Bonda Creek" property which adjoined him on the southern boundary. He wasn't very happy about that idea either as he had plans for building a home and wool sheds nearby.

Almost as an afterthought when I was on the point of leaving, he remarked that there was a site on the far end of their property overlooking their property overlooking the Dam and on the top of a fairly rough ridge. Access would be possible but difficult, and the site had a magnificent view of the Dam. ("Would you like to have a look at it?") So off we went up a very steep four wheel drive farm track to the top of the ridge. Certainly the view was magnificent. There was a rough and rocky ridge with a bulge here and fairly wide

ledge there, and one may be able to make a playing field of some sort by levelling out the top. The only feasible access was..."Ho-Hum!!" "Oh No!" ("Oh Yes!" through land under the control of the Water Conservation and Irrigation Commission (W.C. & I. C.). Another Government Department and more problems. We inspected closely an area of about 4 ha that covered most of the usable part of the ridge and finally left. Col Hansford promised to discuss the matter with his brother Ron and I was to make enquiries of the W.C. & I.C. regarding access to the site. The Hansford brother's answer came in a reasonable time; they would sell us 4 ha for \$3,000! As grazing area it was only worth about \$40 per ha! Suddenly it had become prime real estate. (I never asked but I've always felt that they thought the price might have put finish to our request.) Be that as it may, our heartfelt thanks go to them both.

With the Hansford brothers' approval we decided to make a subdivision application to the Wellington Shire Council. This application would be subject to access being granted by the W.C. & I.C. because at that stage it had not been forthcoming.

It very soon became evident that we weren't finished with the Park Trust. Two councillors, both members of the Trust, opposed our subdivision application. c.f. "The Wellington Times", 29th July, 1968; 21st August, 1968 and 30th August, 1968. However, the opposition in Council wasn't unanimous because part of Council was sympathetic. Eventually, after a council election when there was a radical change, the sympathetic Councillors gained enough support to approve the subdivision, subject to access being granted by the W.C. & I.C., on condition that it was our responsibility to construct and maintain the access road.

Allow me to back track here to cover the other aspects of the purchase. I don't know how many times I had gone alone to the top of the mountain, walked around and planned and prayed and just sat on the stones, near where the Foundation Stone now stands, wondering whether or not the site was a practical one, whether a road negotiable by buses could be constructed, whether it was just a pile of rocks on top of a mountain or whether it could be moulded into the Youth Camp we envisaged. The site was certainly unique in many aspects. I could see the possibilities of benches but could they be cut with bulldozers or was the ground solid rock? Could we economically pump water so high? Questions! Questions! The view was breath-taking and there wasn't another one like it anywhere around the Dam, or in the Central West, but much more than a view was needed!

The time came when I had to seek other opinions so I walked my wife Rae, some of the girls of her Sunday School class and our own kids up the mile of steep, stony ridge one hot Sunday afternoon. The next person I took to the site was Bob Turnbull, one who eventually became closer to me than a brother as we laboured together. He caught the vision and spared neither himself, his time, his talents or his possessions to make that vision reality. (Someone told me early in the piece: "If you are going ahead with the project get a mate who will stand by you when all others desert". I didn't "get" a mate – God "gave" me one in Bob.)

Later I took four others, two stalwarts of the Association, Ron Field and Hugh McGregor from Parkes and Jim Blatch and Rev. Don Eagle from Yeoval.

As I led them up the hill they muttered to one another, “That fellow out the front leading us must be mad!” When we reached the summit and looked back I’m sure my vision was seen but it was very blurred by all the seemingly insurmountable problems. Eventually the Association Executive and Camp Committee met on the site with a few others, namely Rev. Watkins, Mr. Peffer, representing the Baptist Union of N.S.W. Camps Committee, Bob Turnbull, Vic Turnbull, Rev. Don Eagle, Rev. R Wilson and myself. There was one other person but I have been unable to recall or find out his identity. We inspected the area, but one needed a fair imagination and vision to see beyond the fairly narrow ridge covered with rock bars, a few narrow shelves and benches, dead and green timber and fire wee a metre high and thicker than a crop of oats. The only approach was up an impossible track negotiable by four wheel drive vehicle, or walk. We held a meeting after walking around the site. At a spot about where the opening stone is now situated near cottage No. 9, I remember Rev. Don Eagle praying that if this was part of God’s will all obstacles would be removed.

Still there was no word from the W.C. & I.C. regarding the road.

Our plan became known and others visited the site. The comments started to filter back. One chap remarked “It’s impossible to build a car road up there and even if you could, it’s only suitable for a rock quarry”. He came to me later confessing the remark and acknowledging his lack of vision.

I remember hearing snippets of a conversation one day between Jim Blatch and some of his old mate from Yeoval.

Jim: “He says he can build a car road up there,”

Second voice: “Have you ever seen roads he built around the foreshores? Some of them are too steep for mountain goats!”

Jim: “He’s done some surveying, taken some levels, got some facts and figures from the Department of Main Roads. I’m inclined to believe him.”

I thank God for the Jim Blatches and Bob Turnbolls who were willing to give it a go despite all the obstacles. The believers, in the beginning, were few and far between and it couldn’t be proved without risking money, money we didn’t have and would have to borrow.

I put an estimate of \$2,000 on the road constructions. The W.C. & I.C. estimated \$10,000 and the Shire Council engineer \$15,000 for the 1.6 km of road up the ridge. This proposed road had to be considerably more than a track because fourteen houses had to be carted up it. Eventually the road, 7.3 m wide at the culverts, plus the gutters cost \$1,800 with a further expenditure of \$300 for culvert pipes.

Money! Money! Money! Nothing much can be done in the construction game without it!

I remember Hugh McGregor, a true Scot, reminding me of the time he asked at an Association meeting what I thought the initial establishment of the camp would cost. If my memory serves me correctly it was before the days of decimal currency and how I conjured up the amount I don't know but I answered "thirty thousand pounds" (i.e. \$60,000).

His reaction was "They're mad!" "It's impossible, the Camp Committee hasn't got three pounds (i.e. \$6)." But unbeknown to any of us God had been at work for years before.

The Wellington church had been given a parcel of five hundred shares in "The Western Stores", a chain of stores in towns in the Central West. Over the years the church had taken up a few options but the total outlay was small even in those days. In the early 1960's "Farmer" of Sydney took over "The Western Stores" and gave Bonus Share issues. Within the next twelve months, "Myer Stores" took over "Farmers" and did the same things. The Wellington church found itself in possession of shares worth \$29,000 on the stock exchange. They sold the shares and spent \$7,000 buying on of the houses used to establish the All Age Sunday School. The balance of \$22,000 was invested in the Baptist College Loan Fund for seven years. The seven years had expired just when the Camp Committee needed funds for the purchase of the camp site.

The church had a decision to make: what to do with the money? I discussed with those in the church, who I thought might be sympathetic to the camp project, the possibility of it being used to finance the Camp Project. Eventually, at a church business meeting, it came down to the question, "Where could the money do the most good for the Lord's work and for the extension of His Kingdom?"

Wellington badly needed a new church hall to replace an old wooden one and was also looking at the problem of providing more seating by extending their church.

"Wonderful are the ways of the Lord!" The decision was overwhelmingly in favour of the Camp Project and the money, all \$22,000, was released in three separate lots as needed.

I drew up a list of conditions, or an agreement, between the Church and the Association regarding the loan. This went to the Church for discussion and was only amended in one aspect, the first loan was fixed at 4% interest and the final part of the loan was fixed at 6% per annum. Praise God for the far-sighted and generous heart of the Church. On many occasions in our early years they waived the interest payments. By 1980 the debt to Wellington had been repaid and this together with the interest paid to the Camp Committee made up a large portion of the \$50,000 used as a deposit on the magnificent hall and Christian Education complex (that even as I write is under construction to be completed in March 1983). God does not fail those who are faithful to Him.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you to Wellington Church.

We eventually borrowed a further \$10,000 at 4% interest, from the Denomination Debenture Loan Fund and the installation of the electricity mains, etc. were paid for on an instalment plan.

When I retired in 1980, the debt to the Wellington Church and the Macquarie County Council had been paid, and all that remained was the final instalment to the Debenture Loan Fund. We had the amount in hand but the fund manager was having trouble deciding the exact amount. We were really debt free. "Praise the Lord".

In 1969, after some twelve months waiting, we still hadn't received an answer from the W.C. & I.C. regarding our access road. Bob Turnbull and I decided to seek an appointment with one of the commissioners of the W.C. & I.C. based in Sydney. Here again the Lord prepared the way. The Commissioner was one of the most gracious and practical men we were ever to deal with. He had no time for the attitude of the Park Trust and stated that Burrendong Dam belonged to the people of New South Wales and that no organisation, Trust or body had the right to charge for the use of the waters of Burrendong Dam. They could only charge for the amenities within the area allocated to them. The Dam belonged to everyone.

He promised us permission to build our access road provided we displayed a "Private Road" sign. As an afterthought he said : "you will be needing easements for water and power, pumping facilities and sewerage disposal. Be assured all these will be granted."

We came home with joy in our hearts beyond verbal expression.

When the lease for the road was granted it was fixed at ten cents a year if and when demanded.

The Hansford brothers made one request, not enforceable by law but one which we all agreed to, that no dogs be allowed on the camp site. Most of the dogs which troubled their sheep were family pets either from Mumbil or the W.C. & I.C. village at the Dam.

All was in order, the area was surveyed and as 1970 commenced the camp site of 4 ha was ours, not leasehold but freehold.

Looking back, I am convinced that God didn't want us with a site on "Fashion Mount" with water frontage. We had nothing but frustration and defeat for eight years until we turned our eyes to the mountain of His choice. Since then we have only known progress and His blessing.

The Reality
Part II

1970 - 1972

On March 9th, 1970 at 9.30 a.m. I met the low loader with a new 125hp crawler tractor on board, at the point where our road new meets the public road. We had decided to hire a tractor and driver from Campbells Earthmoving in Orange. An inspection of the site had been made earlier with Mr Campbell and I had indicated the work to be done; the road, benches and the oval I had drawn up a rough plan of our proposal for the site and it all depended largely on just what was under the top soil.

After twenty years of supervising road and dam construction on the foreshores area I was reasonably confident that what was proposed would be accomplished. I had done a survey of the road up the ridge pegging the line and the grades and had discussed the latter with the Department of Main Roads in Dubbo. I had also looked at similar grades on the main access road to the Soil Conservation Depot on the foreshores of the Dam. I know, despite the rocky surface and obvious shaly rock bars, that the rock mostly weathers to a depth of 2 m to 2.5m or more could be dozed to that depth before striking solid rock.

Another problem envisaged was that of deep cuts leaving high banks behind cottages and halls. However, in general I had noticed that the foreshores area had remained very stable. Everything depended on the road being a success.

When the low loader arrived, out of the passenger seat climbed one of the blackest men I've ever seen. He came over rather hesitantly and introduced himself as Noel Peter, the tractor driver. My heart sank halfway to my boots. I didn't think I harboured any real racial prejudice, having moved around a fair bit and having spent almost six years in the army. I had learned to take men on their merit, but...There's often a "but Lord!" This was a black man and my experience with them had been very limited. My apologies to those who do work and lead a decent life, but generally I was only used to seeing them work in the market gardens to earn a few dollars and I had seen many drinking in the hotels and arguing on the footpaths.

Noel's next word made my heart sink to my boots: "I've done a fair bit of dozer driving but I've never built a road in my life".

However, there was nothing to do but unload and get on with the job at hand.

Noel turned out to be one of the best drivers, or more correctly, Bulldozer operators, I have ever seen and in my years as a Field Officer in the Soil and Conservation Service, I have supervised many of them, working under all conditions doing such things as contour banking, gully filling, dam construction on wheat farms and construction of road work on the foreshores of the Dam. Noel was conscientious and diligent and he used his intelligence. He wasn't just a "dirt pusher". I visited the site twice daily, before I went to work on the foreshores in the morning, and then after I knocked off and was on my way

home late in the afternoon. Never once did I feel Noel hadn't given of his best throughout the day.

In 1972 we extended the oval and we told Campbell Earthmoving we didn't want any other driver except Noel. He was a Torres Strait Islander with fuzzy hair; his wife was also an Islander and his two little girls aged about five and seven were a delight to behold. We invited them to our opening ceremony and seated them right down the front despite Noel's protests. He was rather a shy man. Thank you Noel! The Lord undertook again.

A total of \$3,831.00 was spent on earthworks. The road cost \$1,800, culvert pipes cost \$300 and the balance was used for constructing the oval and house benches. The road was completed and made trafficable, the benches for the houses were cut, the oval levelled and sites for the church and water tanks also levelled. House number fourteen was originally designed for placing on the bench north west of number eight cottage but heavy rock prevented the excavation there so it ended up where it is and this was the only alteration to our original design.

Next we had to get the foundations ready for the houses which were all exactly the same size and construction. We measured up a grid system for the concrete piers and a working bee was organised for Saturday, 30th May, 1970. The day became known as Foundation Day and was commemorated by a small stone cairn behind number eleven cottage. This cairn was built by Rev. Ron Wilson and a dedication service was held at 2 p.m. after the cairn had been built. There was in attendance approximately fifty men, and the wives and children of some of them.

We all went to work on the foundations. Holes were dug and filled with concrete to form pads 36cm square on which we would later set up the 38 x 23 x 23 cm concrete piers. The piers were put in position after each house had been manoeuvred into place. It was a wonderful day and by the time darkness fell, the foundations of eleven cottages had been completed. We all went home with sore hands, aching muscles and tired bodies but we were happy with the accomplishments of the day and the fellowship we enjoyed with each other.

During this period Bob Turnbull had been busy in his spare time! At his welding works he had filled and emptied a concrete mould he had constructed which turned out thirty two piers at a time. He made five hundred and eighty-eight and they were ready by "house moving" time and had been carted to the site.

I think that at that time I was the only person in our group who had had any experience in house moving. I had supervised the moving of five old cottages from below the top water level mark to higher positions so they could be used by workers on the foreshores. Our equipment for that exercise was primitive; two large steel girders mounted on the front wheels taken from old steam engines. Two wheels were joined by a short axle under each girder at the rear of the houses. The girders were joined at the front by a cross bar

and had pivoting front wheels taken off another steam engine or were hooked directly to the hydraulic lift rippers when a large crawler tractor was used to move them.

I recall that when we jacked up one house the wall went up and the floor stood still and then visa versa. The squared corner stud of one house was round at ground level and then formed the pier which was buried 0.5 metres in the ground. There were no bearers under the floor joists but dozens of 10 cm rounded blocks cut from river red gums stood under each floor joist. This provided all good experience!

I have always been a “Jack of all Trades and Master of None” and I had the ultimate compliment in practicality paid to me one day when a farm hand at the foreshores said: “I think your ancestors must have build the Pyramids!” Actually both my great, great grandfathers were convicts, one arrived with the First Fleet and one nine years later. However, enough reminiscing. We had a problem! One couldn’t move houses along asphalt roads by using steel wheels and crawler tractors.

Professional house movers were charging between \$1,000 and \$1,200 to jack up and move similar cottages as ours and were taking about three or four days to do it. This was out of the question, financially at least, and you are asked to remember that they were to be driven up the hill to “Ridgecrest”, a task that many regarded as “impossible”.

Bob Turnbull got to work in his welding works.

The houses were 7.6 metres wide and 9 metres long. Two 10 metre long by 25cm high “H” iron girders were constructed, together with a set of dual wheels on a single axle, allowing a 3.65 m spacing under the cottages. The axles were made to be detachable from the girders and a box frame was made up to which the girders could be bolted and which allowed the front to be fastened to the pivot point on the prime mover of a semi trailer. A cross bar hooked together the girders at the rear of the cottages with a central lift point. Long bolts were made to go through holes bored in the floor to fasten each house to the girders for the trip up the hill. Cables and chains were obtained for tearing out the piers when cottages were lifted. Hydraulic jacks, trewallah jacks, which were invaluable, a long pipe with a wooden cross piece at the top and notched so we could lift the electrical power lines as we manoeuvred the houses out of Mumbil, were also obtained. All we needed was the prime mover of a semi and some men.

The date was set for a working bee to last two weeks from June 16th – 27th, 1970. A working be to last a fortnight!

Fortunately, in the Western District Association had a group of dedicated farmers, mainly from Yeoval, Bournemouth, Gollan, Parkes and Wellington, who could come throughout the week.

The las Orr family from Parkes promised their semi prime mover with son Bob to act as driver and Stanley Field to act as his eyes. One can’t see much when trying to back a

house 7.6 metres wide up or down a steep incline. It was necessary to position it within centimetres of where it was finally to rest.

All the last minute things had to be arranged. Permission from the police to move things on a public road, "wide load" signs for escorting vehicles, red flags and permission to pull the side off the Bonada Creek bridge, which wasn't wide enough, had to be obtained. Permission was given for the latter provided the sides were put back up after each crossing.

Bob Orr and Stan Field arrived, the day before the moving, together with their wives. They stayed at the caravan park while several of us were busy that afternoon digging out the posts at the cattle grid. The houses wouldn't fit across it at the entrance to the W.C. & I.C. property. Later, Bob and Stan drove past with the intention of having a look at where the houses had to go. They hadn't seen it when they volunteered their services and you must remember that they were born and reared on the western plains around Parkes.

They came back horrified! "We're going home! That's not a bad place to go for a hike up that hill, but drive a house up there! It's impossible!"

We volunteered to push if necessary and eventually somewhat calmed their fears. We were glad to see they were still with us next morning.

June 16th, 1970 arrived. Bob Turnbull had taken two weeks leave from his welding works and I had taken two weeks "recreation leave" from the Soil Conservation Service. Each day we were joined by an average of sixteen men. Most never stopped for more than two days at a time. They would return to their farms, do what was necessary and then come back again. Neither Bob nor I made any attempt to organise a roster but each day the labour needed was provided. If I started to mention names now I'm sure I'd leave someone out so reluctantly I'll refrain.

Battles are not won by Generals, Brigadiers, Captains, etc even though they get the medals. It's the foot soldier who really bears the heat of the battle and the burden of the day. There is one place, and its not an earthly one, where your names are recorded. (Colossians 3:23,24)

How I have rambled on! The morning of June 16th, 1970, dawned bright and clear, cold and frosty before the sun rose high enough to feel its warmth. We gathered in Mumbil. The house moving gear was lying on the ground covered with frost. Bob Turnbull stood on part of it, slipped on the icy surface and fell cracking several ribs! Tragedy! He was in considerable pain and so he had to make a trip to the doctor. After he was fixed up by the doctor I believe the conversation went something like this:

Bob: "Doctor, we've got a big job on out at Mumbil. Can I go back to work?"

Doctor: "You can do anything you like as long as you can put up with the pain."

Bob was back out before morning tea.

He owned a Thames truck with a four ton crane mounted on the rear and it had been his intention to drive the vehicle. This was impossible because of the need to climb in and out and twist around when backing etc., so I swapped him jobs. I drove the crane when required while he supervised. Lifting houses is a dangerous job. There were times when they were balanced on jacks, etc., and despite the safety measures taken, such as having wooden blocks, including four large blocks 45cm across, 2 x 60cm high and 2 x 90 cm high cut out of green box tree, and pig styed, 15 x 10cm hardwoods, an accident could easily have happened. We needed a Foreman who was aware of all the possibilities. Those who know Bob have some inkling of just how hard it was for him to stand around and supervise instead of having his “shoulder to the wheel”.

Our plan was simple for each house. Pull the front fence down, disconnect the water, pass two cables under the cottages and drag the R.S.J. girders under at about 3.6m spacing. Fortunately the houses were all high enough although sometimes they were only just. However, that was all we needed. The yoke that kept the girders apart and which allowed the semi to be fastened to the gear was then bolted on and jacked up about 30cm. Next we went to the back of the house. The spreader bar was fastened to the girders, the 3.6m spaced dual wheeled axle was positioned at the end of the girders and then the crane was backed in and hooked to the centre of the spreader bar. Lifting the house was just about the limit of the crane’s capacity and it often looked comical to see half a dozen men assisting the crane by lifting on the back corners to give the extra few kilograms lift required. (See photo). The house was then on a slope back to front so the wheels were wheeled under about one third of the way along the length of the house and fastened to the girders with bolts.

Next we went to the front to lift the yoke high enough to the semi prime mover to back in. Cables were fastened around the piers and pulled by a wheel tractor provided by Mr Wal Wykes of Bournewood. The piers were removed en masse, holes were bored through the floor and the house bolted to the girders. There was nothing to do but lift a few power cables and drive the 7.6m x 9m houses to “Ridgecrest” about 11.2km away. Quite a simple operation!

Just a few incidental sidelights:

Stanley Field was attacked by a stove which fell through the floor when he bent underneath the house to do something. Fortunately he was only bruised and shaken, nothing serious.

The toilets were the outside type, individual buildings on their own, mounted on a concrete slab. One of these, picked up bodily by the crane, was the first building to be moved to the campsite. We haven’t devised a method of getting along without them. Later on in the operation one of these “buildings”, whose base was a bit soft and crumbly, collapsed while being unloaded by the crane. It broke into a hundred pieces of tin, concrete, fibro and timber. Vic Lockrey, who was standing nearby, dived over the steep bank in front of cottage number four and was chased by bits of angry toilet. It was funny

at the time but it could have been serious. However, they breed them tough out Gollan way and Vic crawled back up the bank, scratched and minus a few small patches of skin but ready for the next job. Not many people can claim to have been chased by a toilet!

Working men get hungry and need to be fed morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea. We set up a kitchen and dining room in one of the cottages in Mumbil and my wife Rae organised the food with help from various ladies, namely Edna Wykes, Glad Turnbull, Colleen Orr and Denise Field. Here memory gets dim and if there were any others my apologies to them. They provided endless cups of tea and coffee, cakes, scones, etc., and a substantial hot midday meal with sweets. Boy, was it appreciated and what a wonderful time of fellowship we had over a “cuppa” or the main meal. Thank you again, ladies.

Back to the story of the work. We manoeuvred our way out of Mumbil with the houses. Bob Orr drove with Stan Field out in front pointing this way and that way but never the wrong way, and so the cavalcade set off each time down the road. I drove the crane in front with a large sign “Caution Wide Load Following” up front. Next came the semi prime mover with Stan and Bob and then Bob Turnbull’s five tonne Dodge loaded with all our junk, jacks, blocks, cables, etc., followed by an assortment of cars.

Out of Mumbil and clear of power lines we would travel the road at a (brisk) pace past the Wellington turn off and then down to Bonada Creek where an advance guard would have the side lowered on the bridge and the large strainer posts of the wing fences dug out. Next it would be up to the top of the range and through the cuttings. When viewed from certain vantage points the prime mover and wheels wouldn’t be seen and the houses appeared to be floating along under their own “steam”.

The road was barely wide enough and in places more thumb directions had to be given by Stanley. Finally, miracle of miracles, we reached the turn off at the Ridgecrest road and the house was still all in one piece.

Next we had to do what couldn’t be done, the “impossible”! We had to turn off the asphalt road and lift the telephone cable which was halfway up to the hairpin bend. The bend was skilfully negotiated by Bob and had plenty of room. A few more hundred yards and it was a case of lift the telephone cable again and then travel along the level to the bottom of the steep climb.

From what was said later, Bob Orr sweated and his foot trembled on the clutch many times during that first climb. Many silent prayers went up and the trip to the top was uneventful. The sun was sinking low in the winter sky when we showed Stan and Bob where we wanted the house. The site was down the steep slope and the house went backwards and onto the foundations. Cottage number nine had arrived!

Everyone was amazed. Each time from then on Stanley stood out in the front yards away from the cab and by word and gesture drove the whole “box and dice” backwards and into place, while Bob sat in the truck and pulled the levers. This exhibition of craftsmanship was demonstrated over and over again during the following two weeks.

The Lord had again provided! Drat! As I write the tears drop on the adjoining page. Believe it or not, I'm rather an emotional person, and it's not the first time my eyes have filled and overflowed with tears. I guess they are just tears of happiness caused by the memory of events.

We stood around and offered a prayer of thanks as the full moon rose over the "Wear Trig" range and cast a brilliant pillar of pure gold right across the water towards us. Despite a hard day's work Doug Lockrey started making romantic noises and these were followed by light hearted jibes from those standing around.

"Lord you have let us accomplish the 'impossible' and now all we have to do is repeat it thirteen more times". We did that in the next two weeks amongst some of the best Christian fellowship many of us had ever experienced.

The trip from Mumbil took about one hour. Previously contractors took three days to jack up a house and move it out of Mumbil. In twelve days we moved fourteen cottages. People in Mumbil were heard to say: "Don't go to town or when you come back your house could be missing. The Baptists will have moved it".

As the days went on our technique was refined and the returning farmers "learned the ropes". On each of the last two days we moved two houses per day. This had been regarded as "impossible".

Of course, on the trip to "Ridgecrest" with the first houses things happened. Near the Wellington turn off Malcolm Campbell lives. His communication link with the outside world consisted of two telephone wires which crossed the asphalt road near his house. They weren't very high and certainly not as high as our houses on wheels.

We were somehow blissfully unaware of their existence and sailed right through them. He didn't complain but regarded it as a one off experience and fixed the line overnight. You guessed it, next day there was a repeat performance.

After the second time we were advised of the situation and henceforth had our lifting pole ready. Thank you Malcolm for your forbearance.

Only one cottage was slightly damaged by a rock jutting out on a cutting near the camp. This broke some fibro, but otherwise they were in just as good condition upon arrival at "Ridgecrest" as when they left Mumbil.

The first trip up the hill was with the semi prime mover only. However, to relieve some of the pressure on Bob and Stanley, we hooked on a large wheeled tractor loaned by Charlie Simmons. This was an extra safety measure as we climbed the mountain.

To unload the houses, the procedure described for lifting was reversed. We got the semi unhitched and the front of each house on our large blocks and then removed the rear

wheel and more blocks. Some of us rolled in the piers while others scrambled around on all fours with a bucket of cement slurry and stood the piers on the concrete pads which had been put down on “foundation day”.

Each house was then lowered onto the piers and that is where the Trewallah jacks, which had been dug out of farm sheds and dusted off, really shined. They enabled us to move the houses a few centimetres forward and a few centimetres back, until each house was in position.

These jacks are crude looking arrangements and look like something out of the ark. They have a long lever with a tongue that works on cog teeth which run the height of the jack, about one metre. Doug Lockrey described them as “meat hungry” things with an appetite for skin and flesh if carelessly handled. This applied even when we were not actually working them!

We thank the Lord for the faithfulness of those who came back day by day, who made time during their own busy lives, who fed the sheep and pigs or milked the cows in the dark so they could be there. Thank you for those who put things off that needed doing and for those who had to work through the week and turned up on Saturdays. There was no earthly reward Lord, only scratches and bumps, tired muscles and aching backs so that, in the end, your name would be glorified on top of a mountain where your Word goes out to the unsaved and where believers are challenged to greater dedication and service. Pardon me as more tears flow.

Back in the days when I belonged to the Anglican Community I lived in a cottage where, if I was still living in it today, I could look up through sixteen to twenty metres of water and see the ski boats churning up the water overhead.

We worshipped in a small fibro Anglican Church erected near “Burrendong” homestead, which was close to the site of the now almost forgotten Burrendong village at present under perhaps thirty metres of water. During the last service that was held there, our son Ross was christened by the minister who came from Stuart Town.

When work on the Dam commenced and Mumbil became a “metropolis” the Wellington Presbyterian church bought the Anglican church at Burrendong for four hundred pounds (\$800) and paid a further four hundred pounds (\$800) to have it moved to Mumbil where it was used until the dam was completed and workers drifted away. It had stood idle for some years and the Presbyterians wanted to get rid of it. We offered them \$175 which was provided by a small Baptist group at Forbes. The Presbyterians probably had more lucrative offers but we were the only ones who planned to keep it as a place of worship so it came to us. It was not really big enough for our full camps, but it was a well constructed building which could be added onto in the future. It has served as a chapel and can accommodate small camps of up to sixty four.

“Hey! Don’t let those ‘Slaves’ go, bring them back again!” became the cry. While we were in the moving mood there was a church to be moved. On Monday, June 29th, 1970,

we jacked it up and got it as far as the W.C.& I.C. grid. Early Tuesday morning, while the fog was still thick on the lower slopes, we hauled it up the hill and into the sunlight. There were a few problems. We had to extend the girders to carry the porch, and fasten 15 x 10 cm hardwood planks crossways underneath the church because the bearers ran the wrong way. Down at Campbell's corner the main telephone line to Burrendong crossed the road with about six pairs of wires which were too low for the church to go underneath. The PMG (Telecom) wanted \$70 to come out and lift the wires but we didn't have \$70 for Telecom. We took the crosses off the church and trundled down the road where a certain fellow climbed an extension ladder and stretched the wires one by one on to the ridgecapping while the church and prime mover inched forward. It wasn't an easy task and the wires sang like violin strings. What happened at the exchange I don't know but the wires were pushed and shoved across the ridgecapping to drop limply on the other side. It was all over in a few minutes. As we drove away we contemplated the sag and realised we couldn't give Telecom a guarantee that the wires were the same height as they were previously. We knew however, that the line was due for replacement by cable so no real inconvenience was caused.

When the cottages were on site the task really began. All cottages had broken windows and cracked and broken fibro. They had to be repainted inside and out. Seven houses were set aside for use as staff and holiday cottages and they had to be furnished as such while the remaining seven had to be equipped with double-decker beds to accommodate fourteen people in each cottage. The lounge room and kitchen of each had to be furnished as such. The bath in each of the seven cottages was removed and a shower installed. We purchased fourteen quick recovery 68litre hot water units. Various individuals and churches took it upon themselves to renovate and furnish different cottages. The first offer came from Mr & Mrs Wilf Turnbull, Bob Turnbull's parents. They renovated and furnished No. 12 and then others followed. Gollan church renovated cottage No. 11, Yeoval, cottage No. 9, Bournewood, cottage No. 1, Dubbo, cottage No. 4, Wellington Young People, cottage No. 5, Bournewood, Yeoval Young People, cottage No. 7, Rev & Mrs Ruth Wilson, cottage No. 14 and Bournewood took on a second cottage, No. 6.

Up till that time Orange Church had not given any support to the project. They had been influenced by several leading members who had witnessed the building of a camp out of second hand buildings up the coast. It had been almost an absolute disaster, so they remained aloof, convinced that our project wasn't a viable one. Eventually they had a change of heart and took on cottages No. 2 and No. 3 and today, as far as I know, they are the only church which includes "Ridgecrest" in their church budget. "Ridgecrest" has benefited greatly by their gifts over the years.

With work being done on the above cottages, it left only two others, No. 10, and I'll say more about that later, and No. 8 which we used as a store room. The Board of Management has it on its agenda to renovate and furnish No. 8 in 1983.

While cottages were being renovated other aspects were pushed along. The cost of supplying power was negotiated and fixed at \$2,417 to be spread over five years.

Discussions took place with health authorities in Wellington regarding septic tanks; ordinary soakage trenches were obviously unsuitable. The Health Inspector pushed for transpiration (evaporation) beds which could be located under the oval but we weren't keen on that plan. I had read about septic ponds and questioned him concerning them. He knew of them but because none had ever been constructed in the Shire, he wasn't very keen to authorise them. I chose a site where I thought there was enough depth of soil with the correct nature to build them on a fairly steep slope. The Health Inspector sent the engineering staff out for an inspection and they reported that it was impossible to do what I suggested because of the very steep slope.

A "stand off" situation again! Another one of those "impossibilities". Eventually he agreed that if would build the ponds to his specifications on that site then the ponds would be acceptable. Of course he was sure we couldn't build them.

Those ponds were grossly over-designed. There were to be three ponds, number one 121 m x 18 m x 1.5 m deep with a 1.2 m "freeboard". It's usual to only put a 0.9 m "freeboard" on 1,000 cubic metre dams on properties with creeks flowing into them. The second pond was to be 12 m x 12 m x 0.9 m deep and the third pond was to be 9 m x 6 m x 0.6 m deep. It's worth noting that the second pond very rarely get water in it and the third one has never had any overflow from the other two.

We built ponds, 1.2 m "freeboard" and all. The back batter was so steep that the tractor had a job to get out of the hole. However, it has given us a trouble free disposal system for our 1,800 litre septic tank and will do so for ever.

We received from the W.C. & I.C., easements for power lines, the road, our water line, a bore on the bank of the river below the dam and the area on which the septic ponds were to be built. We will always be thankful to them for their willing co-operation which has been an ongoing thing right up to the present day.

We didn't have a hall, dining area or kitchen and we discussed putting two houses together to fill this need.

I'm an avid reader of local papers and usually read them from front page to back page. My eyes alighted on a small advertisement tucked away amongst the other adds, "for tender and removal, the two rooms "Roman Catholic school, Stuart Town", 12.8 km from Mumbil, 24 km from "Ridgecrest". Naturally I made a deviation on my way home from work next day because at the time I lived in Wellington and drove daily to the foreshores. The two school rooms were joined as a hall and the building looked solid. More importantly, it was movable. It needed a coat of paint and had an enormous three cornered fire place on one side serving the two rooms, the building also had a narrow verandah.

I could see it had possibilities and after a further visit with seven committee members we decided on a tender of \$500. It was really "guesstimate" because we might have obtained

it for \$100 or someone may have tendered \$1,000 for it. However, by early September, 1970, it was ours.

The hall was 6.7 m wide by 12 m long so Bob Turnbull simply extended our house moving gear to accommodate it. We went down one day and removed the large chimney and pulled off the verandah. After that it was, "Hi Parkes! We need the semi again."

Donald Orr and Stanley Field arrived to do the job. We hooked on and manoeuvred our way out of the yard, down the hill, across the railway line and down to a culvert which had sides too high and too narrow.

The question was asked, "Where's that truck that was taking a temporary loan of a few dozen railway sleepers from the Stuart Town railway station?"

We packed up all the wheels, two sleepers high, and crept over the culvert. Slowly we moved to the railway crossing near Mumbil where there were two right angled turns, one on to the crossing and one off. It was a case of "pray fellows that a train doesn't come hurtling along while we dig out a few guide posts and manoeuvre across".

God answered so we moved on to "Ridgecrest". We managed to get around the hairpin bend and reached the top by sundown. The building was left parked overnight and "jockeyed" into it's position the next day. We decided to use the hall as a dining room and to build a skillion about 3.6 m wide to make into a kitchen. This would be between the building and the bank. Other suggestions were made. A verandah back and front would be very useful; we well need a canteen; a store room for supplies and a toilet for the cook should be provided. Bob Turnbull had been pondering over the building and trying to envisage the end result. "A skillion roof is going to look lousy. Let's pitch a large roof over the lot."

I had been playing with designs for the inside and things looked a bit narrow, so I suggested we "chew" a bit more off the bank and make it 5.5 m side. It was agreed that that was a good idea. Eventually, under Bob's supervision and with some help from Bathurst, it all came together.

Allow me here to digress again. Many years before, I tendered, on behalf of the Wellington Men's Society, the sum of \$50 for a very well built house containing two bedrooms, a lounge, hall and kitchen. It also had long verandahs on three sides and a very good iron roof. The house was at the head of Oakey Creek. If you gaze across the main basin of the dam from "Ridgecrest" to where the water disappears at the farthest point, you will see where the house was. The only other tender was the sum of \$25 by the man who had previously owned the property. He was disappointed he didn't get it! Twenty five dollars? One door was worth that! I'm not sure but in the middle of winter 1966 or 1967, half a dozen of us went up one Friday to pull the house down in wall sections and to cut the floor into sections. We froze all night as we tried to sleep. No wonder! Next morning the ground was covered by a layer of snow several inches deep. It probably only happens once in fifty years in that area.

As the sun peeped over the hills, we heard the drone of engines as Bob Turnbull, in his five tonne truck and John and Allan Bennett in theirs, wound their way up the Oakey Cree road. They had left Wellington at about four o'clock in the morning and arrived with the news that the Monarch Theatre in Wellington had burnt to the ground as they left. The Scotts (Presbyterians) had had a ball in the theatre the previous evening and the "Haggis" must have got a bit hot or something.

We loaded the house and a few other outbuildings which went with it, on the lorries and set off home. The dam at that time had started to fill and the low level bridge at Burrendong was under water. It was a long way home by a gravel crossing near Ligingery Creek and then via Wuuluman.

Bits and pieces were stored in a large hay shed on a small hobby farm I owned in Montefiores. Four or five years later, we were to use it to build the kitchen, canteen and cooks' room. Some of the helpers thought we were mad as we lifted some wobbly wall sections and then fitted second hand floor sections into place like a jigsaw puzzle. Bob used steel plates to join sections where nails would no longer hold. The original house was very solidly built out of 10 x 5 cm Cyprus pine. A few broken sheets of fibro were replaced and now we probably have one of the best kitchens of any Youth Camp in New South Wales.

None of us had any real knowledge or experience in kitchen design and there were a few other things, such as sporting ovals, beds, bedding, etc., that we needed information about. It was decided that there was not a better place to get this information from than our own established Baptist Camp sites. Rae and I holidayed at the Evans Head camp and visited 'Elim' on the way back we then paid a visit to the camp at Dee Why which has since been sold, and then made a visit to camp "Saunders". On the way home from camp Saunders we called at camp "Carey", if our camp was to finish up only as good as those we had seen, we should give up immediately. The kitchens seemed to lack the design and just had refrigerators stacked around a square room. There were no decent playing fields for sport or recreation and as for the beds. (I've censored my own remarks regarding them.)

I drew up a preliminary plan for the kitchen. My wife wanted a special sink for the cooks. Bob wanted the passage-way widened, more storage space; sinks for campers to wash up; crockery; pots and pans; benches on which to peel vegetables. The stove had to go on a special place as did the fridges and so it went on. Even now we may not have the perfect design but we do have a large, airy, workable kitchen capable of catering for crowds of one hundred.

The next thing we had to consider was beds. We needed something better than crude wooden structures or second hand cast offs. A firm in Sydney advertised ex-army hospital beds at \$2.50 each. They were 0.9 m wide, had wire mattresses and pipe frames. It was decided to send for two and then see if we could make them into double bunks. After some time at Bob's welding works we finished up with quite an acceptable product,

so we ordered one hundred more and organised a few night time working bees at Turnbull's Welding Works. There were a lot of farm "boys" who could weld and those of us who couldn't used power grinders and cutters. We held things stacked, fetched and carried. As a result fifty very strong double decker beds were made.

The next thing we had to look for was mattresses. Vinyl industries of Villawood had the Government contract for the supply of vinyl covered foam mattresses. The contract price was \$6 for the vinyl covers and \$5 for 10cm thick x 0.9 m wide foam mattresses. I wondered if they would put us on their supply list? They said they were willing to supply us with a bulk order at the same price, so we ordered one hundred and two. This meant that another problem had been solved.

A trip to Orange was made in answer to an advertisement for a large slow combustion stove which had two fire boxes and a top area of 2.12 x 0.61 m. there were also exhaust fans and a large cowling to take away heat and fumes from the stove. The price asked was \$115 for the lot so we made another trip in Bob's truck.

The Bowral Church donated sixty-five ex-theatre seats for the church.

There were many needs and many people contributed physically and financially. A special mention must be made of Doug and Doris Lockrey who saw many of our financial needs. Their hearts and cheque book belong to the Lord and we often needed a thousand dollars for "this" and another for "that". They won't like what I have just written, but now, ten years after the "event" I feel I can make these things known. God bless you both and I record our thanks.

We urgently needed cupboards for the kitchen, benches and sinks. It was wonderful to watch the Lord provide.

My contact with my brother Ron had been very sparse over the years. He had started out as a carpenter builder and had eventually become N.S.W. Manager for the construction section of a large firm involved in the construction field Australia-wide. Ron owned, and still does, a very comfortable home overlooking Whale Beach. The house has a billiard room, large swimming pool and all. It wasn't his affluence that kept us apart, he's not that type. We had very little money for holidays while our children were growing up and couldn't visit him. I think he thought Wellington was at the other end of the world even though he commuted interstate with his job. As a result our meetings were few and far between. However, at this time we were on holidays in the Parramatta area and contacted him. He was in charge of the demolition of a large city building. It covered half a city block in Sydney and ran from Elizabeth Street through to Castlereagh Street near Hyde Park. We walked in and the ground floor was full of doors. Ron explained that their carpenters had pulled them all off, carried them down the stairs and called tenders for them. The tender amounted to \$1.50 each. It had cost \$2.50 to pull the doors off and stack them. Consequently, everything in the building was to be pushed down the lift wells by a bulldozer and then carried away as rubble. I couldn't believe it! On about the 8th floor there were flats with double stainless steel sinks and kitchen cupboards made

from solid wood. No pineboard or 3 ply had been used, and scattered through the building were built-in benches, desks and a few large loose cupboards.

I remember thinking, "What wouldn't we give to have those at "Ridgecrest"?"

The following conversation then took place.

Ron: "You can have the lot providing you carry it downstairs, and in a hurry, because the dozer is at work on the top floor."

What an opportunity! However, "Ridgecrest" was 230 miles away and where would the labour come from?

Myself: "Exchange, Wellington 770. That you Bob Turnbull? Can you bring your truck and a couple of men down to Sydney?" and I explained the situation.

Bob: "Are you sure it will be worthwhile?"

"Yeah," I replied.

Bob: "Well, Bev and Des and their father Vic Wykes are holidaying at Manly and Allan Bennett is at Ryde."

Myself: "I'll have my son Greg with me. I think we can do it."

Bob: "I'll bring John and Bob Longhurst with me."

Two days later Bob backed into the Castlereagh Street loading bay with his 5 tonne Dodge truck which had a special extended top table. We levered sinks double sinks out with crowbars and trudged up and down stairs until our knees wobbled.

By late afternoon we had the truck stacked so high it could only just squeeze out of the loading bay. Sinks, small cupboards, big cupboards, bench tops, wash room lockers which are now cupboards under the sinks at "Ridgecrest" and a whole lot of other junk we thought would be useful.

Had this all resulted in a chance meeting with my brother or was it the Lord's doing? Sometimes several years went by without me seeing Ron so you, dear reader, make up your own mind.

How did "Ridgecrest" get its name you may ask? Not many people really know. The camp had automatically been called "Burrendong Camp", so the Committee decided to launch a "Name the Camp" competition with the prize of \$10 for the winner. I have been, and still am, loath to relate the story of the naming of "Ridgecrest" because there were many coincidences which involved me. I do it for the sake of history.

People from all the west put forward names to me as secretary of the Committee. There were Biblical names, Aboriginal names of sites and places and names specially devised and constructed. Many of these were very difficult to pronounce. There were at least fifty of these names and the list still exists somewhere in our records. You are assured that I put it away very carefully.

The question was asked: "Who is going to be 'Solomon' and pick the name?"

We circulated the list of names to all the W.D.B.A. churches and asked each church to choose one and take their choice along to the Annual meeting of the Western District Baptist Association which, that year, was in Broken Hill. The meeting had to make the choice of one out of seventeen. Well, at least that was how it was supposed to work.

For some time I was superintendent and teacher of a men's group in the All Age Sunday School. Back in those days we slavishly followed the American pattern and used their literature and I'm sure that there wasn't anything wrong with that. As superintendent I got a copy of "The Builder", a monthly American publication distributed to assist those who had to lead classes and assemblies. Lit gradually became evident that the Southern Baptist Convention owns two huge education complexes consisting of Adult Conference Centres and Youth Camps for boys and girls. Each one capable of seating and providing for between 2,000 and 3,000 people. In America gifts to religious institutions are tax free and every building seems to have someone's name on it. "The Smith Complex"; "The Jones Auditorium"; a pity it doesn't work like that here! "Ridgecrest" and "Glorietta" are their names. "Ridgecrest" America is built in the typical Pinewoods area and looks terrific, the gardens look like Botanical gardens. The complexes have grown into huge denominational centres with separate Boy's Camps and Girl's Camps, conference centres for deacons, Sunday School teachers and every other Christian use you could imagine.

My desire was that one day, even from our small beginning, the camp at Burrendong would develop like one of those. And why not? We are the centre of the Universe – well almost! At least Dubbo is not far away and it's known as "The Hub of the West" because, through it passes the highway linking Sydney to Adelaide and the Newell Highway linking Melbourne to Brisbane. With these highways and a large airport is it possible or have I just been dreaming again?

Back to the story! Among the names that went on to the list were several from yours truly and one of those names was "Ridgecrest". On the night of the Wellington Church business meeting which discussed the name to be submitted to the W.D.B.A. meeting to be later at Broken Hill, the Pastor was away and I was elected Chairman.

"Well ladies and gentlemen, which name is the one of your choice?". Names were bandied around and discussed in an informal manner. As chairman and on my "Scouts Honour", I declare I didn't have anything to say on the subject.

Nora Thomas stood up and said: "I move we submit the name "Ridgecrest". It sounds good and certainly describes the site."

As chairman I had to tell myself to "shut up" and say nothing.

"Any further suggestions? Let's not be hasty. None? Any further suggestions? All those in favour say 'aye'. On the contrary 'no'. The 'ayes' have it. Carried."

"Ridgecrest" it was and nobody knew who had submitted what names because I had the key list.

Broken Hill turned out to be **HOT** and it was enveloped in a dust storm. This fine dust settled in the folds of our shirt sleeves as we sat in Church on the Sunday morning. Outside the visibility was down to about one town block. The meeting on Saturday dragged on and although the proposed “naming” was on the agenda, the chairman was about to close the meeting when the call was given. “Any further business before the meeting closes?”

I’m sure you’ve all been to meetings where everyone has a stiff “backside” from sitting on wooden seats and everyone hopes no one is stupid enough to respond to such a call.

“Mr Chairman, the decision on the name of our Youth Camp at Burrendong hasn’t been made.”

Chairman: “Oh! How many churches have brought a recommendation?”

There were only a few, three or four, I’m not really sure.

The names were submitted. The camp at that time was an unknown quantity to most of our churches and in my opinion, didn’t rate a lot of thought by them. The sentiment expressed by the meeting went like this.

“Well, since Wellington has put up most of the money and done most of the organisation, let’s accept their recommendation. Would you please move along these lines, Mr Graham?”

I moved the appropriate motion. It was seconded, voted on, and declared “carried”.
Chairman: “I declare the business session closed”.

So “Ridgecrest” we became and with God’s help may it live and grown and be a blessing always to mankind. May it continue to be a place which demonstrates His glory and may it glorify His name and His deeds.

Rev. Don and Mrs Eagle visited “Ridgecrest” America and stayed there for a few days. They brought back a few mementos and photos or rather, picture post cards. Actually Don brought home about eighteen blank rolls of 35mm film. I’m not sure whether he blamed himself, his wife, his camera or his son who loaned it to him. I’m not even sure about who owned the camera but I know it didn’t work. If it had worked we’d now have more pictorial evidence of “Ridgecrest” America.

Coming home on the bus from Broken Hill, Doug Lockrey asked me the dreaded question. “To whom do we pay the \$10 prize? Who was the winner?”

I told the story to Doug on the condition that he didn’t tell anyone else. Somehow I never did get around to collecting the \$10 prize.

A few more asides before continuing the main story:

The fourteen blocks of ground in Mumbil each attracted shire rates of \$12 per year and were bound to rise. There was no immediate market so it was decided to make it known that anyone could have them for \$10 each plus the payment of all legal and transfer costs. We got rid of thirteen blocks mostly to adjoining occupiers and gave the fourteenth to a chap who had already bought three or four. Two years later the same blocks were probably worth \$1,000 each and today they are probably worth \$2,000 or \$3,000 each. Oh well! One can't win them all!

There are four people I must mention specifically and whose names haven't appeared or have only been mentioned, so far in these reminiscences.

Firstly the two "sparks" or electricians. Brian Cook, at that time a member of Dubbo Church, was the Consumer Advisory Engineer of the Macquarie County Council. He ensured that "Ridgecrest" would never be in the position that many places find themselves occupying today, that is, afraid of using appliances for fear of "blowing" the lot. He arranged our street lighting and hot water services. Together with Vic Turnbull, a qualified electrician, a pig producer and the treasurer of our "Ridgecrest" committee for all our formative years, they re-wired all our cottages and put in power points and lights. The kitchen complex and hall were a mammoth task. I remember thinking as they wired No. 10, the cottage I was to live in for six years, we wouldn't need any roofing material because there were so many electrical wires. Sadly Brian dropped out of sight a few years ago but only after the main work was finished.

Vic carried on wiring our pumps, putting in fans, wiring the hall that hadn't yet been moved to "Ridgecrest" and continues to do electrical work.

Secondly there is John and Allan Bennett and their long suffering wives, who never knew where their husbands were. They never knew what time John and Allan would get home – (it was usually some time between sundown and midnight although occasionally it was later) or what they were doing. John and Allan ran and worked our "project" which gut-busting, bone cracking work, requiring special skills and "know how". Like Bob, they gave freely of everything they had and annually, in our balance sheet there appeared, opposite the word "Projects", amounts not in tens or hundreds but amounts involving thousands of dollars until all our major development was paid for and our original debt amounting to about \$35,000 plus interest, had been wiped off as well as providing thousands of dollars for development. This was completed in 1980.

John and Allan would smile and say, "But what about all the others who help and regularly respond to the call for help?"

Thank God for them also, but what happened could never have occurred without John and Allan Bennett, or should I write Allan and John? They were always together in their work. Our thanks are extended and we pray God's blessing on them.

I intend someday to write the story of the “Project”. It will have to be soon because time dims the memory. There were wonderful times of fellowship, lots of comical situations and many which were not so funny. Those involved ended up with aching bones and tired muscles, after long days in a fantastic environment. The “Project” was one of the things I most enjoyed playing a part in and one of the things I miss most, even now. The project, even now may be in the process of winding up. Nothing in our endeavours can go on for ever. It served its purpose well.

Early in July 1971 a bore was sunk about one kilometre downstream from the dam wall on the bank of the river. We struck pure river gravel at 12.2 m and solid rock at 17.4 m. It was only about 100 metres from the river bank. However, I think we must have hit a pool which was not directly connected to the main channel. Perhaps it was isolated by a bar of silt or clay. The water was a bit on the “hard” side, but quite pure and suitable for human consumption and for use on the garden. It was right in the path of an old electrical power line which had been abandoned by the W.C. & I.C. We only had to have the poles rewired from the sub-station and we were in business.

We chose, on the best advice available, “Mono” 5 cm Stator Pumps. The system was designed by a Mono Field Officer. We established a 2,700 litre concrete tank halfway up the 237m lift and installed another pump. The pumps were to be synchronised and operated by cut-off floats. The system proved to be underdesigned because the 5 hp motors should have been 7 1/2 hp. This caused us endless trouble and the float switch system never worked properly either. The bottom pump had to be turned “on” and “off” manually although the middle pump worked satisfactorily on a float switch in the middle tank. This switch cut the pump off when full and on when almost empty. If anything ever gave me grey hairs it was the worry of trying to keep this system operating for seven years until we duplicated our pumps with 4 x 5 piston pumps. They also have been far from trouble free. I don't think the trouble free water pumping system has yet been invented. To make matters worse, from about 1978 onwards the 5 cm PVC delivery pipe started to break down and fountains appeared on the side of the mountain. This pipe was replaced in 1981. It had dozens of patches and joins.

People wonder why I have so little time for the so called “Experts” in many fields. Most possess knowledge but have no common sense and the latter, in my opinion, is the key factor.

The storage tanks have now been duplicated and we have 181,000 litres of water storage and with the duplicate system of pumps we manage to keep the gardens, trees and shrubs alive and camps running without having to borrow a lorry and cart a 4,500 litre tank of water up the hill, as I had to on one occasion just to keep a camp in water.

From July 12th to 17th, 1971 another working bee was held to install the septic. We had to lay all the pipes, including 15cm mains and a 10 cm off lines, and run the effluent from the 18,000 litre septic tank about 500 metres down to the septic ponds. The big question was, would the workforce respond again? At that time life seemed to be one long working bee. Every Saturday morning since we had moved the houses in June 1970, Bob

and I had left town at about seven-thirty. Usually someone else turned up. People worked on the house renovations or the kitchen complex; there was never a shortage of jobs.

Everyone realized that certain progress had to be made before camps could be held and so they came back time and again. By the time the camp was officially opened in September 1972, an estimated 15,000 hours or more had been given in voluntary labour.

We again hired the Fiat 125hp crawler tractor from Campbell's and Noel came as the driver.

The kitchen was re-established for meals and morning and afternoon teas. There was a lot of manual labour using picks and shovels, crowbars and rock hammers. To a ripper tyne we welded wings like mouldboards each side; a sort of delva, and adapted it to fit the Fiat. This, together with a road plough, did most of the back breaking work. Fortunately the deepest trench we had to dig was about 1.1 m in front of cottage No 4 for the main 15cm line.

It drizzled rain nearly all the week which made working conditions very uncomfortable. However, by the Saturday most of the pipes had been laid and in one day after the trench had been ripped and delved out we laid the delivery line from the river to our storage tanks. This line was made up of PVC pipe glued together and then covered by the dozer. The total length of the line came to 1.8 k.m.

Bob and I had considered the size of the oval and we came to the conclusion that it needed to be at least another 15m wider. The dozer did a tremendous job, but we found there was a hard ridge of rock which commenced about 9 m from the northern edge and ran the full length of the oval. Much of this ridge had to be blown with gelignite. Bob became a "Powder Monkey" for the day after the plant hired from the Shire had been used to drill all the holes. For every job that had to be done there was always someone in our group who could do it.

Over the years people donated almost every conceivable item to "Ridgecrest". We reserved the right to take unsuitable things of minimal value to the garbage tip. In the enlarged oval and underneath we buried two 45 litre garbage tins full of crockery that was crazed, cracked or chipped and half a 45 litre tin of cutlery that had seen better days. If you dig it up in the future please don't think it is part of some ancient civilization.

When the water and sewerage systems were completed, pressure was exerted to hold some camps even though things were far from completion. And start they did! The first camp was a small group from Wellington Church. Following that a large number of girls attended a Girls Brigade camp. By the time the camp was officially opened in 1972, seven hundred campers had been to "Ridgecrest".

At this time the kitchen was still fairly primitive. The board floors had 1cm cracks where some sections joined. Through these the wind whistled. In the middle of the floor stood

a set of concrete laundry tubs hooked up to a 181 litre mains pressure hot water service which was beside it. Kitchen equipment was minimal and had been inherited from the old Easter Camp Committee. There was an odd assortment of tables and chairs and each group which came to "Ridgecrest" provided their own cooks. Things greatly improved by Opening Day.

Before we go on with the story let me describe the Official Opening of the place.

Official Opening _ September 30th, 1972.

The October long weekend was chosen for the Official Opening. A "live in" weekend was organised for all who wished to enrol. The Opening was set for the Saturday and the Annual Association Meeting was to be held on the Monday. The day was fine early but during the afternoon it turned very cold. It was one of the few occasions on which I've ever experienced a very cold northerly wind blowing at "Ridgecrest".

The ceremony was conducted from the verandah of the dining room with official guests sitting on the verandah and all others in the open space in front. The full story of the opening is available in our records and on tape together with copies of the programme. For record purposes I briefly mention those who took part.

The meeting was chaired by Rev. Don Eagle, who at that time was area Superintendent and Pastor of the Dubbo Baptist Church. The W.D.B.A. President for the year, Mr Les Blatch, led in an opening prayer, welcomed official guests and received the keys to the camp gate from Bob Turnbull. Various sponsoring groups which renovated cottages also presented keys. There was a prayer of invocation by the Rev. S. Beggs, Pastor of the Yeoval Church. A statement of purpose was made by the Rev. Don Eagle and a statement of the Historical development was made by myself as honorary secretary of Camp Development and the Finance Committee. An offering was received and amounted to \$1,600.

Greetings were brought by:

Mr Leo Nott, M.L.A. for Burrendong, Mr D. Mills, The Wellington Shire President, and Rev. E Walsham an ex Pastor of Wellington Church and a pioneer of Christian Endeavour in the west, at that time he was a Pastor Mayfield Baptist Church. Rev. H. Suttie a former pastor of the Wellington Church and one who had acted as secretary of an early committee of the Association. He was responsible for much of the early correspondence and lobbying for a camp site. At the time of the opening he was serving as a counsellor in a Large Melbourne public school.

The opening ceremony and the unveiling of the plaque on the rock was done by the President of the Baptist Union, Mr M.J. Hamer whose initials are incorrect on the plaque. A prayer of dedication was offered by Mr. R.G. Robertson, secretary of the New South Wales Baptist Homes Trust.

The proceedings were closed by the singing of the following hymn:

How blest is this place O Lord
Where Thou art worshipped and adored,
In faith we here an altar raise,
To Thy great glory, God of Praise.
Here let Thy sacred fire of old
Descend to kindle spirits cold,
And may our prayers when here we bend
Like incense sweet to Thee ascend.
Here let the weary one find rest
The troubled heart Thy comfort blest.
The guilty soul a sore retreat
The sinner pardoned at Thy feet.
Here thine angelic spirits send,
Their solemn praise with ours to blend.
And grant the vision inly given
Of this Thy place, the gate of Heaven.

AMEN AMEN AMEN AMEN AMEN

Afternoon tea was served before the commencement and all those present were then invited to inspect the camp site and building. An evening rally was led by Principal Emeritus Morling, O.B.E.M.A. and after that, supper ended the day of the Official Opening. Please don't give any credence to reports of proceedings printed in the "Wellington Times". Any relationship to actual fact was purely coincidental. We estimated 400 people turned up for the opening.

The Sunday Morning Worship and Communion was led by Mr. M.J. Hamer, Union President. The afternoon rally was led by Rev. E. Walsham and the evening rally was conducted by Rev. H.B. Suttie. The Association meetings occupied the Monday and concluded with tea. People departed for their homes at 6.00 p.m.

My thoughts on that occasion are best summed up by referring to the Annual Report I prepared and distributed to delegates at the Association Meeting on Monday, October 2nd.

I quote in part:

"To God be the glory great things He hath done".

What a wonderful day that Saturday was! It was the culmination of ten years of waiting, of inactivity; and it was also the culmination of a further two years of activity, work and toil involving aching backs, tired muscles, much planning, scheming and dreaming. Those preceding two years had also been filled with wonderful Christian fellowship which was shared by those who laboured together for the Lord. We had experienced two

years when we knew His blessing and guidance as all our needs were met. We had no serious accidents and nothing had gone radically wrong during that time.

“Thank you Lord!”

Altogether, seven hundred young people had been in residence since the previous September. There had been commitments and rededications made. The challenge of the Gospel had been presented, souls had been saved and people guided towards a closer walk with their Lord. The bricks, the mortar, the fibro, the wood, the beautiful view, the fun and the games are only incidental: a means to an end.

Pray that God will continue to use “Ridgecrest” to draw “men” unto Himself and to extend His Kingdom and that all Glory will be to Him! Amen.

Onward into the Future

Part III

The opening was a real watershed in the history of “Ridgecrest”. People wrongly concluded that the camp was “up and running” and that, from then on, it didn’t really need their support. To be fair, most of the faithful, who had so willingly responded when called upon for working bees, also formed the backbone of their own church programmes. These programmes, I guess, had suffered over the previous two years. It took a massive effort in propaganda to organise working bees of any size.

One group remained faithful above all others. Jim and Lionel Blatch and the men from Bournewood formed the group. When I last visited the camp in November, 1982 I was not really surprised to find this group there with just one or two missing. Jim had retired to Wellington, Les, his brother, and Wal Wykes had gone to glory. However, their places had been taken by younger men and so the work had gone on. Thank you fellows. At one time Bob and I commented: “We should never have had the camp opened.” Be that as it may, that day has been and gone.

While the glow generated by the opening was still being felt in everyone, a working bee, to top dress the oval with soil, was organised for the second week in October. Because the river soil is generally full of “nut grass”, arrangements were made to get our top soil from below Top Water Level on Stockyard Creek about sixteen kilometres from “Ridgecrest” and just past the Sport and Recreation area.

We hired a large Front-end loader from a contractor in Molong and sent out a call for trucks. These came from Gollan, Wellington and Yeoval-Bournewood area and totalled eleven or twelve. I think they were all table tops.

Loading trucks with the contractor proved to be easy. Unloading was quite another story. Vic Turnbull had a very high lift bucket on a Ferguson wheeled tractor. This combination could push off a fair bit of soil each side and we used a “tumbling tommy” scoop which was pulled the length of each lorry by another tractor. This was very

effective and when all else failed to clean up, we used the “Banjo” shovels. Without any long delays we managed to keep all the trucks on the move. After two days the oval was covered with top soil varying in depth from 10 cm to 25 cm. Levelling proved to be a problem. We tried a grader but needed something much larger. The question was raised: “What about one of our house moving girders?”

These were 10m long and very heavy. A wheeled tractor was hooked on to each end by a short cable and then they were driven around at random. This method worked and when we finished the oval was as level as a billiard table.

The “Ridgecrest committee provided drums of petrol and diesel, so the only other expense was the contractor who loaded the trucks at Stockyard Creek. This again highlighted how generous the western “cockies”, or wheat farmers, are with their time and equipment.

The oval had to be planted with couch grass and an evergreen clover. Summer is the best time to germinate couch grass but it has to be kept wet.

Years earlier, when I had some misguided aspiration, I purchased an irrigation system hoping to make a few dollars out of growing lucerne on my “hobby” farm in Montefiores. Incidentally, I like that modern term “Hobby farm”, it sounds terrific, but all it really means is that one has no spare time for anything, there is a lot of hard work, many long hours and very little reward. At least that was my experience during that time. It cost, under irrigation, about \$10 to grow, bale and shed a tonne of lucerne. One good fall of rain at the right time on the wheat farms, where most farmers rotate dryland lucerne with their wheat, and hundreds of tonnes of lucerne become available at \$5 to \$7 a tonne. In the middle of the drought year of 1982, lucerne hay was advertised at \$5.50 per bale which, at 30 bales to the tonne comes to \$165. Droughts don’t come regularly so growing lucerne is always a risk.

However, I return to the story of couch growing on the oval. I moved my spray lines and submains to “Ridgecrest” and hooked them on to the power boosted outlet in the middle of the oval. For the next week or so I visited “Ridgecrest” every eight hours. The first call each day was made before I went to work around the foreshores, the second was after work and then I’d return for a late night pipe move. Because it was necessary for the top soil to be kept moist as it was a bit on the clayey side and inclined to cake hard on top when dry, this went on until the green shoots broke through. Finally, up came the couch, clover and a sample of every week that ever grew along Stockyard Creek. However, there is a first class oval now at “Ridgecrest”.

Bob and I cut the oval once, with ordinary household “Victa” mowers before we realised what an impossible task that was. We put a “ride-on Rover mower” at the top of a list of necessities. The area of the oval is about 0.4 ha.

Two problems at that time had to be solved. We couldn’t afford to pay a caretaker and we didn’t have any volunteers. Earlier, we had decided that to let every group provide

their own cooks was a recipe for disaster. People were always in a hurry when their particular camp finished which was usually Sunday afternoon. The place was seldom left clean. The stoves often weren't cleaned and neither were the pots, pans or floors. Each person had a different standard, and most standards weren't good enough.

It was decided that the Camp Committee would cater and provide the cooks and assistants. The only exception to this was the Association Camp Committee which organised five or six camps each year. Decisions are easily made but much harder to put into practise.

Except for the occasional meeting of the "Ridgecrest" Finance and Development Committee, which was a non descript group, supposedly with representatives from all the churches plus anyone else who liked to come along and contribute, it gradually became a rubber stamp for the committee of two. Perhaps it was the best type of committee to have, it certainly got things done.

Bob and I kept things moving. We often had the treasurer "chewing his fingernails", because we worked on the premise that what needed to be done had to be done, and half baked measures weren't good enough.

Almost every Saturday morning for about five years from 1970, Bob and I arrived at the camp at 8.00 am and worked together until sundown. Gradually our wives became known as the "Ridgecrest Widows". We had trouble with the water supply and one Saturday around midnight, we decided to phone our wives to let them know we were O.K. However, both numbers were engaged which was strange. Suddenly the "penny" dropped, they were talking to one another!

At that time the telephone was still manual so the following took place.

"Exchange, would you please interrupt the conversation and tell them we are trying to contact them."

I'm not sure whether they were sympathising with one another or planning a divorce.

For a while I managed the camping side of "Ridgecrest" travelling in and out from Montefiores, Wellington where we had lived at that time. I opened up for the people who rented holiday cottages and I engaged various cooks for the camps but it just didn't work. My wife Rae eventually took up the cooking and we moved out to "Ridgecrest". Our children by this time had all left home and were working in Sydney. I gave my services free and Rae was paid only for time actually spent cooking. The pay was on the eight hour day basis, but we seldom pent less than fourteen hours per day in the kitchen.

If we were to make "Ridgecrest" our home until I retired in 1980, we needed a home large enough to enable us to have our children visit form time to time.

The committee agreed to build a 3.6m extension along the front and end of cottage No. 10 and open up the lounge room. It took just about 121 months to renovate the cottage. Bob and his son John were there every Saturday. When there was a “camp in”, Bob sometimes brought out Mrs Joan White to help in the kitchen so I could work on the cottage. At other times I picked up Joan late on the Friday while collecting the groceries, milk, bread, etc. Occasionally Joan came out on the Thursday and spent two days cleaning. She was paid, but like everyone else, her day was long and the extra hours were gladly given in service to her Lord over many years and until we retired, Joan White was a very faithful helper to my wife.

We had occasional help with the renovations from others but despite that we had to move into No. 12 for several months because our house had been sold and No. 10 wasn't ready. We moved in during February, 1974, and we spent six and a half very happy years in No. 10. The renovations provided a home that exceeded our expectations and gave us every comfort. Besides that, we probably had the best view from any house in the central west.

Timber, in the form of Cyprus pine logs, were donated for the cottage. John and Allan Bennett, Bob Turnbull and I, with the help of the donor, Mr Vic Lockrey and his son Jim, cut and loaded about eleven tonnes of logs. They were milled in Wellington with a 50% saving in cost. This procedure was repeated later when Albert Davidson renovated and enlarged cottage No 11. We really appreciated that help from the Lockrey family. Vic and Doris also came each year for some time and donated their services in the kitchen when the Christian Women's Convention was held. At those times the camp was almost full to capacity with from 90 to 100 ladies in residence. For two days Vic would wash up all day long. Anything that didn't move, of its own accord, was liable to find itself in the sink.

Vic and Doris also helped on several other occasions when they were requested and so we thank them, and Jim.

The first shrubs on the camp site were those planted between cottage No 10 and No. 11 by Wilf Turnbull and myself. Wilf also donated most of the Bearded Iris which put on a lovely show each spring. We had a very attractive garden in Montefiores and when we decided to move we put into tubs and tins numerous cuttings and roots. An overloaded five tonne truck was needed just for shrubs and flowers when we finally moved. It took nearly twelve months to get them all planted. I told my wife that nothing would grow on the banks until we carted some soil to put on them. Her reply was that if she waited until I carted soil nothing would ever be planted because I'd never have the time. She “stubbornly” went ahead, prised out rocks, put in plants and every now and then, when a larger hole was needed, “nagged” until I spent several hours with her pounding rocks with crowbar and pick. Occasionally I added a little soil to the holes and, contrary to what I said, everything flourished!!

“Well you can't win them all.”

Rae's garden and shrubs gradually extended from around our cottage, up past cottage No. 11, 12 and 13, across the road to the "opening stone", along to the hall, to cottage No. 3 and down the side road to No. 4. a few other bits and pieces sprouted "here and there".

Watering proved a big problem and we spent our lives moving sprinklers especially during summer. It wasn't until 1979-80 that I finally installed the present watering system which consists of small plastic sprinklers spaces at 2m intervals along a 2.5 cm diameter polythene pipe threaded through the garden. Even if those who follow aren't gardeners there is no excuse for letting the garden die from thirst.

Everywhere we went we came home with the boot of the car loaded with plants or cuttings and you can guess how I appreciated that! More holes to dig! Rae and I bought six liquidambers in Sydney and six claret ash in Orange. We brought them home on the roof rack. They were advanced trees but the wind, heat and dry conditions were too much for the liquidambers and none survived.

Rae concentrated on planting ground covering plants and shrubs. Pig face, gazanias, pinks and various ground creeping plants and daisies; the list went on and on. Geraniums thrived and were a favourite. From the Burrendong Arboretum came many of the Australian native shrubs. The complete garden, trees and shrubs were cost free to the camp and now provide a very attractive setting for the proclamation of God's Word. The claret ash, planted in 1974 are today beautiful trees.

I was sitting at home, in cottage No. 10, and thinking it was time to go to bed when the phone rang.

"Col Hansford here Eric. I've been talking to a Real Estate agent and have put the selling of 250 acres, adjoining "Ridgecrest", in his hands. My wife has just suggested that "Ridgecrest" may be interested in purchasing it. If you are, I'll give you the first option."

My heartbeat just about doubled. Doug Lockrey and I had done a little day-dreaming along these lives as we thought about future expansion, obtaining ponies for the camp and preserving our isolated environment. Until that time it had only been a dream.

Col continued: "I've been showing around some developers who are interested. Do you think "Ridgecrest" would be interested?"

"How much Col?"

He replied: "\$30,000 to us clear of expenses. You will have to agree to fence the western boundary. It works out a \$120 per acre."

What sort of answer does one give? At the time we were over \$30,000 in debt!

I continued : “Could you give us time to think and also contact the committee and I’ll see what we can come up with. It’s October 20th and we are having an Association meeting in Bathurst on October 28th. The final decision would have to be made then.”

Col went on: “I’ll give you an option that will expire on November 15th, I had decided not to sell any of my land for less than \$300 per acre. However, I’m interested in some cultivation country that is coming up so you have my present offer.”

There wasn’t much sleep on my part that night. \$30,000 in about three weeks! It’s impossible.”

“Lord you know we can’t afford to borrow that sort of money. We are already up to our ears in debt.”

It was then, I think, He gave me the answer, although I didn’t realize it at the time. “If you are to have this area which surrounds “Ridgecrest” on three sides, it will have to be bought with donations.”

I knew it would be hopeless to call a committee meeting without some plan. The members would think I was crazy enough as it was. \$30,000 in three weeks! There were about 100 acres of reasonable sheep grazing country, cleared and grassed, with a good dam on it for stock watering. The rest was “Billy Goat” country. I remember one dear old lady in Parkes asking what it meant by “Billy Goat” country.

The land in question was steep, rough and covered with green timber. If one had two billy goats running on it, you would have to hand feed one. That’s “Billy Goat” country. As grazing country I personally don’t think I would have paid \$20 an acre for it. However, it surrounded “Ridgecrest” with views of the dam and there was enough room further along the Ridge to enable us to build another “Ridgecrest” someday. One hundred acres would be enough to graze ponies for youth camp purposes and it was possible the rest could be improved.

Our fourth side faced Crown Land, which would always remain as such because it was vested in the W.C. & I.C. It may sound trite to say it but the Lord wasn’t making any more land around “Ridgecrest” and if we missed this opportunity it would be gone forever.

I’m sure inspiration then came from above – “If people will donate bricks for a building why not ‘acres for Ridgecrest’.”

With this one thought in mind I called a meeting. I can only remember a few of those present, namely Rev. Don Eagle, Doug Lockrey, Bob & Vic Turnbull and Jim Blatch. I guess Lionel Blatch and Bruce Pickford were there also and perhaps half a dozen others. Sorry fellows I don’t remember any more names. Put it down to advanced senility!

Everyone agreed that buying the land was an admirable idea but they wanted to know where the money would come from. “Oh ye of little faith and vision” which included me.

I introduced the idea of selling acres. “It just might work!”

Doug Lockrey then spoke up and from what he said I think Doris must have been there too.

Doug: “If you decide to go ahead the Lockrey family will donate the 10% deposit of \$3,000 due on November 15th.”

I remember thinking: “Lord, this must be your seal of approval. We’ll sell acres for \$150 each which will cover fencing and other expenses and have a title deed printed.”

John Francis had sold some 25 acre blocks for about \$300 an acre. A few of them had views of the dam so our price of \$150 was reasonable providing one didn’t look upon it as a grazing proposition.

The next step involved taking our proposal to the Western District Baptist Association meeting at Bathurst on October 28th.

It was decided at Bathurst that if we had \$20,000 promised by the time the option expired and we could arrange to borrow the rest, we could go ahead. Some committee members presented to their churches the following Sunday the plan to buy “Ridgecrest acres” while others went to neighbouring churches. I went to Cowra and Forbes.

Our next meeting was held on November 11th in the Wellington Church. No one knew just how we had gone until that night. I think it was Jim Blatch who announced that we had \$25,000 promised and also a couple of small loans. \$25,000 in twelve days! A miracle! Lord thank you! By the time the option expired on November 15th, there was \$28,827 in hand.

It took about twelve months to get the legal procedures completed and contracts exchanged. While we were waiting our money was invested in a building society and the interest for that twelve months provided the balance required to give us the land debt free. Truly the Lord’s hand had guided along the way.

People, who if they had been asked for a donation would have given \$20 or \$30, gave acres instead and many folks gave two. There was one donation of about seven acres, but mostly the acres sold in ones and twos or even smaller amounts. People even clubbed together to buy one. I know of one pensioner couple who bought two acres.

I guess many people would have stories to tell. However, the money went firstly to the Pastors of the churches and then to Doug Lockrey who was the secretary of the Association. We don’t really know³ all those who bought acres but we do know the Lord

moved in the hearts and minds of His people and they responded to the need. Praise God!

Excuse me while I get a handkerchief to dry the tears and clean my glasses.

On January 19th, 1975 the land was ours. Allow me to go back to October, 1971. At that time I had a ring from Norm Robinson the Officer-in-charge of the W.C.& I.C. area at the Dam wall. He said that there was a group from Dubbo applying for several acres of water frontage lease on Eagle Beagle Bay and asked if we would be interested in doing the same. It was thought that two applications might have more chance of success than one on it's own. Fortunately the area concerned was under the complete control of the W.C.& I.C. , at present known as the Water Resources Commission, so there was some hope, because the Lands Department was not involved.

I selected the Eastern side of a long ridge which ran down into Eagle Beagle Bay and was straight down the hill from the camp site. I drew up a sketch plan and presented the application. Some time later, after a survey, the maps were drawn and the area chosen allocated to us under the terms of permissive occupancy at ten cents a year, if and when demanded.

“Our own water frontage! Lord, You think of everything!”

I've never once seen the Dubbo group come to the area allocated to them but our camps certainly make good use of area.

Back to 1975. The Dining room at the camp had, until then, doubled as a hall and meeting room. This meant tables and chairs had to be packed up after each meal. It wasn't really satisfactory but we had no option. Then, my paper reading habit got us into “trouble” again. I heard later that some of the fellows from Parkes were going to ban me from reading them.

“For sale by tender! One building at Mumbil. A school divided into two class rooms. Overall size about 15 x 9 metres.”

This was just what we wanted for a hall but the question was where would we put it? More inspections were made by the committee. We discovered it was actually a prefabricated building, too lone to move in one piece, and would have to be cut in half. True to form, the Education Department had put a new galvanised iron roof on it only twelve months before. It had a two metre verandah all under the main roof.

We put in a \$500 tender, hired a D6 tractor and dozed out a bench behind the church. We figured it might just be possible to wriggle half the building at each time up the embankment. Bob Orr and Stanley Field came back with the prime mover from Parkes. Naturally, there was one problem. The half of the building we had to pick up first at Mumbil was the one we wanted to put in place last at “Ridgecrest”.

A chap who lived in Mumbil had a lot of 200 litre drums in his backyard, so we borrowed these and moved the first half of the building to “Ridgecrest” and sat it on drums on the oval. Back to Mumbil we went for the other half and “jockeyed” it up the embankment and into place. We had several wheeled tractors on hand and these gave a pull up the embankment. The semi had to back it up as there was no way out the other end. We then picked up the half that was “parked” on the oval and Stan and Bob backed it up the slope. The semi was “jackknifed” as much as possible and it looked as if the two sections would never join.

“X” stands for the unknown quantity and ‘spurt’ is a drip under pressure, an ‘expert’ is a drip under pressure (this definition is not original). All that is to simply say, along came the “Experts”.

“Perhaps we could hook a chain on and drag it a couple of feet this way or that.”

“Maybe we could jack it over.”

“Maybe we can slide it into position after we unload it.”

The suggestions went on and on. Meanwhile, Stanley stood to one side with a quizzical look on his face and said nothing.

Finally someone commented: “Why not let Stan and Bob have a go?”

Stan simply stated: “Just give us one try to finish the job.”

The nose of the semi hung over an embankment which dropped about five metres. Lit didn’t look promising but after a few minutes of “Forward a few inches; now back on the other lock; wriggle this way; wriggle that way.” Before we realised it, the two halves had joined perfectly. I think that job was their most difficult task but it was accomplished by true experts.

We removed the classroom division, concreted the verandah and finished up with a large, airy, well-lit meeting room, capable of seating 140 people.

The Christian Women’s Convention donated Holland Blinds for the windows, Bathurst church gave 150 theatre seats, Gollan church donated a piano and we obtained a stage of sorts and a large chalkboard for each end. Cooling fans for summer and heaters for winter were also obtained and that solved another problem.

After the building was in place we waved the last “goodbye” to Stanley Field and Bob Orr. Actually it almost wasn’t the last time but the way things have worked out it proved to be that. The Orr family of Parkes were very generous with the use of their Prime Mover and gave generously to our camp “Project” which the Bennett “boys” ran.

About the time of this latest building move in 1975, or it may have been in 1976, I don’t remember and it doesn’t really matter, Bob Turnbull’s business and private affairs caught up with him. However, when there is anything to be done Bob is always there. He’s on the Management Committee and only as far away as the telephone.

In 1974 Vic Turnbull had to give up the position of treasurer and this was taken over by John Bennett. When an electrician is needed Vic is also only as far away as the telephone.

Not much mention has been made of the Dubbo supporters. They were mostly people who were prevented from attending mid-week working bees because of their jobs. There were school teachers, office workers and others but under the leadership of Evan Elliott and Kevin O'Neill, they rendered sterling service.

Alf Petschel and Stuart Homer from the Orange church were other good friends who worked, organised and planned things from that end.

The Committee of two became a committee of one. I liased with Doug Lockrey, the committee chairman and with Bob Turnbull and John Bennett when necessary. Unfortunately the management became too much for a "one man show". I later sought to correct this by introducing the idea of a Board of Management. I reasoned that the drive and push had to come from somewhere and I hoped it would come from this Board. However, it appears to be only partially successful. The Board of Management first met in 1978. "Ridgecrest" really needs the services of a full time Christian Director with vision, flair and entrepreneurial skill. Such people are few and far between and salaries are always a problem. Well maybe someday, please Lord!

In 1976 the kitchen and dining room floors were covered with masonite and floor tiles. Keeping the dining complex clean and polished is probably one of the most unrewarding tasks of the camp. It never seems to be clean for more than five minutes. Sometimes I felt that I was married to the mop, bucket and polish.

Ruth and Albert Davidson, our first live-in helpers, arrived in 1976. They came with a background of many years of work in the Oriental Mission, The Sydney Rescue Society and amongst the Aboriginal people. The Davidsons were in their late sixties but very spry for their age. Albert worked on the maintenance of buildings and enlarged cottage No.11 into a staff cottage. He also did some local preaching around the district. Ruth was somewhat handicapped by asthma but was a keen gardener. We often laugh about the fact that her first act on arriving was to poke a digging fork straight through a polythene pipe. She did this while endeavouring to dig a hole for a special plant. The Davidsons stayed for two years and their work and fellowship was greatly appreciated.

The best water "diviner" I've ever seen was Jim Blatch. He didn't use a bent stick or piece of wire but a crowbar and he used it fair in the middle of the kitchen. He drove it into the ground to get a better push when we were putting the floor sections together. Underneath was a 2" PVC watermain pipe. Jim produced a "gusher"! the look on his face was priceless!

Another incident occurred just after we had finished extending the 2" pipe line from the middle of the oval down to the Foundation Stone. We had neatly covered in the trench

and “Blind Freddy” could have seen it was a pipe line. A visitor staying in one of the holiday cottages came sheepishly to me declaring he had struck water behind cottage No. 12. he had driven a “Totem Tennis” pole right through the line. It was the only bit of soft dirt he could find.

In 1976 the sub division fencing of the block we bought was completed and the western boundary fenced. Half the subdivision was without a northern boundary because it had been part of a “give and take” arrangement that had probably been operating for a hundred or more years. The northern boundary fenced was finally erected by contractors in 1981.

During 1977, extensions to cottage No. 11 were completed and the Davidsons moved in. Bob and I cemented two large tanks so they could be used to hold rain water. I had used them on my “hobby” farm to store wheat for pig feed. It drizzled all the time on each occasion we tried to cement them. The rain dripped in and every now and again there would be a “plop” as another lot of cement fell off. Eventually we got enough to stick to the walls so that the tanks could hold water. One tank behind the hall is used for the kitchen and campers and the one behind cottage No. 12 is for staff and holiday cottages.

1977 was the best year, to date, that we have had for camps. In that year we had thirty-one camps and fifteen hundred campers. By 1982 the number of camps dropped by one but the number of campers increased to eighteen hundred, due to some large school camps organised by Roman Catholics.

Rae and I did all the catering and cooking for the camps. Actually I was the kitchen “slushy”. Rae is a superb cook and I don’t think “Ridgecrest” will ever have better meals. They always tasted like home cooking and there was plenty for everyone. Sweets were served twice a day and the campers had cooked breakfast. Rae had the knack of putting in a bit of this or that until the flavour was just right. The compliments came thick and fast and there were too many for anyone to deny the claim that “Ridgecrest had the best catering of any camp in Australia. With a bit of help from me at breakfast time, before I went to work, and then more help for dinner after I finished work, Rae cooked for up to forty. When the numbers rose from forty up to sixty or seventy, Joan White helped and when there were over seventy we asked for helpers from the churches. Usually we hired two extra people.

“Ridgecrest” became well known and built up a reputation for good food, good clean accommodation, good beds and co-operative staff. People who had been to both “Ridgecrest” and the one and a half million dollar complex of the “Sport and Recreation” area on Stockyard Creek preferred our camp. They said we treated them like human beings and not just as numbers. The camp leaders who came to “Ridgecrest” could make a cup of tea or coffee early in the morning or late at night. They enjoyed the co-operation and the camp set-up which included the cottage facilities. We trust our witness hasn’t only been a physical one but that they have gone away with food for thought.

In the mid 70's we purchased one hundred and fifty chairs through acting on advice of an old Christian "Warrior" who was a speaker at several of our camps. He assured us that only about 5% of the chairs would need repair, it turned out the opposite, only 5% didn't need repairs. The chairs were very cheap and I'm not sure whether we paid fifty cents or a dollar each for them! They were ex-army so we were able to stack them away. By 1978 we had fold-up Laminex tables which were presented by our Association Camp Committee which runs our denominational Association camps. We needed those chair renovated so Alf Petschel took them all to Orange and with some helpers down there transformed them with paint on the frames and orange vinyl on the seats. Our dining room at that time sported new curtains, tables, chairs and vinyl covered floor. Things were really looking up. All the old plates, cups and cutlery were done away with years before and replaced with new ones. Every time Tae and I went to Sydney we visited the wholesale kitchen supply places and gradually our kitchen utensils were replaced and added to.

Three or four times a year Allan Bennett loaded his tractor on his lorry, drove the fifty kilometres to "Ridgecrest" and together we graded the road up the hill. You, dear reader, have no doubt noticed how impossible it is to tell the "Ridgecrest" story without mentioning certain names again and again. Allan is one of those names.

In retrospect the purchase of the grader from the Soil Conservation Service was, in some ways, a rather humorous incident for me but in other ways it caused much heart searching. The Soil Conservation Service advertised the road grader as equipment which was surplus to requirements. It was fairly battered and bent but still in a serviceable condition. I think it was advertised with the idea that the Mookerawa Water Park Trust would be the successful tenderer. It was advertised in the local paper for tender and there was no overriding clause such as "Lowest or any tender not necessarily accepted."

Only one farmer took the trouble to inspect it. We decided that Bob Turnbull should put in a \$50 tender for the grader. Nothing was heard about the tender for a long time and then suddenly I was told to deliver the grader to Mookerawa Trust. It became evident that they hadn't seen the tender advertisement and no one had told them of it so consequently they had missed out on tendering. However, a former Wellington District Soil Conservation officer who worked in the Sydney Head Office at that time decided that the tenders would be "Scrubbed" and the grader would go to the Park Trust for the price of the highest tender figure of \$50 which was ours.

I then experienced the problem of divided loyalties and I wondered what to do. The whole circumstances had a smell about it which I didn't like so I wrote a letter to the Minister for Conservation pointing out that the tender had been an open one with no reserve and no conditions. Naturally the letter was signed by Bob.

In less than three days I received instructions to pick up the grader from the Trust, deliver it to Mr Turnbull within twenty four hours and then advise Sydney. Bob received a letter of apology. That was one we did win!

Despite that “victory” it is one incident I’ve never been completely happy about. Altogether I had thirty-three years of service with the Soil Conservation Service, during which time I worked in a fantastic environment, for most of that period, and I enjoyed a very close and amicable working relationship, especially with senior staff, which extended to the top. For service to conservation involving my work on Burrendong Foreshores, I was recommended by the Service to receive in the June 1976 Queen’s Birthday Honours List, “The British Empire Medal.” I was a General Division Field Officer and fairly low in the pecking order, but subsequently I received my medal from Sir Roden Cutler, Governor of New South Wales. Hence my dilemma.

As mentioned previously, Ruth and Albert Davidson left us in August, 1978. Since then Albert had done interim Pastorate work and is now in Tasmania.

Our ride-on mower served us well but the time came when it had to be replaced.

I think it was Lionel Blatch or Bruce Pickford who said at a meeting: “I’ll see what the Bournemouth group can do.”

They eventually delivered a \$1,400 tractor type ride-on Rover mower after they had traded our old one in for about \$400. Thanks Bournemouth, you have always been around when needed.

The Orange church gave a new Simpson Automatic washing machine for use in the kitchen and Geoff and Sandra Smith donated an automatic clothes dryer. This has made it possible for the kitchen staff to wash and dry tea towels regardless of the weather.

The pumping system was duplicated.

1979 heralded my imminent retirement. For eight years I had cut and carted all the blocks of fire wood needed to keep the large semi slow combustion stove going and as it had two fire boxes it was a fairly hungry “beast”. All the wood used was white box which had to be further split before it was fed to the “monster”. The question was, who would be silly enough to do this when I left? The answer was simple, no one.

We made enquiries and eventually out came the wood burning monster and in went a gleaming 2.13 m x 0.61 m stainless steel gas stove with large twin ovens, top burners and hot plates to match the old one. Actually we had a love/hate relationship with old wood burner. We love its warmth in winter and hated its heat in summer. The thing I hated most was having to go back at ten or eleven o’clock at night, after working in the kitchen from 6.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m., to stoke up the fire boxes. If we wanted any hot coals and a good start with the oven the following morning we found that that just had to be done. It wasn’t fully slow combustion and was originally made to run on coke. I was usually asleep by “stoking up” time and although I occasionally tried to organise it, I couldn’t really rely on anyone else to fill it chock full, shut off the dampers and put foil in front of the fire doors before shutting the insulated ones. However, “Ridgecrest” must have

benefited by many hundreds of dollars, which weren't paid out in power and gas bills, over a period of eight years.

One of the most worthwhile camps held yearly at "Ridgecrest" is the Spastic camp. How it came into being is worth recording.

Leigh Lockrey, the son of Doug and Doris, suffers from cerebral palsy and spends much of his time in a wheel chair. He can use his legs to push his wheelchair but has a very limited use of his hands. Although he is what most people know as a spastic, his handicap hasn't affected his mind one iota. He is intelligent, has a fine sense of humour and is one of the greatest organisers of pranks I have ever met. At Easter camps, more than once he had ended up under the tap, wheel chair and all, because of his starring role in escapades. Leigh, who is now (1983) in his late twenties, surrendered his life to the Lord at "Ridgecrest" in 1972. During the Easter Camp in 1974 he was baptised in the dam at Eagle Beagle Bay, the "Ridgecrest" swimming area. Although baptisms are not conducted at Easter Camp, this concession was made because he really felt that "Ridgecrest" was his spiritual home.

By choice, Leigh lives and works at the Spastic Centre in Frenches Forest, Sydney, and comes home to the farm at Gollan for holidays, Christmas, etc. For some years he was always found among the EASTER CAMPERS at "Ridgecrest". His mother Doris, and Sylvia, Bruce Pickford's wife, were the chief cooks for Easter Camp for a number of years. Even today these two stalwarts are the mainstay of the cooking and catering for the W.D.B.A. camps.

Leigh witnessed to his faith in Christ at the Spastic Centre and then came up with the idea that if he could attend a camp why couldn't others from the Spastic Centre do the same? Many of his handicapped friends had never left the centre or Sydney. Over the years they had been forgotten by almost everyone.

"Mum I want to have a camp for Spastics," Leigh announced one day. I guess that for a while his parents saw the difficulties, but he persisted. Those in charge of the Spastic Centre weren't sure it could be done. "Ridgecrest" was 370 kilometres away and that meant there would have to be an eight hour bus trip with necessary stops in between so people could be unloaded, toileted, fed and then put back on the bus.

Difficulties surfaced to be overcome. The camp started off with twenty-two of the more mobile ones and a few in wheel chairs. The churches of the west provided a help at camp for each spastic and the numbers increased until in 1982 there were over 38 present. Some of the more seriously handicapped are now added each year. For some years, on the Saturday of each camp, a picnic day was held on a farm. During the camp many of the "C.P.'s" (cerebral palsies) have seen, for the first time, sheep shorn, cows milked, pigs fed and cuddled lambs. The Harveys at "Aspley" near Wellington have been gracious hosts. On one occasion the Spastic camp visited the Western Plains Zoo at Dubbo.

After the Saturday activity those involved in the camp get “dressed up” for a special evening meal which is followed by a concert. Occasionally some of the Spastic Centre folk have taken part. I don’t think I have ever been as moved as when I saw one lad get up with his arms and legs jerking about then sing with great difficulty, “Jesus Loves Me”. Those present, with tears in their eyes, joined the chorus.

On the Sunday morning of the camp a voluntary church service had been held. To date almost all have attended and then they have left for home by mid-morning. Spastic camp continues to be a wonderful experience for the “C.P.’s” and a humbling experience for those who pair them for the week-end. Some have come to know the Lord as their Saviour and the witness is ongoing.

It is amazing how all this started through one young chap who is virtually confined to a wheel chair. His mother told me recently that he’s thinking of buying a computer.

I have written this as a casual observer because Rae and I haven’t been actively involved in Spastic Camp but we have attended several of the Saturday evening meals and concerts. I suggest someone should take up a pen and write more fully on the subject.

Footnote: Leigh has his computer.

Allow me, dear reader, another diversion. I have written this while staying in Dubbo with our eldest son Brian, his wife Brenda and our three grandchildren. One day prior to Christmas 1982 it was 43° C. a fortnight later Brenda came in as I was writing and suggested I take a look outside because we were about to experience a “Cobar Rainstorm”. Thick red dust blocked out the view of houses less than 100m away and I had to switch on the light at 3.30 p.m. on December 7th, 1982. A week earlier aeroplane pilots reported the area had a dust storm which rose about 1,000 m. Four years of drought resulted in little or no wheat, dead stock, water shortages and the water level in Burrendong Dam dropping to about 11% capacity. It was a dismal picture of the west. I never saw worse conditions in the 35 years we were in Wellington and there were many older people who had not seen the country more drought affected.

Back to the narrative and the year 1979. We advertised for someone to take our place because we intended leaving in July 1980, “Ready or not.” We wanted someone to work with us for a while so they could get to know the “ropes”

Ted and Jean Dell turned up at the camp one day before Easter 1979. They had been visiting their daughter at Cumnock. Rev. Don Eagle had met them and directed them to “Ridgecrest” to “look us over”. They evidently liked what they saw and promised to come back and stay for some time after making a trip to Western Australia to see their other daughter.

By this time it was evident that “Ridgecrest” should start paying its workers because it was in the financial position to do so. This was one objective that we had worked towards. Ted took on full time maintenance and remodelling of the cottages. He

believed in doing things thoroughly. The cottages, which in recent times had been rather neglected by their sponsors, took on a new look. Jean helped Rae in the kitchen and we all were involved when it came to big camps. Ted and Jean became very good friends of our and it was terrific to have their company permanently on the campsite.

They stated emphatically, however, that they had no interest in gardening, so there at least was one problem which had to be solved in the future.

The Dells took over the camp management, catering and cooking when we retired in July 1980 and stayed until January 1982 when, like us, they found the job too much for them. We acknowledge, with thanks to God, their contribution to the ongoing maintenance, development and management of "Ridgecrest".

The 100's Club

There is one group of faithful supporters which had helped us out over the years. The group grew out of an idea which was put into practise after much discussion Doug Lockrey and I had had on numerous occasions. It became known as "The Hundreds Club". To belong, one had to contribute \$100 a year to "Ridgecrest" and the money raised was used only for capital development and not on "Day to day" expenses. The club aimed to have one hundred people contribute \$100 per year because we were sure there were enough people in the west who could afford to do that.

We have never had more than about thirty club members and this number had dwindled as the years have gone by. However, a lot of money was contributed and this substantially helped in paying of f the debt and financially assisting major development. If fees are kept to a level where they only cover the running costs, some means has to be found to pay for capital development.

I'm sure we need to go back to this idea and promote the 100's club until it is just that, 100 people contributing \$100 per year. It's still possible.

The 100's club gained most members when Ralph Morris, another member of the Bournemouth Group, promoted it during his term as President of the Association. It still operated but membership is greatly reduced.

The time also came when we realised we needed a vehicle, preferably a four wheel drive one which could clamber up and down the track to the middle pump.

Government vehicles are sold at Auction when they have done about 40,000 km or are two years old. I found out where a Soil Conservation Service Toyota table-top was for sale. It had a six cylinder motor, was four wheel drive and had had a rather easy life on extension work. John Bennett and I went to Christies Auctions in Sydney and bought it for \$5,000. At 40,000 km the vehicle was only just "Run in" and \$5,000 was about half price. Another problem was solved! Until then I had used my own utility to collect

things for catering purposes and had received a “mileage” allowance but that arrangement had to end.

For ten years prior to 1980 the Anglican Church at Dripstone stood empty and unused. It was a replica of the one we had at “Ridgecrest” and we had become resigned to the fact that it would never be sold to us. However, due to changed circumstances the church was offered to us in 1980. I think we paid \$200 for it. Its use was one of the very few things I failed to see eye to eye about with the Board of Management. I wanted it renovated, refurnished and joined to the other church so we could have seating for over one hundred. There was no way they would agree to that. They were happy to use the conference hall for services but I guess my Anglican background lingered on.

Ted Dell came up with a satisfactory compromise. He suggested we put it where it could probably be joined up to the existing chapel at some future date if needed. In the meantime it would be used as a storeroom.

Again we had to gather the gang and gear together. This time it was for Saturday, March 7th, 1980. We figured we would only need a prime mover for half a day so we thought it would be uneconomical to have Parkes come. However, I’ve no doubt they would have come if we had needed them. We hired Russell Hough and his prime mover. By lunch time we were ready to move and by sundown we had the church on site. Today it is still a storeroom.

It is probably the last building which will ever be moved to “Ridgecrest”. Future building needs to be of something more substantial such as brick or cement block. Our “fibro jungle”, as someone described it, has served us well. Had we waited for funds to build in brick it’s doubtful if we’d have ever got into action and many people would still be outside His kingdom.

“We cut our coat according to our cloth” and God blessed.

For a long time we toyed with the idea of trying to get softer water supply by sinking a bore closer to the river channel. Just weeks before I was due to leave, we were forced into action. Output fell in our original bore and the pumps sucked air when they worked continuously.

We obtained permission from the W.C.& I.C. to bore for another water supply and tried to line up a boring plant. At the time we were in the middle of a drought and everyone wanted bores sunk. Ours was only to be about four metres deep so no one came. I had spent half my life down the well I had in Montefiores. Had had to clean it out and lower the cylinders and service the centrifugal pump located 30ft down the well and I was sure some others in our group had endured similar experiences so we decided to sink a well only a few yards away for the river bank.

We mustered up some of the Bournemouth boys, John and Allan Bennett and Bob Turnbull and by the end of the day the well was down about four metres and lined with

concrete cylinders. The river level was three metres down. We pumped over 13,500 litres per hour and didn't lower the water level in the well. The river would never get any lower than it was that day because for some reason they had cut off completely the outlet from the dam. The water from the well is sometimes a bit cloudy but seems to settle satisfactorily. It's certainly softer and the supply is unlimited, unless the Macquarie River dries up. Of course that is not impossible but it is rather improbable. I saw it as only a chain of water holes back in the sixties before the Dam was built.

Early in 1979 we had a new type of brochure printed with a coloured print of the dam and "Ridgecrest" on the front. We compiled them in hundreds and Rae busied herself and sent out brochures to the leader of every Boys Brigade and Girls Brigade company in New South Wales also to all the churches in the state. Anyone who had had contact with us over the years received one and after the Roman Catholic issue had been resolved, a brochure was sent to all the Catholic schools and Churches in the Central West.

I am convinced there is a continued need to advertise our facilities. When the camp was first established its use was restricted to Protestant groups only. By 1978 this had become a real issue and was spilling over into the community.

The executive of the Association and Camp Executive met and draughted an amendment to the rules under which "Ridgecrest" operated which would allow the camp to be used by the Roman Catholic Church and school groups. This amendment was sent to the churches in the Association and each one was asked to take a congregational vote on it and then instruct the representative as to how they should vote on the statement when it was presented to the Association meeting in 1979. We believed this was the only way we would get a true indication of just how our members felt.

When the vote was taken at the Association meeting only two churches voted against the motion. In most of the other churches the vote was unanimously, or almost unanimously, for it. In my opinion it was a vote for common sense because one cannot have any witness to people if those people are ostracized. Not only is there the witness of the staff but more free leaflets disappear from the leaflet rack during camps run by Roman Catholic folk than at any other time.

I reject all doctrine not based directly on the Word of God as contained in the Bible but I believe Christ died for every individual, every group and nation. There are many arguments which will never be settled this side of glory and I respect the opinions of those who differ from me. In a very real way, over the years at "Ridgecrest", I have had to deal with the problem of camp usage. I am pleased it is one problem which doesn't have to be passed on to those who follow.

In 1978 I made a move to change the system of camp management from a large loose Committee to a small compact group which, I hoped, would have the interest of "Ridgecrest" at heart and would become really involved in the day-to-day running and the overall management. For too long the Committee had been little more than a rubber stamp in 99% of the decisions. "Ridgecrest" would not grow and thrive under those

conditions or in the situation which could arise where the manager considered himself no more than the paid servant of the Committee with a nine to five job.

The outcome was that the Board of Management was set up. It consisted of nine members, completely responsible for the running of the camp, but which was ultimately responsible to the Association as the Parent Body. The Committee met first in April 1978. At this stage I would like to pay tribute to the role played by Rev. Don Eagle in the whole of the camp establishment. During the setting up, and through the years, his God-given wisdom and common sense approach saved many situations. With a few chosen words he would bring us all back to basics. Often we saw people with strong wills at cross purposes with each other. Don's counsel always held a solution which was acceptable to all. May the Lord bless you Rev. Don with renewed health, strength and spiritual well-being.

My story draws to a close. I have mainly dealt with the physical aspects of "Ridgecrest" but before I finish I would like to just say how much joy Rae and I received from working in the camp situation. This joy took many forms. The Christian fellowship with fellow-labourers will never be forgotten. We were drawn into a bond of fellowship with people from all churches and I'm sure that this would otherwise not have been possible without "Ridgecrest". The leaders of the various camps, the campers, the people in the holiday cottages and the ordinary visitors all enriched our lives. My thought goes back to one paragraph, which I've already quoted, from the Annual Report 1972 after the opening:

- "The bricks, the mortar, the fibro and wood, the beautiful view, the fun and games, are only incidents and means to an end." Keep praying, with Rae and I, that God will continue to use "Ridgecrest" to draw "Men to Himself and extend His Kingdom." May all Glory be His!

We had a wonderful send-off in July 1980 and it was a night we will never forget. "Ridgecrest" will always be a part of our lives and just exactly what the future holds is completely in "His Hands." However, we will be in touch!

Eric and Rae Graham

Someone needs to keep the "Ridgecrest" story going but this can't be done from a distance. We returned to "Ridgecrest" for about a month in April 1982. Ted and Jean Dell resigned in January 1982.

Arthur Baker and his wife Maureen and their two sons come to "Ridgecrest" early in 1981 as manager.

Another couple, Frank and Irene Barrot came to "Ridgecrest" soon after we left in 1980. Frank was employed as a gardener and Irene helped in the kitchen, with the cleaning of

cottages and in other ways. They were about our age and we became very friendly with them.

Frank had spent most of his life growing vegetables, as a market gardener in Victoria, and both he and Irene were members of the Church of Christ. Interestingly, Frank was a bit of an artist and loved to paint in oils. He found a lot of inspirational subject around the camp and its environs, and sold many of his paintings. He also made a small curio which consisted of two small rocks stuck together. After they dried he painted a scene on one and then sold these as souvenirs through the camp canteen for either two or three dollars each. The camp received the commission.

Frank's artistic ability, however, was put to even greater use in the garden where, instead of painting on rocks, one could say he painted with them. He tackled the big steep bank which drops about five metres from the oval to the lower level of the kitchen and dining room complex and really transformed it into a thing of beauty. It was too steep for Rae or Ruth to clamber around and consequently it only had an odd shrub or plant here and there. No one really knew what to do with it. Frank didn't say much, he carted rocks by the tonne and tens of tonnes until he had benches here and there. Small gardens were built around them, he even highlighted an old stump. This kind of effort went on until he created something which is a thing of beauty and will give very real joy as long as "Ridgecrest" remains. He concreted the steps at the back of the kitchen. The ramp, and other concrete work had been done several years before and then he filled in the area with rocks. It really set off the whole area. While we were there in April, a Bird Bath made from a load of very interesting rock scavenged previously from Doug Lockrey's place, took shape on the corners of the oval. Further rock work was done around and in front of cottage No. 13 in which we lived. Frank's parting gift, just before leaving for their beloved Victoria was a waterfall from the Church level to the kitchen level behind cottage No. 1.

When not involved in "painting with rocks" he weeded the gardens Rae had developed and he kept all the camp grounds in first class order. In spring "Ridgecrest" is an absolute picture which rival any postcard scenes. Frank also developed a large, first class vegetable garden which provided large amounts of vegetables for the camp and for the permanent staff.

Everyone was sorry to see Frank and Irene leave but children and grandchildren "called" and I was happy to be at their farewell on November 17th, 1982. While one rock sits on another, Frank and Irene will be remembered at "Ridgecrest". Incidentally Irene had quite a lot of talent with a paint brush and also sold an occasional painting. She also had a wonderful Christian witness amongst the members of the Mumbil Tennis Club which she helped revive. After the Dells left and Maureen Baker took on the job of cooking, Irene helped. I think Maureen misses Irene "more than her right arm", as the saying goes. At "Ridgecrest" she was a bright and happy person, always wearing a smile.

May God go with you both and may His blessing be always yours. Many thanks from "Ridgecrest".

As I have mentioned earlier, Arthur and Maureen Baker took over the camp catering and management when the Dells left. Camp numbers have been maintained and "Ridgecrest" has prospered. Barry and Lyn Whalan, from the Dubbo church, joined the staff in November 1982. Barry, a licensed builder, felt that the Lord called him into service at "Ridgecrest". When the children grow up a bit Lyn will be able to give a hand but, at the time of writing, she is a very busy mother with two little boys. Barry is mainly employed on the maintenance of buildings but also helps in the kitchen when larger groups are in camp. I pray that their time there will be a blessing to themselves, to others and to "Ridgecrest".

At the end of 1982, when this was written there were very real signs of progress. A large area adjoining the dining room had been covered and gives an excellent protected play area. A large bench was recently bulldozed out below the bottom row of cottages and will be developed into a play area. A new access road has been made to serve cottage No. 8 and a bend taken out of the main entrance road up the hill.

We need another "Frank" to landscape the play area. There will always be work for people who are willing to serve the Lord, at "Ridgecrest".

A final word before printing in the Spring of 1984. God has restored the land, the drought is only a memory, the fields are green with pasture and crops, the cattle and sheep are fat, Burrendong Dam is brimming full and the gardens at "Ridgecrest" are a riot of colour.

The dream is not ended, it goes on and on in Eternity as a reality. God is using "Ridgecrest" in the accomplishment of His Eternal purpose, to Him be all Glory, Majesty, Dominion and Power, both now and forever more.

AMEN

"IMPOSSIBLE?"

Jesus said: "If you have faith even as small as a grain of mustard seed....nothing shall be impossible unto you." Mathew 17 V20

With Men things are impossible.

With God, nothing is impossible.