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Reflections of Tasmanian woolgrowers





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Acknowledgements

There are a lot of things which I want to say thank you for with this project, mostly the way in which people so warmly gave of their time to be involved. I constantly left peoples properties with an admiration of human spirit. There were many memories that people spoke of which expressed times of difficulty, and I left with a sense of admiration of people's strength, tenacity and courage.

Change is the only certainty in this life and the changes in rural communities sometimes seem swift and many. Humans are such adaptable creatures, finding new ways to be successful in agriculture which is developing as part of a global economy and experiencing constraints affected by a changing climate. Caring for the land and rivers is as important now as it has ever been. As someone living close to a river in an urban setting I feel thankful for the people I met upstream who respect the catchment.

Also thanks to everyone interviewed for the many cups of tea, home-baked treats and snippets of lives told through the stories. Great people working in great places. The wider world needs to hear about these people because it is their strength, compassion, courage, sense of community, optimism, mateship and love for what they do which makes rural communities so special.

The process

In the following pages are stories told by 23 woolgrowers in Tasmania. They have been selected as a broad representation of people involved in wool growing and caring for the land and rivers in their regions. The purpose of the discussions was to discover and document people's connection with rivers and life as a woolgrower.

The Land, Water & Wool Steering Committee, consisting of woolgrowers from around Australia, defined the project as The Five P Project, with the Ps being, People and their sense of Place, Proof, Profit and Promise. Proof explored the indicators people use to determine the effectiveness of a particular management technique; be it land, water or animal management. The definition of Profit included the unmeasurable; the sorts of things that enrich people on a personal level as well as financial. Promise revealed how people felt about wool growing and management of riparian areas in the future. Together, the five Ps formed the guiding framework for questioning.

Discussions were recorded and transcribed, with a selection of those discussions presented as property or district stories. The stories were then returned to woolgrowers for comment and review.

These stories reflect aspects of woolgrowers lives, and their connection with the water and land.

Jo Dean

Biodiversity for long-term benefits



Lindsay and Rae Young —
'Lewisham', Ross and 'Green Valley',
Bothwell

Photo Laura Eves.

Grandparents and Dad and one brother and sister came up here from Bruny Island in 1946. It was a big move for them because they lived in a really nice environment overlooking the ocean and they loved the water, especially Dad. He would have preferred to be a fisherman I think rather than a farmer. He said that he thought he would miss the fishing but when he got here he was so busy he didn't miss it at all.

They really came here to give themselves the chance to expand, which they did successfully. Dad and his two brothers all ended up with a farm. When they came here they ran 900 sheep on Lewisham in the first year that was all, basically just a big run, three or four paddocks. They built everything. Put the house right on the highway, which is probably the worst place to build a house but that's where they put it. I think Grandad wanted the morning newspaper which he managed to get without any trouble at all.

Mostly ploughed a block of tussock and sagg country, which in hindsight it would have been nice had he left some but one thing that he did which was quite unique, maybe it was because Dad only had a small bulldozer but I think it was because they wanted to keep the trees for shelter. There is a pretty large area of white-gums and they just cleared the light stuff out from underneath and left most of the trees which is a really good area for lambing and a good shelter area. It is probably one of the last areas of lowland white-gums in the Midlands. It was a good thing that they left them; we hope to try and keep them going.



They made huge changes to the carrying capacity, as everyone did after the war with super and sub-clover and getting rid of rabbits. It changed the country completely. On that part of the farm we run close to 4000 sheep which are quite big productivity gains. Now that there is so much grass grown compared to that period, surely that affects the amount of water available for trees too? Water doesn't get down into the profile like it used to. So that may be a reason why the trees aren't surviving as well, especially with the old trees which would rely on a huge amount of water, I guess, to maintain themselves.

Mount Augusta, up the back of the house here, is halfway between Campbell Town and Ross, 5 kilometres each way. It is a real landmark, you can see for miles. It adds a bit of character to the farm, apart from the telephone towers, I try and look the other way. It's a lovely spot, catches the sun beautifully and is well sheltered from the Northerly winds most of the time. Certainly a favourite with the family anyway. It is tradition to walk up there after Christmas dinner.



We have 5 kilometres of river frontage on the Macquarie, and we have fenced all of that. We probably could have fenced it a bit differently in hindsight. We went a little bit close to the river in spots. Along most of the river we have a reasonable strip of native vegetation coming back. Mostly Poa tussock but you see the odd tea tree looking much healthier. We hope that planting tube stock next year, long stems and getting more tea tree established it will become a much better environment along the river. We are hoping that we can get the native vegetation up thick enough so that the fence won't be needed because our fence is actually right on the flood plain and nearly all of it goes under water. Our flood prone areas are fenced to the flood level anyway so if we have got a riparian strip along the middle there eventually we will be able to

do away with that fence and just graze the flood plain periodically in short spells. Normally we don't worry about maintaining it until the spring's over because we could get floods at anytime during the spring. Two years ago I think we had five floods so we just waited until the summer and spent a couple of days tidying it up. It is mainly only grass and a few sticks that cause problems.

We have removed all the willows from half of the river and this winter we are going to plant long stems to try and get some native vegetation going. The other half of the river I want to actually do it the opposite way; get the native vegetation going before we remove the willows. Because at the moment the willows are the only things that are providing any shade at all for the river, for the fish or whatever.



Most of the willows were on the neighbour's property. We decided to do it together and clean up both sides of the river. We work together and employ a contractor every year who comes and maintains the regrowth by spot spraying and that works really well. Maintenance of the river is an ongoing job, it is very much part of it. It is not a matter of just fencing the river off and forgetting about it, because they respond to lack of grazing pressure too. They will come back harder and thicker if you don't continually maintain them. We have built maintenance into our management program now so it is just something that is done every year. If we do it every year it is not a great cost because the regrowth is only small and it is a one day job for a contractor to run along and tidy up.



There are fish in the river. I know we used to see platypus regularly when I was young. I think they are still there, we just don't see them anymore. We used to go down there and catch the red-fin perch, we never seemed to land the trout, had the

wrong worm, but we used to have fun catching the redfin perch and the odd eel, and they are still there. There have always been swans and ducks on the river. They don't nest there much. During the shooting season they come along for a bit of shelter and refuge.

I was talking to an older fellow in Ross the other day and he said that a late friend of his could remember when the bottom of the river around our area was covered in tea-tree and it was clear enough to see the bottom in his young day which was about 90 years ago. I think there has been a steady decline because stocking rates have gone up over the last 50 years and stock have had access to the river, grazing there and tracking down for drinks. Now stock water is pumped all over the farm anyway so it is no problem just to put a trough in the paddocks that are fenced off.



The country here just doesn't hold water; it has sand seams all through the clay so it is essential that we have the river for stock water. Also it adds value to the farm I think, it gives a real balance on the environmental side of it and it is a nice area to have on the farm. Hopefully the fishing will be improved once we get a bit of native vegetation to provide fodder and shelter for fish. It will become a pretty important recreation adjunct to the farm as well.

The flood plains add real balance to the grazing because if you have two or three beneficial floods over them in the spring time you get tremendous summer grazing at a time of the year when the rest of the farm is closed down basically. It adds real balance. Five per cent of our land is flood plains so it is significant beneficial grazing that we get over the summer time. The pastures on the flats are mainly ryegrass and annuals and the silver tussocks are definitely coming back in one section of the flood plain. It seems to provide a good balance of pasture feed. At certain times of the year they really eat Poa, especially the heavier

black soils which hold on into the summer. With careful management, with short grazing and long rest, they seem to get plenty of green leaves on them and sheep eat them readily at certain times of the year.



I think the river is becoming more important for farmers in the area. There has been a big focus on irrigation in the last few years and we are pretty lucky on our section of the river because there are not a lot of people who own land on it. We have only got one town and at the moment we seem to be working well together. We have got a rivercare and catchment management plan done and in the process of being done. The actual process of putting those two plans together brought us together more often than we did before. There is certainly a lot more interest in the river now. Water quality is very important to the town people and they are taking an interest in that obviously. I think in time that if we can get the river back to pretty good health and get the fish population up, the river will become a pretty important recreational area for the towns' people as well. I think the river has always been an important place, probably in the past more so than now. Hopefully irrigation development and rivercare will happen at the same time.

There are only a relatively small number of people on our section of river and the majority of them seem to be keen to improve the health of the river and the quality of the water and I think that we are a group of people that can work together; we have proved that in the past. So I am quite confident that positive changes will be made as a whole. Anyone who has seen the Macquarie River from the Mount Morriston Bridge upstream will see what the river can look like in its pristine state and if we can replicate that downstream and still run profitable businesses then I think everyone will benefit.





Macquarie River. Photo Laura Eyes.

There are multiple reasons why we fenced the river off I guess. Landcare is something the family has had an interest in and we wanted to start to turn the country around. I think it has been slowly dying over a long period of time. Especially at the back of our farm, there is hardly a live tree left. That was one motivation. The other reasons are animal health. Over the years we've had a lot of sheep coming across from the neighbours and vice versa, and it is much better if we can manage our livestock so they stay at home because disease control is important. If we all do our own thing within our boundaries it should be a lot better. Ovine Johnes was the major motivation for me because I have a sheep stud and I wanted to sell sheep to Western Australia. I had orders for sheep from Western Australia that needed to be accredited. That's the thing that really got the river fenced as well as the landcare side of it.

We made the decision about five years ago to phase out of cropping. We used to do a lot of cropping and I remember one time when we grew a lot of dry-land poppies and the year turned against us, we had a dry year and a lot of wind and we got a huge amount of erosion that buried a fence 2 feet deep and a few years later we had a stubble fire that burnt the same area and the sand storm was chasing the fire up the paddock. In the aftermath of the fire you could see all the problems that we had created through long term cropping, lack of soil structure and lack of organic matter in the soil. It was just there, bare, obvious. That was when I decided that our country really needed to be just growing good pastures to get that soil structure back and health back into the soil.

And I'm sure if we do it well; we will make just as much money out of wool and livestock as we were growing average crops. We did very well out of cropping in the early stages but we found that our yields were trending down. It didn't seem to matter what we did to arrest that, it wasn't really

happening. We seemed to get more and more weeds every year, using more and more chemicals. We just seemed to be going the wrong way from my point of view. And I always had an interest in running just a purely grazing property and we did an irrigation feasibility study of the property and decided then that it was a better grazing property than a cropping property so we decided to take the property that way and invest our irrigation money somewhere else and get a best return from our investment there rather than on farm diversification. Also we get economies of scale through having a larger flock.



We want to try and get biodiversity back in the area and to do that effectively we decided that we actually need clumps of trees with a full range of understorey plants and shrubs, with grasses and everything in with them. We are tending to plant trees and understorey out in blocks roughly 200 metres square so it is 4 hectares, or 10 acres and we put a game proof fence around there, netting with two off-set electric wires. It is very effective at keeping the game out. Long term we hope to have a full range of plants and shrubs and trees in them and we will be able to get periodic grazing out of there at times of the year like lambing and shelter at shearing time.

Long term I think the benefits of biodiversity are going to be quite marked. Especially in areas such as keeping down the population of red-legged earth mites and pasture grubs. To do that effectively we need to keep our plantings no more than about 400 metres apart I think. So we are going to try and do that. This year we are going to plant about 20 acres with strips of silver tussocks at about 10 metre intervals to try and provide shelter and also get some roughage back into the improved pastures for stock health. I noticed last winter when we had a flush of



green feed that there was no roughage and the sheep scoured badly so we hope, in time, that the tussocks will provide a hit of roughage in the winter time as well as stock shelter.



I think sheep love dry summers and we certainly get dry summers. It is a very healthy farm, it doesn't lay wet so we don't get problems with footrot and we don't get insurmountable problems with internal parasites like the higher rainfall areas get. It is a sandier sort of country that doesn't really grow good crops but it does grow good pastures. It retains the moisture well and we grow quite a lot of grass for the rainfall.

Sand is a bit of a problem in the wool but the sort of sheep that we are starting to breed now have better nourished wools which keep the dust out so it is not the problem it was. We used to get a lot of dust through cropping and grazing stubbles, but that is all behind us now so the yields are certainly well up on what they used to be in those days.



I happen to think that there is a very big upside to growing wool. I think that there are profits there to be made if you can do it well. Wool growing, I suppose it is a career really, for me it is anyway. Like anyone with a career I hope to be able to do it well, enjoy it and have an impact, even if it is only a small impact. Shearing, lambing, classing time, are definitely important times of the year. Seeing the improvements that you make. Shearing time is always a good time because improvements are measurable. How many kilos you have got and the measurable characteristics like micron and staple length and strength and those sorts of things.

Dad, I suppose he and his father worked very hard at putting the land together, that was their major objective in life. But Dad said to me once that he had always wanted to run just a grazing enterprise but always had to do other things to pay the interest bills. That is something that has always stuck in my mind and I decided that is the way that I wanted to run the farm and that one day I would and that's the way that I decided to go now.

We are trying to breed sheep that are quite different to the industry standard, referred to as Soft Rolling Skins. The sheep classer that we use has a background with the CSIRO and he and other colleagues did a lot of development and research work into the biology of how and why wool grows. We are applying that understanding of wool growing he gained then and putting it into practice. Getting a sheep that is quite opposite to the industry standard. Most sheep tend to have a staple length of 80–90 mills and are quite wrinkly sheep. Our sheep are very plain bodied and grow staple lengths that are 50–100% longer than the industry average. We are still maintaining low micron and high fleece weights. It has probably taken us 10 years to get to this stage, which is probably only about three generations in sheep terms. The health of our sheep is much better and the fertility is much better just due to the type of sheep we are breeding. More a natural type of animal, they are free of wrinkle, got better bodies and do well.



I think wool has a tremendous future. I was reading an article the other day which said that wool is the fastest growing fibre in the fashion world, even when prices are low. So I think if we can specialise in that elite end of the market things will be good for wool. If we can breed a more dual purpose sheep that has something to offer with meat value and fertility we will have enough diversity within our own flocks to contribute to reasonable profits. I'm determined

really to prove that wool growing is profitable in our area. I'm convinced it is. I think that you have to look at profitability over a longer period. Other things can be profitable in the short term but over a longer period I think wool growing and livestock production in this area will be just as attractive profit wise as any other pursuits. This is based on experience of growing crops and seeing yields trending down and growing wool now and seeing the productivity trending up.



We tried to sit back and look at what we were doing on the whole farm and cropping seemed to be becoming more reliant on chemicals. We seemed to be spraying weeds and ending up with more weeds at the end of the year than we had at the beginning. We seemed to be going in the wrong direction. Whereas most of those weeds the sheep will actually eat. Not only that, weeds are more or less an indicator of poor environmental health. Weeds only grow on bare ground.

A lot of benefits from biodiversity as I see it are getting whole communities of insects and bird-life back on the farm. At the moment it is out of balance. We are getting plagues of pasture grubs periodically and red-legged earth mites. Rather than just spray the red-legged earth mites and all their predators, in my opinion we should be encouraging the predators to live on our farm and let nature do most of the controlling for us. Chemicals are getting more and more expensive every year and why buy sprays when nature can do it for you?

Just further to that though, I think it is a long-term thing, getting the whole farm back into good environmental health. My family has been here for 60 years, I think it has been a gradual decline in biodiversity over that period. It will probably take us half that time to really build it back to where we get the full benefits from having a diverse population of flora and fauna.

I hope to see a fair bit of it, but I don't think I will see the full benefits of it, no. It is a long-term thing. It is very important to keep at it and leave something that the next generation can build on. I think long-term capital values will be enhanced by having a well managed farm environmentally. A lot of land values are increasing because people are changing their land uses from say grazing to irrigation or cropping. I think long-term we will get those same benefits from having good biodiversity and an environmentally well managed farm.

Good management as far as our pastures are concerned too. Through subdivision we now have about 90 paddocks on Lewisham that will allow us to run big mobs for a few days in each paddock with long rest periods, probably up to 90 days during the winter. The result of this will be better feed utilisation, more robust plants and therefore more robust root systems and good ground cover.

Soil organic matter comes mainly from decaying roots and with that comes an increase in microbial activity all leading to healthier and more productive soils and pastures.



We live very close to the road here, we own a 1000 hectares but our privacy is not as great as we would like. The advantages of living in the country would be greater I think if we lived off the highway so I am trying to put native vegetation in and shield myself from the increase in traffic noise that we have had in the last few years. Part of the area that we have fenced off used to be a spring that filled up every winter, used to be a home for frogs. But over the last 20 years it has probably only had water in it three or four times. That is probably a sign that the area is probably going through a dry period. It definitely is, going through the records.



Our average rainfall has dropped over two and a half inches over the last 20 years. Out of a 19 inch rainfall that is quite significant. We hope to create an environment where the frogs feel happy to come.



My family came here in 1946 but I have always been here. You just grow attached to the land that you were born on I suppose. I have worked here all my working life and I have a real personal satisfaction of working the land and making it, hopefully, a better place. When I come around the Mona Vale corner and see our hill (Mount Augusta), that's good enough, that's home. We always used to walk up the hill; you can see tremendous views from up there so it is a real landmark on our farm, and a reasonable landmark on the Midland Highway I guess. Certainly all my nieces and nephews enjoy it.

We have family Christmas' here still and that is one of the Christmas Day activities walking up en mass to the top of the hill. I fenced half of it off from grazing and for regeneration and that area is looking quite good. There are a few blackwoods there that are really responding to reduced grazing pressure. There is one particular blackwood that shot up out of a big cutting grass sagg about 25 years ago. Now that is probably about 30 feet high and it is a magnificent tree and there are dozens of suckers coming up underneath it and all around it now and that is a real landmark for us.

My parent's ashes are spread near there. My sisters and I have planted a blackwood in each spot. Mum's has grown really well. Dad's has struggled a bit so it has needed a bit more attention. It is higher than browsing height now, so it should get away.

I know farming is a business and we must strive for good returns from our investment but it is also the place we live and spend most of our time. Creating a pleasant environment will enhance our experience of living and working here.



Never a dull moment



Valerie Le Maitre — ‘Lochiel’ and ‘Wetmore’, Ross

Photo Laura Eves.

Altogether we farm 3725 hectares of which 500–600 hectares are cropped. It is made up of two properties, Lochiel and Wetmore. Lochiel was purchased in 1927 by my grandfather from the Estate of Robert Kermode for his youngest son, John Cameron, my father, and I inherited it on his death in 1998. Wetmore was purchased by me in 2000 from the Estate of the late Harry Gillett whose mother’s family, the Parramores, had been granted it back in 1820. Purchasing Wetmore meant that I had the chance to farm properly rather than just be a hobby farmer — the two properties made up a nice balance of cropping, grazing and bush paddocks and with the Blackman and Macquarie Rivers running through, a good source of water most of the time.

I returned to Tasmania when my mother died. Prior to that I had lived, with my husband Roger, in Melbourne, Europe and the US, but deep down I always wanted to farm. My family returned back in 1946 after my father was demobbed from the Navy to take up Lochiel to farm himself. I left in 1960 when I married and didn’t return until my mother died in 1988. It wasn’t an easy decision to return, Roger and I both had good jobs and the thought of moving my husband to Tasmania seemed daunting, bearing in mind that he was a geologist and an academic and had no knowledge of farming. But it all turned out well and I’ve been very lucky.

Farming is in my bloodlines. It was always what I wanted to do, in fact I would have farmed anywhere as I really enjoy it — there is never a dull moment — it’s full of interest. Perhaps I have an inquiring mind? You wake up in the



morning and jot down the jobs you need to talk to the men about, get started and all being well everything goes according to plan but in farming the unexpected can and does turn up which makes all that careful planning go out the window. Some of my friends in the city still ask what on earth do you do — well, if only they knew! Check the livestock, the water, diseases and pests in crops, plan for the future and that's just skimming the surface. As you can see I thoroughly enjoy my work. Such a variety of aspects including the freedom, dealing with nature sometimes at its most horrible and the most important part — making it a profitable business.



Lochiel, along with Mona Vale, was owned by the Kermode family over four generations. William Kermode arrived in Tasmania in 1819 from the Isle of Man with a view to settling and soon after received his first grant of land.

He arrived in Australia in his own boat and brought with him most of his family, some livestock and all provisions necessary to live a comfortable life for some time — this was quite normal. He was a very astute businessman and politician. There was a census about 1880 which records that there were 130 souls as they called them, living at Mona Vale and Lochiel at that time. Lochiel even had its own school which took in the farm hands children from Beaufront, Lochiel, Wetmore and Charlton.

The Kermodes travelled to and from England many times, attempting to resettle after they had made their mark here, however the English I gather were not keen to accept them into society because their background was unknown and they were 'from the colonies'. William Kermode's son, Robert, who built the present Mona Vale house,

visited England many times to gather up the wonderful wallpapers, chandeliers, furniture and carpets that he used to furnish the house when he built it in 1865.

The Kermodes were an amazing family when you think about it. Sadly, when the last one died here at Lochiel in 1927 he instructed his manager in his will to burn everything — and the manager did! There is an early photograph of Mona Vale with one of them in a rowboat that managed to escape. There is also a photograph of the last Robert Kermode in a shop in Ross which was the old Anglican Sunday School, but there is very little else left and when you think that family went back to the 1820s, had huge wealth, and the records and photographs of their lives was all burnt! Kermode was a gregarious person, very generous in his hospitality, and amongst the many people who came and stayed was Count Strzlecki who advised him on an irrigation project that is in use to this day. Mona Vale, Beaufront, Charlton, Wetmore and Somercotes are interlocked with irrigation channels that Strzlecki mapped.

At that time they were focussed on irrigating pastures for hay. As for cropping, oats was grown for stock feed, barley for beer and wheat for bread. There are the remains of a flour mill on what is now called Gillam's Hill — more than likely named after the miller — and the water for his mill came via one of Count Strzlecki's channels.



The Macquarie River to me is a healthy river. There has been an effort recently to clean out the mostly introduced weeds such as gorse, hawthorns and cumbungi along its course. The cumbungi is relatively new as a problem; however the hawthorns and willows are long standing. Somewhere in the family papers is a copy of a letter sent to the Colonial Office thanking them for the four valuable seeds of

gorse which they had planted in pots and placed in the garden. It's a good river for fishing too and a good habitat for platypus and the native fresh water mussel which the water rats love.

Keeping livestock from damaging the banks has been addressed by grants for fencing off areas. I don't have a large number of cattle which can do the most damage. Sheep seem to be far less of a problem. I haven't noticed any definite changes to the river or the banks since we fenced off the river but there again I don't go into those fenced off areas much now. During a flood, when the Blackman joins the Macquarie, the water can cover a vast area — lots of shallow water courses fill up and spill over the flood plain.

We fenced off our part of the river four years ago. I was asked to do so and it seemed like a good idea. We were supplied with the wire and steel posts and we supplied the end assemblies and gates. Another good outcome from the fencing is that my sheep don't cross over the river when it is low. There have been times in the past when not only my sheep but my neighbours have crossed over and that can lead to problems of all sorts.

My side of the river is not an easy one to successfully fence off. It's low lying. The other side is better. I've looked at fences that collapse and gates that swing up but it hasn't been successful. The flotsam just flattens it, sometimes taking the fence well down stream.



We have some very special wetlands on Wetmore; they carry some rare and endangered plants which I'm happy to do my bit to ensure they survive by fencing them off by way of a grant from Greening Australia, and keeping stock out, especially during spring and summer. As it turns out these wetlands are not fertile or profitable. These so called wetlands can be wet, growing a few aquatic reeds and endangered plants but

can also be dry, cracked mud — almost desert in their appearance. It's lovely to see them full of water as it happens so rarely. If we get a lot of rain you can see masses of swans, ducks and grey egrets feeding, nesting and raising their chicks. The frogs seem to come from nowhere — no doubt they make a good meal for the birds.

I think had they been fertile and accessible they would have been ploughed up years ago.

The Land, Water & Wool project has also given us money to carry out fencing. It's so good to see the native flora coming back. I don't see much in the way of benefits for sheep grazing — it's just native pastures. It's nice to see the trees getting a hold again. I don't think there's an alternative to fencing off — don't think it's possible to have tree regeneration unless we fence off the area, there's no alternative.



I do get surprised that botanists don't know all the species that are here as early botanists would have documented all these plants back then, no doubt travelling by horseback or by foot and now they drive and you can miss quite a lot!

There has been a project commenced in a couple of the fenced off areas, run by the University of Tasmania, plotting every single plant within a 2 metre site. This will become a benchmark for change. I think it would be just as valuable if they did it in non-fenced off areas especially to monitor the sustainability of the grasses. There is a range of different forest types that we have also agreed to fence off to conserve. My favourite site consists of a tall stand of gums, sheoaks and wattles which has a gully running through with three small lagoons. It's nice to see the regeneration.



Photo Laura Eves.

I couldn't see any profitable enterprise coming out of the areas I have agreed to fence off — they were either too rocky, they were a long way from water or didn't have water, light, unproductive soils too costly to improve — these were the things that went into making the decision easy for me to set aside areas for regeneration. To date I have chosen not to covenant — maybe in the future I might look at doing it.

It is nice to see the trees getting a hold again. It is not easy anywhere in the pastoral zone in the Midlands of Tasmania to have regeneration unless you fence off areas. The gum species on my farm are predominantly small cabbage gums — not good for much except fire wood but if we want them for future generations at all we must have to fence them off.



The grant of the fencing materials made it easier for us to fence it but more importantly if we can get hold of a workforce that are trained up, that is even more important. It is not easy when you only have a couple of farm hands working for you to take them both off all farm work to build a fence.

The Land, Water & Wool project is coming to completion. Areas of native grass lands have been targeted for fencing off and management.

As the old saying goes — “The farm reflects the footprints of its owner”. When I get out of my farm vehicle to walk a fence-line, to walk through thick bushland looking for missed stock, I take the time to look at what is growing under my feet.

I gauge sustainability by looking — looking at the grasses and so on. You know drought is the best time to look — what's surviving, what's not. If you want a good idea of what's happening, bearing in mind that when the drought finishes how long you are going to have to leave it

unstocked. Sometimes you just have no option but to eat things down further than you would want to. Hand feeding is an expensive alternative. Sometimes you have no option but to sell stock.



I think if there is one issue which will get a farmer agitated about, it has to be water and I am no exception! Most people in Tasmania would be aware the Macquarie Catchment area where I reside has finalised its plan. None of us are satisfied about the amount of water we are allocated. However there is only so much stored. Most of us have put in on-farm storage. This is going to be absolutely essential as in the summer months we might well be in a position that we cannot take water out of the river because it just isn't there. It is a big issue and I can't see it getting any less political and frustrating.

We have about 7 kilometres of river frontage on to the Blackman River which runs intermittently and a further 4 kilometres along the Macquarie River. A 6000 mega litre dam has been constructed on its headwaters. The other dam from which we have an allocation is Toom's Lake dam. For us, accessing this water is all by pumping from the river either directly to an irrigator or by pumping the water into our dam over some 3 kilometres. We are charged according to whether it's summer or winter take or if Trevallyn dam spills it is free to pump for four days whether summer or winter as that water is excess to hydro requirements.



At the moment we have a nice, fresh stream or river running through the properties. The water has always been slightly brackish which the new comers to the village complain bitterly about. It has always been this way — sometimes quite brown after a flood — if only the new comers realised that the flood was cleaning out the river. Many of our new comers have come from



Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Canberra where they have lived in suburbia and they want what a major city provides in the way of so-called clean water, sealed foot paths and out of site sewerage works. They look at our community for its rural background and to a lifestyle change.

Regular monitoring needs to be done to ensure that, with the large amounts of cropping, the rivers do not get polluted. So far we don't have a salinity problem but we need to watch it.

I think that all dams built into a stream should be required to release a small amount of water at all times — just enough for an environmental flow. We've got three large dams in the district, Tooms Lake built by private subscription in 1889, the Bell's Bottom dam on Charlton in 1999 which is privately owned, and the Tunbridge dam built in 2005 by private subscription.

The Tooms Lake dam was built by its owners to ensure they had guaranteed water for domestic use and stock but they also had to supply the trains with water, and for this the government gave them 50 pounds towards the bill to ensure supply. They were irrigating pastures mostly. They did a little cropping and cut hay. Australia was riding on the sheep's back, very much so.



I returned to live in 1988 and I didn't notice a lot of change in the wool industry from when I left in 1960 except the floor price scheme was still in place, wool prices were just going through the roof. I sat down with my father and our manager at that time and we wondered how we were going to spend the money that year, and that hasn't happened since! With the collapse of the floor price scheme we've seen a lot of hardship, the ramifications of that collapse were horrendous to many farmers. Monopolies in my opinion have never succeeded.

I would say 20 years ago this farm's components were made up of 95% production of sheep for wool and the remainder cropping. Last year when we did our books wool was just over 50% and I don't see it increasing in the short term and reluctantly probably not in the long term. Fifty per cent of the land is made up of light sandy loam country and we are dealing with a rainfall of 12 to 18 inches a year, so sheep are really the only thing that does well. Sheep have minimum impact.



We don't breed sheep that produce super fine wool here; we breed what you might call the bread and butter variety. They range between 17 to 20 micron. They are just nice, good quality, easy care sheep growing lots of soft, bright wool and it is a pity that long term there might not be a place for it. The present breeding program has been in place for 10 years. I noticed that the wool then had a bit too much of a cream look about it and wasn't perhaps as fine as it could be so we took steps to change while still maintaining the cut. I am quite happy where the product stands at the moment.



We need to look at the American sheep industry which has grown substantially. I think the top shearer in the world at the moment is an American from Denver. There should be good market opportunities there. I mean we are dealing with 250 million people there and if you can get say 2 million of them wearing some sort of woollen apparel you would be made. Advertising and promotion is what's needed. By way of example — in 1988 we were pottering through the United States on business and pleasure and spent a few days in Chicago, so we went to Bloomingdales. I often pop into big department stores to see what people are buying, just another interest of mine when I'm not at home! They had tables of woollen jumpers

and cardigans or reasonable quality with a Merino label, made in Mexico, nice colours. I was looking at them and a lady came up and said “Good price aren’t they!” And I said “Yes, excellent.” They ranged from \$US40 to \$US70 a piece, and I said “Are you selling many of them?” She said, “Oh, yes, they are walking out the door and many buyers are taking one of all colours.” I thought ‘This is great’ and said “What is this mark — Merino?” She said, “Oh”, and being a little naughty I said, “What is it?” And she said, “I’m not really sure but I think it is a goat!”

Again, marketing would have solved her problem. A large poster of a Merino sheep saying to the buyer sheep, wool — pushing the emphasis that Merino wool comes from sheep.



The community of Ross is great. They support one another. Some complain, saying “oh, everyone has got their nose in other peoples business” but conversely they know when you are sick or when you are out of sorts or when a child needs a helping hand.

Our medical services in Tasmania are very supportive. Everything from help with nursing, meals on wheels, a community car for visits to Launceston, twice weekly visits from a doctor can be accessed if you need it. Even the local Post Master keeps an eye out for people.

Anzac Day, we had well over one hundred in the Hall; it was fantastic, young children as well as the elderly. We don’t have a school any more only the buildings. Christmas, every child within the village who turns up to the Christmas Party gets a present up to the age of 14. It is organised by a few of the local ladies who write to people asking for donations about the beginning of November, then they buy suitable toys for each

child. A former Post Master plays Father Christmas and hands out the presents, throws sweets for the young to gather up. Every child gets a present.



I think the lake in front of the house is my special spot. I have a little row boat and I row up the lake, no distractions apart from birds — black swans, ducks, moor hens, native hens and even the odd sea eagle. As a child I spent many an hour on the lake. It was a happy playground for me. We swam in it, water skied from one end to the other, watched the birds in the reeds. We often got together with family and friends for a picnic. It was and still is a happy spot. It’s about half a mile long and over 2 metres deep.

There were strict ground rules that my father put in place to ensure my safety. I wasn’t allowed to row the boat until I could swim from one side to the other and always tell someone where you were going. It’s not a place where you can let young children near as it’s over 6 feet deep and there’s nowhere you can touch the bottom.



I love my home; it’s where my husband and I have contentment. It is where our grandchildren come and play, friends visit but it’s also where my job is, not that that matters, it’s home. It’s a happy marriage of the two things. If you can get the right mix of people and skills — people that you trust and get on well with — you’ve got it made. First of all you have got to recognise that our workforce have got the skills, but once you have done that and they recognise that you recognise, it’s a great place to work and to live.





Macquarie River. Photo Laura Eyes.

Look after what we have got



Frank and Melissa (Milly) Youl —
'Barton', Cressy



Frank — Barton is 4000 acres of which we have got a covenant on 600 acres of timber and our wool growing operation is heavy cutting medium fine Merino. We have our own stud, Barton Stud, so we sell rams. The genetics we have used are Nareeb Nareeb and East Roseville.

My father, he had a stud and my grandfather did too but we have changed the genetics a bit since. We started when my father was still around and we've been here for 20 years so he had a couple of years input when we changed the genetics and we've just gone on from there. We fined up back then, the average micron was probably 24 I suppose. A different breed of sheep, the Polwarth. It was a cross between a Saxon Merino and a Lincoln. The Merino was

Photos Laura Eves.



bred mainly for the Tasmanian climate but we found that they weren't cutting enough wool so then we introduced these other genetics to kick it along a bit, fine it up a bit, fine the crimp up a bit, and maintain all the other good things the Polwarth had to offer.

We have an AI program, I don't buy in livestock, we just have an AI program every year, joining our top ewes to selected sires throughout the countryside. I set out to breed productive sheep that has a power of wool and generally the micron looks after itself if you go for handle and the right sorts of things. Our micron is around 20 micron and when we first started it was 21 and a half, 22. The ewes have got the ability to cut seven and a half kilos in a good season and the wethers eight to nine kilos in a good season. Our wool clip can be anything from 55 to 60,000 kilos.

We have 3500 ewes, and 3500 wethers. There's 1400 ewe weaners and 33 rams, depending on the season. Basically it is productivity. A lot of people chased micron during the 1990s because there was no fine wool in the stockpile, it was all medium wool so the price was down in the medium wool. All the consultants around the countryside were pushing people to grow fine wool. Now there is an over supply, like 35% of the Australian wool clip is now finer than 19.5. Before that started, probably about 12% of the wool clip was finer than 19.5 micron. If you are going to grow fine wool today you are better off to grow anything finer than 16, otherwise forget about it.



Frank — This place has been basically a wool growing property. We also have Angus cows, about 120 cows. We also do other things here as well. We bought the place in '85. I grew up at a place just North of Symmons Plains, called Elsdon. My family were there from the early 1800s.

Milly — I grew up in Melbourne, I am a Melbourne girl. We were married in 1978. We used to have a property just down the road, about 6 kilometres back towards Campbell Town. Moved here about 20 years ago. The previous owners, they grew wool here.

Frank — When we came here it was basically wool and a few cattle and a few fat lambs. We have still maintained a sheep flock, and the cattle as well and eight years ago we got into centre pivot irrigation and we now grow potatoes, poppies, grass seed, barley and wheat. It has given us diversification and it means also with these drier autumns that we are having that we can put in a crop for our young sheep and grow them out rather than rely on the rainfall.

The way the wool job was going, it didn't look real flash. I think you have got to diversify to balance the whole operation out. Wool has a history of up and down and has been like that forever and a day. Costs are getting higher all the time. I had kids to educate. We just couldn't do it on wool alone. Then after we put the irrigation scheme in the wool market took off again.

Milly — Yes, the motivation was an economic factor as much as anything. That has applied to a lot of people in the '90s.



Frank — I'm glad we did because we have got that diversification, we can do most things. Certainly centre pivot irrigation has opened up this country. Traveller irrigators, you know, the wind blows and it all goes there, blows the other way and it all blows there. You can't really grow good crops like that. I did use a traveller for a couple of years. There was a mate of mine said, "You are too bloody old to be carrying pipes around." So he's probably right, we then got into centre pivots. You just press buttons. Travellers, you are probably moving pipes every 12 hours

depending on how long the runs are, you might be doing it every 6 hours. These soils around here, they have got to be continuously wet, the sandy loam. Keep the profile full or whatever.

We are generally growing about 50 acres of potatoes a year and 70 to 80 acres of poppies and probably 150 to 200 acres of grain, wheat or barley. And 5 acres of vineyards.

Milly — That's a new addition, entering its fifth year. We planted that in 2001 and we have had our first vintage in 2004 and it is looking very promising. It had been discussed between Frank and myself and my late father for a number of years. I think it was more of a bit of a dream, dreaming and discussion really. Anyway, we decided to look into it a little bit further, and we got some advice and we had a few sceptics and anyway, we thought we might as well go ahead and do it. We looked at all the soil and tested all of that. I suppose, apart from anything else, we enjoy our wine. Anyway it has worked, so we are feeling quite proud of that. There were a lot of those that did say to us "No, no, you won't grow wine in the Midlands" and so on and so forth and that was largely a frost factor which obviously, that could still happen but yeah, no, we are very pleased with that. We could say that it is just a little bit bigger than a hobby, wouldn't you reckon?

Frank — I think, you know, in the long term it could probably return a hundred grand, gross, if we get it up and running properly. It's only 5 acres so... there are opportunities to expand too around the river. It is right on the Macquarie. It is three degrees warmer there than it is here at the house in the mornings.



Frank — We talked about it (*the vineyard*) in '88 when you know, wool was pretty good then and also the industry was pretty young in Tasmania then and I thought the way wool was we were

probably right, that was all we needed to do but I was wrong. If we had put the vineyard in then we would have been a little further advanced now. But I think, in hindsight, the technology over the '90s in the wine industry has improved that much that it is easier now to put a vineyard in. So 87/88 would have been when we first talked about putting vines in, wasn't it?



Milly — It was very exciting when we opened our first bottle of wine, as I said, a bit of dreaming between myself and Frank and my Father and unfortunately he wasn't here to see us do it. So there is quite a lot of sentiment attached to planting that vineyard. There are times when I think about it and think, 'Thanks Dad for a great legacy', because all I do is spend quite a lot of time working down there now. But still, it has given me quite a lot of pleasure. But certainly, yes, that first glass went down very well and it's not bad! This harvest, 2005, this season, well, that's in the barrel now doing its thing but that is looking really promising. Certainly we picked more this year than our first year. It was very exciting. It is fully labelled, Barton Vineyard, and we have just started selling it. It is small quantities from our first vintage so really we are just selling to our friends and family and just sold recently to a restaurant in Campbell Town, Zeps. I thought it might be nice to get into the local market. Just sort of gradually ease into it like that and see how it goes.

A friend of ours who has helped us with the project is our wine maker, a fellow called Nick Butler, and he has a vineyard down the Tamar called Holm Oak, he has been terrific. Yeah, a great support and a great help. We couldn't have really done it without somebody like him. With his knowledge and things like that because we were complete novices really. We knew how to take the cork out of a bottle but we didn't know much else. Although, it is interesting, because if you know a little bit about gardening, which



'Barton' Cressy. Photo Laura Eves.

obviously I have enjoyed over the years, although it is looking a bit neglected at the moment, I'm spending a bit more time at the vineyard than here. Certain things, it just falls into place and it starts to make sense. You know, it's like growing any plant really, whether it's vines, fruit trees or whatever I expect.



Milly — We have tourist accommodation there as well down next to the vineyard, we run accommodation called the 'Broadwater on Macquarie'. We opened the Broadwater at the end of '88. With some degree of success, a lot of repeat guests and my main target market would be the trout fisherman. I probably get about 80% would be fisherman and pretty much that many probably from the mainland too I would say. Certainly 60 or 70% mainlanders or overseas guests. So that has been a bit of fun over the years. I mean it's a really lovely spot where that is and it is just adjacent to where we have planted the vineyards, which makes it a bit more interesting for any guests staying there. It is busy at this time of year, through from about October to March is the best time for the tourists and fisherman.



Frank — When we first came here the property was basically watered by water holes, run-off, apart from a couple of hundred acres around the house here, a pump out of the Isis, so we decided to bring the power across the Macquarie River and we put a pressure system in right through the farm. We did away with all those water holes. You know, climate and rainfall had changed a bit, to be able to fill waterholes. That would have been about in '89.

Anyway, when we put the pump in we filled all the waterholes in and put troughs in, just a pressure system. You have got to have good water for stock. Stinking old waterholes, they just don't

do on waterholes, especially through the summer. See, stock can live on good water, just a bit of clover burr; they don't need much in the warmer months. If you have got crook water, well, you are in strife.

I suppose it is all part of looking after the country. We took a lot of gorse out when we first came here to Barton. We were pretty clear of gorse, we paid for that ourselves. There were also hawthorns.

So when we started in the Isis Landcare Group about 10 years ago, we got in and we got all the gorse pretty well out of it and the hawthorns or whatever, and we opened it all up. The long-term plan is to fence the river off. We have got it fenced in odd places; we have got a bit more to do there. We haven't done any replanting but when we fence off there will be enough things happen, silver tussock and tea-tree and stuff that will be there to do that.

Milly — A lot of people rely on it for their water and it was a bit choked up.

Frank — Yeah, she was very choked up.

Milly — So it has made a huge difference.



Frank — The river runs at about two and a half to three mega litres through the summer and that's pretty stable, and then in the winter time well, it varies. A lot of people fish the Isis these days. I think as time goes on, when we get the river fenced properly and a bit more tea-tree and stuff, the river will be a little bit cooler.

Milly — With the overhang. Still we get quite a few people come here to fish...

Frank — Oh yeah, a lot of people come in and say 'We are going to fish the Isis'.



Milly — They walk down from the Stewarton bridges, or staying at the Broadwater they can walk upstream from the Macquarie, where it joins the Isis. It is a lovely river.

Frank — Yep.



Frank — I have reserved the bush, for a start there is only 2% of peppermint bush left in Tasmania, wiped out 98% of it.

Milly — Is that right? In Tasmania or in this area?

Frank — Well, in this area and I felt with running stock through all that country we are never going to get any regeneration and in 30 or 40 years there mightn't be anything left. A tree's life is between 150 to 300 years, depending on what variety. I enjoy the bush and I thought I better do my bit, or our bit and shut it up. How many years are we up to? Four years?

Milly — Yes, four years now.

Frank — We haven't had the good sort of spring rains, summer rains to regenerate but this year I have noticed that there are some gums which are starting to get up like this [2 foot] wattles, which is good to see. But you have got to manage it. We stuck a fire into a couple of them just to help them regenerate as well because the grasses tend to smother them out a bit, the seed doesn't strike so you have got to put a fire in it. Some of it had little things and all sorts in there so we thought we would give it a bit of kick along. There is nothing worse than a bloody barren landscape. I reckon you have got to have 20% of your place in trees.

Milly — Or bush, natural.

Frank — Whatever, plantation, you know, plant trees, nice varieties. The 20% in trees is for evaporation. Stock do so much better if they have got timber on the windward side. Basically this place had a band of trees up the middle and on the westward side there was nothing and we put a plantation over there, which was, I don't know, 4 kilometres long because I found that the stock over there during the winter months just didn't do as well. They were cold over the night; walk all day whereas the ones on this side, they did so much better.

It [the shelter belt] is about 30 metres wide. We put some seedlings in and sod seeded some seed as well with varying results. We are trying to do another block, we started doing it two years ago and we have just had a bugger of a go at it. Last year we reseeded, it was so dry we only got a few plants. The year before we started and only a few came because we have had such a very dry spring. Whereas this spring, if we had gone and done it this spring everything would have struck. So we have got a little section to do.

We generally plant in September but we don't know what the weather is going to do in October or November. Before we put it in we spray out the area so you are not going to get all the grasses smothering them out, fence off and all those sorts of things. We have tried to do it properly but the weather was against us getting them established but we will win in the end. You have just got to keep at it, that's farming. If you spit the dummy, well you might as well give it away. We are learning all the time but every year is different and treat it accordingly. That's what the bush is all about. Every year is different; we know next year is going to be different to this one. That's what keeps us here. If it was all the same it would be boring.



Milly — Setting up the accommodation was quite easy really. The previous owners had built a little timber cabin down there, like a little kit home because they used to use it as a weekender. They were very keen on their water skiing and windsurfing and things, because The Broadwater itself is part of the Macquarie River, but like a huge lake. So they used to enjoy their weekends down there and it was just sitting there, empty. We had been here a few years and then we talked about it and thought ‘Well, we might as well utilise it’. At that point in time trout fishing was pretty popular in Tasmania. It has been interesting over the last few years, I have noticed quite a big swing, some of my guests who come specifically to river fish as opposed to go up to the lakes. A lot of mainlanders like to do that, which is quite interesting. I’ve even noticed that in the last five or six years. You usually say, ‘Are you going up to the lakes?’ and they say “no, we are only here to fish the river”.

Apparently the rivers in Tasmania have a good reputation for trout fishing. I guess it is just personal choice as much as anything but I certainly notice that a lot more guests that have come to me are coming over here specifically for river fishing or a combination of river and lake fishing.



Frank — I grew up on the plains. The block we had down the road here was 6000 acres but 3000 acres of that probably only ran 800 wethers. It was right in the middle of the place and I used to spend a lot of time on the horse. The other country was sort of semi improved, it still had quite good timber on it and I just liked travelling around the bush on a horse, gathering stock, tending stock. I just enjoy it. I don’t think you ever stop learning.

Milly — You have had some pretty good teaching, your Father loved it.

Frank — Yeah but he didn’t do much there.

Milly — No, but he sort of had an affinity with the land and then the stockmen, the people who worked for you, you pick up from them, you learn different skills.

Frank — The pace is a bit different out in those sorts of blocks. When you come into the lower country it tends to be a bit go, go, go.

Milly — It is probably what we miss, if anything, is having that bush, the hills and just taking off for the day in the bush.

Frank — We used to go and spend time, having barbeques up in the bush.

Milly — Having picnics.

Frank — Even here, we light a barbeque.

Milly — No regrets coming here.

Frank — No, it was a business decision to come here. You have the back drop of the mountains here, and the Western Tiers.



Milly — I went overseas last year, for six weeks because my eldest daughter was living in London at the time and so I made the journey over there to see her and do some other travel and I must say after that time I was very, very happy to get home. You do need to remove yourself from your own dung heap to come back and appreciate it. We work pretty hard.

Frank — No harder than anyone else.

Milly — You do lose perspective, because of the taking for granted thing. Going away and coming back, that’s when you notice that it is not such a bad life after all, despite its ups and downs. For us we need to get away.



'Marathon', Deddington. Photo Laura Eves.

Frank — Yeah, go to the front gate and put the indicator on.

Milly — Or go and play golf, or even sitting out here like we are now, this is nice in summer. Quite often we will sit out here and light that fire there and have a few of our wines, that's nice too. You don't always enjoy your own garden, I said to Frank, "it's like having your office where you live, for most farmers, I don't think they ever really relax", maybe I am wrong. We'll go and play tennis or something; we have the court there and having friends around and friends to visit, just ringing up spontaneously and going off for a barbeque or something like that. That is good. And we live in an area here where we have a lot of friends around us so we are pretty lucky here.



Milly — The community changes. From my part, initially, would have been the children's schooling when I first came to live in Tasmania and then getting to know other people who had children the same age. Going to the Campbell Town School and doing all that side of things and one thing leads to another so you make friends and probably from Frank's side, you knew a lot of people in the area anyway, we all have similar interests, we are all farmers and making that effort.

Frank — Everyone is sort of doing their own thing, kids are going to different schools so you tend to gravitate towards the kids. You sort of go through stages. Well like, before they head off to school, well we'd all get together on the weekends and have a barbeque or whatever and then off they go to school, so then you get involved in the school side of things, the sport, there would probably be a different mob of people then, all the townies and things and then the kids are sort of out the door and then you probably spend a bit more time with people in the area, that's how the system works.

Milly — From a social point of view you tend to get in contact with your friends but from a community point of view you do need a basis like Landcare or the fire brigade. I've just joined the local fire brigade and things like, we are having a barbeque here next week for everyone here who belongs to that but they are not people that you are seeing all the time. Campbell Town, I do most of my shopping in Campbell Town. I have always maintained and I am always a big believer in supporting the local town and I really haven't wavered in that even though I had a few years living in Launceston just part-time while the older two children were studying.

Frank — They were going to town. Sarah had five years at Campbell Town and Thomas three and Sam had none because the others were in town. So we bought a house in town and Milly was in there for six years until Tom left.

Milly — And then I put Sam into boarding school and I just worked part-time in town, you know, that was good just to keep me occupied. I was always home every weekend, never treated the place we had in town as home. I always told the kids "Don't get too comfortable here, because this is not home".

Frank — But I still think that it was good for the kids because they saw the bush and they saw how the city operated and I think that is a great leveller in their upbringing. A lot of country kids just have country and they have got no idea how the rest of the world ticks.

Milly — Well, you tend to have your blinkers on.

Frank — You know, it's not easy for some people in the city. You have got to get on with everyone in this world, teaches them all about the big city.



Milly — Campbell Town is certainly thriving now, it is amazing. I think it is going to be the cuisine epicentre of Tasmania, with all the eateries opening up there!

Great for employment opportunities.



Frank — For some people profit is the be all and end all. You know, they focus on always pulling the dollars in. Profit is not everything, it's handy, but I think sustainability is more important. Even the irrigation in this area, you have got to be careful, salinity can be a bit of a problem. You want big long rotations, grow grass, grow lots of grass and clover in the rotation and hopefully when we leave this earth the property is hopefully in better order than when you started, otherwise you haven't achieved anything. So that is why, you know, I am starting to omit some farming operations. With the cropping we do do, the stock fit in well with it. I think probably, in the early days you probably push a bit and that's because you bring kids into the world and you want to give them the best education and then just ease off after that. Otherwise it just becomes a vicious circle. You just have to add a few more strings to the bow and I think that's where this vineyard will be handy. You know, it's small, you could make a nice little living off of it and it is not affecting the countryside at all. It fits in well down there. We try and just look after what we have got. It is pretty fragile countryside Australia, the driest countryside in the world. I mean even this area here, mainlanders come in here and they say, "What's your rainfall here?" and we tell them, "22" inches and they can't believe it. They imagine that Tasmania has a 40 or 50 inch rainfall all over. And you go closer to Campbell Town. Campbell Town's rainfall is about 20. Ross, well just South of Ross is about 17 or 18. Tunbridge is the same, so it is pretty fragile.

I think rainfall patterns have changed because of cloud seeding. Rainfall has dropped off in this area by nearly as much as 3 inches a year. We are told that it doesn't affect rainfall in the east, but they have some terrible seasons, relying on easterly rains. The north westerlies just don't get there. I am anti cloud seeding, and patterns have changed. Very wet in the west, miss out in the east. Interesting that it is banned in other parts of the world.



Frank — Basically farming is common sense. You don't have to be very clever, just live with the environment.

Milly — But not everyone has that.

Frank — If you look at the big picture and you have a plan. You don't go in and try and do it all in one day. You've just got to plan it out and it all slots together. It might take three months, just a bit of a plan, up here. At the end of the day it all comes together, someday you think, 'Shit, are we going to get out the other end?' If you have got your head down and your arse in the air you generally get there. Some things that you might have done years ago, you think, 'No, bugger it; we don't really have to do that.' Take a short cut. Always look for the easy way, don't do it the hard way.

Milly — But things change all the time.

Frank — You have got to reassess things to be able to be flexible, weather changes and all those sorts of things, take it a different way. Like we were setting up a paddock to put some forage crop in in October, we wanted it in. We sprayed the country out ready to put a forage crop in. The rain kept coming, so we sprayed it again. The rain kept coming, and we sprayed it again and we are putting it in now. It's just the way it happens.

Milly — But it can be very frustrating.

Frank — Well, it can be. Diversification again, if you haven't got all your eggs in the one basket you are not relying on it, you have always got something else to make it happen. That's why we have always maintained sheep.

Milly — Frank is fantastic with sheep. He is a true shepherd is Frank.



Frank — Well, you see, the way with sheep today it is not only their wool, you know the wool market is a bit sad at the moment but every one of those four legged animals is probably worth 50 bucks or better if you do it right. So we have got the lamb side of it or whatever. Fat lambs, well, which we don't have, you get 70 plus dollars for those whereas in the early '90s I can remember trying my hardest to get \$4 for the old wethers. Four dollars you nearly had to fight for it. You know, the sheep flock in Australia has gone from 180 million to a bit over 90 or something.

Milly — But Frank, he does have an affinity with animals. His father did, his brother — Frank's father Bill was a very well respected sheep breeder and I could say that about you, and Frank's brother.

Frank — It is a wonderful fibre.

Milly — You do. You love it.

Frank — And I think they are getting better. You know with all these new processes they have got for woollen products or blends or whatever, it doesn't matter, if it has got 1% wool it's good. As long as there is some there. It lasts forever, wool. You put wool in a hole in the ground and dig it up and you want to use it, it will be basically all right. It is clean and green. It is a wonderful fibre, it breathes, you can put it in anything. There is no greater fibre than wool, I'll tell you that.

Milly — There will have to still be a future for it.

Frank — Oh yeah. There is nothing better than a lovely wool suit or a woollen jumper, it is just that feel about it.

Milly — I do think that you have a point, even if it can be a percentage I guess with costs and one thing and another, the way we are, it has just got to be easy to maintain and care for, and reasonably priced.



Frank — I think wool will just go along. It's not too bad at the moment, if you have got a bit of productivity. If you have gone to the fine end and you are only cutting a few kilos, they would be a little bit disappointed at the moment. Also the other thing just at the moment we had a very dry autumn so the wool cut is down a bit as well, so you get a double whammy. I think there is future there; we're just going through a blip again. It goes through three year cycles or something like that. But it is no different to the timber industry at the moment, it is going through a bit of a patch where the blokes can't get the contracts that they want because the dollar is a bit high and all those sorts of things come in there. It is not quite as competitive on the world market. Farming is up and down, it doesn't matter what you are in really. That's the way it has been forever. You have just got to get a bit smarter some times and find a way to work through it.



Milly — We swim in the river and we have got a boat, we do water ski on the Macquarie River, but we haven't done that for a number of years. Mainly swimming, that's it really, mainly in the summer, the kids love it. It is a beautiful spot. As kids they had the privilege of growing up on the farm, they were great cubby house builders in the hedge here and in the garden, down by the river.



Frank — Thomas had a flying fox across the Isis.

Milly — All those things like driving utes and vehicles and motorbikes, those opportunities are there for them, I guess they take it all a bit for granted but that is just part of it really.



Milly — It is a bit like a whirlwind when the older two kids come home, they breeze in and breeze out again. They grow up very quickly. One thing, we do love having them all here with us, particularly me I think, being the mother. I don't like saying goodbye to my babies. As long as they keep coming home, that's the main thing. This place has contributed to who they are. Although, we do maintain that if we weren't here, where ever we were it would still be home for them, if you have a pretty close family unit which I think we do. I try to maintain that but there is no question that some of their roots are here on Barton through the life that they have had. The same could be said for most kids that have grown up on farms, there would be that link and understanding, when they meet someone else who is off the land in whichever part of the world, something in common.



Frank — I went away to boarding school and I lived 16 miles away from where I was boarding. I was a full boarder. You couldn't go anywhere for a night, it was full boarding in those days. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed the boarding side of it, I'm not so sure about the academic side. Quality of teachers in those days was pretty average.

Milly — It is certainly different now.

Frank — What they had to offer back then, not like today, it is pretty broad, it suits everyone.

Milly — I wouldn't mind going back to school now.

Frank — All the kids love school these days. I enjoyed the boarding side, made good mates. You can just pick up with those fellas if you haven't seen them for 10 years, and pick up where you left off.

Milly — That's one thing that you get out of going to boarding school, I was at boarding school in Victoria as well, same thing.



Frank — If you go away somewhere and come back, you feel like you are home when you turn off the highway.

Milly — No, coming down the highway, yeah I think so, from Epping Forest.

Frank — You turn off at Epping and heading this way.

Milly — You look at the Tiers and the valley just opens out before you, I love that, every time.

Frank — It is a pretty unique sort of valley.

Milly — It's a great view and you just think "Ah, I'm home. Really home." Yeah, we like that. For sentiments sake that would be it, coming down that road, the Barton Road.



We do what we do, because we want to do it!



Tom and Cynthia Dunbabin —
'Bangor', Tasman Peninsula and
'The Quoin', Ross

Tom — Bangor is 6200 hectares, approximately 800 hectares sown to a mixture of pastures, 1000 hectares of grasslands and grassy woodlands and then the rest is forested to one degree or another or riparian and coastal areas.

We have got 1600 hectares in formal reserves and another 400 odd reserved under our management but not necessarily in reserves. That doesn't mean it is not grazed, it just means it is not timber harvested. The balance is managed for forestry in one form or another. At the moment we have got about, just over 300 hectares in plantation and nearly 1000 hectares of native forest that is just managed for regrowth timber basically.

We run about 60–70% sheep and the rest of it is beef cattle of various breeds, mainly Hereford and Angus and crosses thereof and the sheep are predominantly Merinos. There are about 1000 prime lambs or ewes for rearing prime lambs but the rest are Merinos, nearly 7000 Merinos. They are fine, 17–18 micron. We breed wethers here to take up to The Quoin, the place we have up near Ross, so there is proportionately quite a high ewe flock here, relative to the total flock. We run some wethers here too.

The Quoin is 2000 hectares, mostly native grasslands and woodlands with some sown pastures. We bought it in 2001 as a grazing property, and also with the aim of conserving the vegetation communities there.





Tom — The Bangor property was never one holding. The first block which is the one where we are living on now was bought in 1890 by my Grandfather's Father. He had a property up at Bream Creek and he ran his younger sheep here. It is interesting how times change — he bought this because he used to have a property out at Cockle Bay just North of Bream Creek up towards Triabunna/Orford area and they used to have a lot of trouble with the Tasmanian Tigers coming down and killing their young sheep in the winter. That was the story, but I suspect he was going to buy this property anyway. He certainly moved his young sheep down here as soon as he got it. Certainly the Tigers used to kill a few sheep because they tried to trap and snare them.

When my Grandfather came here after the First World War, about 1918, there was a number of soldier settlement blocks established on the un-allocated Crown Land bordering those two blocks. He purchased those as they came up for sale and then it was just added to I guess until the last couple of blocks we bought about five years ago, a couple of small blocks that were still in other private hands. So it has been added to over the years. I grew up on the property here; I only went away for school and university.

I did all the country child stuff here — fishing, shooting etc., as well as working in the sheep yards and so on. We went to primary school at Dunalley, and most of the time we walked home from the school bus stop at the main road, about 5 kilometres. There was usually a bit of a rush home in time to listen to Argonauts on the radio. Most times it wasn't a problem, but if we got diverted it could mean a rush at the end. It was a pretty good lifestyle I guess, reasonably austere as Dad worked pretty hard to establish the farm as a viable unit and there was not a lot of spare money around, but we had pretty much all we needed and lots of opportunities going to high school and University in Hobart.

Cynthia — I grew up in Hobart, Howrah, but I have been here as long as Tom and I have been married so that's over 30 years. We have two sons, Matthew and Robert. Robert is married to Emily and is an engineer working in Brisbane at the moment. Matthew and his wife, Vanessa are back here working with us. Vanessa works in research so she has been working through the University for a while.



Cynthia — About 10 years ago we decided to get involved in educational tourism on farm. The involvement with people from the outside started when the media and general public were criticising what was going on on farms and started to talk about farms being unsustainable and farming practices being bad. It became noticeable in the '90s, the greens got more vocal. Just generally, people were becoming more vocal about what was happening on land and the criticism of logging would have started at about that time and we knew we could sustainably log and we could do other things sustainably here and we thought the best way was to show people what we were doing so they could see for themselves. If they had questions then we could answer them.

Tom — Yes, it would have been then, that's right and it was the conservation push, it has always been a real bone of contention for me in Tasmania particularly, we have this single issue, icon issues of conservation in Tasmania, it is wet forests. You know Tasmania's wet forests are probably one of the most highly preserved and conserved plant communities in the world? Over 40% of the original wet forest that was in this country when Europeans first landed is in some sort of reserve status. And yet the grassy woodland areas, there's something less than 2%. So what is really in danger here?

Cynthia — We had one bus trip here with some people and I happened to be sitting next to a pretty well known vocal conservationist who was against logging and when we had finished the trip he said “Oh my word, you should get Gunns (or North then) down here to have a look”. And I just turned around to him and said “Well they did it!” (Laugh) And he couldn’t believe it, well I don’t know where he had been to look or what his perception was, but he was pretty interested by the end of the day to see and notice what had happened and how sustainable it was. So we had some good days doing those sorts of things.

Tom — That was the general thrust of it, rather than try to convert, the approach we took was to say there is another side to this argument and this is what it is, and that has been our philosophy all along.

The other thing about all this is, and this is where the whole conservation debate goes a bit wrong, is that we are not actually talking about many people being involved. If you have a society which is made up of people who basically don’t care then you end up with a very bad outcome in terms of environmental management. So the other side of the deal is to talk to those people who are in that category and say “Well, there are things that you need to be aware of and there are things you can do to make it better and these are what they are”. It is important that a much greater proportion of the population become involved in actually making a difference, not just a few making a noise!



Cynthia — It is important to do what we do here but, in terms of the community I think there are wider issues. If we (or Australia) don’t start getting some things right in terms of climate change and some of those gross issues, our shelter belts aren’t going to matter very much because things are going to start dying and

disappearing regardless of what individuals do on their land. No matter if you live in towns or anywhere else. We have got to get out there and do something!

I think NRM (*natural resources management*) has a lot of strategy and I’m not sure how the strategy is going to be put into practice and who is actually going to carry out the on-ground works that are needed. I think Landcare needed a change. Landcare is a great movement, it got people involved and it did some really good things, it needed some sort of change but I suspect the change could have been done within the landcare movement. I see NRM as being a separate movement which has moved in with strategies and come over the top if you like and I’m not sure that we are not losing some of the enthusiasm that we already had from people who were involved with landcare because they have been pushed out and pushed around a bit.

I think the real issue for NRM programs, and one they don’t consider much, if at all, and this is a big mistake, is the concept of Sense of Place. This is a very important concept for farmers who work in the environment on a daily basis and who have a very strong connection to place. NRM programs could achieve so much more if farmers’ sense of place was recognised and respected. If farmers felt their place would benefit by changing land management practice I am sure they would readily do it. Unfortunately too many NRM programs try to impose values on the farm, their environmental priorities, and this severely impacts on the sense of place of the farmer. We have a lot to learn from the aboriginal communities about this.

Tom — I think the devolved grant processes that went on with NHT 1 (*Natural Heritage Trust*), was genuinely devolving decision-making out into the community and it was doing a really good job. I think, to be frank about it, the bureaucrats in Canberra and in the state could see themselves being done out of a job. Rather



than try and talk about the bigger issues like greenhouse, or water quality, one that has never really been seriously addressed in its own right, in terms of marine ecosystems. They have tried to control the NRM activities at the local level. I mean everything that goes into the sea comes from the land and that has never been addressed as a big issue thing.



Tom — In any of these things, there is a whole range of places where people are at. There are some people who have been part of a Potter Farm scheme in Victoria or did a whole farm plan in 1986 in Tasmania or whenever it was, the first one, and have been there ever since. And there are other people who are just putting in their first shelter belt. Now that's the reality and that's the way it is. This is particularly noticeable since we have been doing Tasman Landcare with the native vegetation strategy bushcare Project. Now it is a Landcare project and every time we have another project we have more and more people interested and they all come in at different sorts of levels. So it's really interesting.



Tom — We had a Landcare group based around here, Bangor Landcare. It evolved and changed in time from a vehicle which was set up originally to let people see what was happening here so people could be informed and make their own decisions. It then became a vehicle which administered and ran, and promoted broader landcare and bushcare projects in the region. The region is now from Sorell to Port Arthur basically and we thought it was time to morph it into something else and basically gave it a new name to give it a broader focus. People sort of saw the name Bangor Landcare and thought it was just here when in reality it wasn't. The last Landcare project we had people participating from Forcett to Port Arthur.

What motivates us is when you see people who have been involved in projects and what they achieve. You just realise that it is worth the effort and they are the people who are making a difference. If you get a couple of landowners to fence off a streamside to keep the cows out of the creek or whatever it is, that keeps building and building momentum, you end up with a totally changed mindset in the community. And the other thing about it, I guess the other motivating thing is that these people are making money, they are running farms and businesses as well and they can see the benefit in it and that is really important. Improved water quality and improved stock management are the sorts of things we are pushing.

Cynthia — They are changing individual and community awareness of issues. You have got to start somewhere. We started looking fairly insularly about it and my opinions changed and other peoples' opinions and visions changed too. Maybe not the same direction as mine, that doesn't matter, but as long as people grow and develop then something has been achieved.

Tom — If you can see people in a position where they can add up all the bits and pieces and make good well informed decisions then that's progress I reckon. At least if you can put all the cards on the table with as much knowledge in the decision making process as is possible it is much better.



Tom — For a while here we had school groups regularly coming to the farm and learning about the area. The recorded history of this place goes back to well before European settlement. We come across middens in the coastal areas which is another part of what is special about this place. Anyway, back in the early days of Landcare there was funding for schools which helped with the buses and getting the kids out here from Hobart

and all over. It had its positives. I run into young people all the time who say they have been down to our place. A journalist from the *Mercury* the other day said, “I went to your place!”

Cynthia — Somebody who said they’d been down to our place and some *old* bloke talked to them.

Tom — Yeah, we’ve had a few funny ones like that, especially with conference groups. Because the conference atmosphere is totally different and you get 40 or 50 people getting off a bus here you rarely remember faces. The next time you see them it will be in a totally different context somewhere else, you will be different, they will be different and you don’t recognise them at all. I’ve had a couple of those.

Cynthia — People always remember the setting and the scenery because it is spectacular. People do remember what you say to them about the environment and people remember how passionate we were when we were talking. We learn a lot of things from people coming too, so it is not only a one way communication. We have learnt heaps of things.



Tom — It was surprising how common it (*the presentation*) was between groups. It varied a bit but we covered the whole lot from Aboriginal archaeology right through to modern farming practices and history and everything in between including vegetation and the whole bit. And the reason is that they are all the things that you take into account in what you do. It is not a single or even one or two issues; there are a whole host of issues that are involved. It is important that people understand that all those issues are important. Obviously if you have got a group of marine archaeologists they are going to want to talk about marine stuff more than blue gums, but everyone has an interest in how we put it all together.

Cynthia — It was important for us to give people an understanding that there are a lot of issues involved and I liked people to realise that we have to weigh up issues to make decisions. Everything is not always clear cut and quite often we make mistakes and get it wrong because we didn’t consider the issues broadly enough. I think the process of decision making is one of the things I like people to go away with. So they can weigh up issues themselves when they read about them, or in their daily life, so they can make different decisions about some things or reinforce the decisions they had already made if they were making good ones.



Tom — Essentially we work on two timeframes for decision-making. A short-term one and a long-term one. The short-term one is equivalent to your cash flow. There is no use having a million dollars coming in two years time if you have to pay the bills between now and then. It’s not really, well, colloquial slang, “There’s no use draining the swamp when you are up to your arse in alligators!”, that sort of decision and it is important in business, you have got to keep the short term in focus. But it is equally as important that the long-term stuff is there as well. Unless you are getting the longer term stuff you are always going to be in the swamp where the alligators are forever.

It really is important to think about the longer term stuff. If it is going to make you financially unviable or it’s going to be too costly in the short-term for the long-term gain you can’t really justify doing it. There is nearly always a short-term pain but you have got to make sure the pain is not unbearable. It doesn’t matter what it is, if you are fencing off riparian or coastal areas, reticulated watering systems for stock or whatever it is, it’s planning. You have to break it down and do it in small bits all the time, particularly with stock watering systems.



Tasman Peninsula. Photo Laura Eyes.

Cynthia — But we have visions of how various areas will operate and in some cases we wait for old fences to fall down before we fit them into the plan, as long as there's no degradation that is irreversible, as long as it is looked after, we don't have to do it yesterday.



Tom — We were doing planning stuff before whole farm planning but the whole farm plan gave it a framework and a context and that is why it is so valuable, it's ongoing. It's not the actual nitty gritty bits of the plan, but having the framework. We are always referring to the plan.

Cynthia — We don't always get out the old sheets and maps and things, the framework is pretty well in our heads now.

Tom — The old bits of paper are no longer relevant. Now Matt's got a GIS.

Cynthia — The basic principles we used then we are still using.

Tom — Visions were there and the whole farm plan gave them a framework to work within, with time-lines. They don't always happen as quickly as you would like either. You have got to realise that, that's just a fact of life, that's just the way it is. You make your plans assuming that everything else is going to be average and you get dry years and you get wet years and everything in between, high and low prices. The plan also allows the big issues to be broken down into doable bits and that's important. The planning process has got to be flexible as well and do-able.

Cynthia — Then you get break throughs. Someone was known to say poly pipe was the greatest invention there has been for years for farming, they are probably right, it has probably allowed for water troughing and allowed for irrigation. We were just talking the other day about water storage for the next 20 or 30 years

with Matthew and some things which seem unviable at the moment, but you never know, there might be another poly pipe breakthrough and then you wish you had something else to back it up. So there is always that risk I suppose. Things you can't include in your plan because they are not invented yet. So you have to allow for some flexibility to make the most of them if they come along.

Tom — The vision is really important, the vision guides the thing but it has to be underpinned by all the short-term strategic stuff as well. You need to make sure there is someone actually doing the bits at the bottom. Otherwise it becomes just a piece of paper.

Cynthia — And of course now our vision, — interesting with the change in generations, there is really no competition for visions. I guess our visions are running out a bit.

Tom — No, it is just changing.

Cynthia — Yeah, it's changing.

No, I suspect as you get older and you have another generation coming on, I don't feel it is so important for us to be generating all that vision for the farm. I'm quite happy for Matthew and Vanessa to be generating the vision. So far we haven't had any big barneys about it. We are backseat drivers now. We like to be in the backseat.

Tom — You haven't got hold of the steering wheel and the foot on the throttle.

Cynthia — I don't know that I want to have the steering wheel and the foot on the throttle all the time.

Tom — I'm quite happy to be chauffeured around and that's the change.





Tom — I'm a believer that you don't learn anything from your parents. By that I mean in the technical sense. For example I was in the car when the boys learnt how to drive, but I didn't teach them how to. If the source of technical knowledge for each generation is from the previous one, we have a problem. Each generation invents their own knowledge and they invent the things that are going to be important for them, not the things that were important for their parents or grandparents.

That's the way society needs to progress, that's the way it needs to work I suppose. But there are a whole lot of values, life values, that you do inherit from your parents and that's the critical difference. It's important that kids get exposed to and learn those life values. What they learn about putting up a fence or drenching a sheep or whatever, one would hope the next generation has got better ideas and knows that there is an easier way than the way we did it. But in terms of the bigger picture stuff — goal setting, planning, concepts of budgeting, concepts of holistic management and all those things, that's very transferable across generations.

Cynthia — The ethics of how you manage your animals, what you are actually doing and what is involved is what we hope that our family has learnt and that we share rather than how we do it. I guess if you are confident that you share the same values then you can be fairly confident in the back seat. I suppose that is a value thing that you pass down, a respect for other peoples' opinions and respect for how people are. So when we are making decisions, if we have all got that, then we can make the difficult decisions somehow. It is a learning process for parents to respect their children as well, not just the other way around. I think the role of the parent is to teach children everything they need to know

to be a capable adult and to be able to live within the world so if that's your aim you have got to expect that you have got some learning to do as well. It is not all one way.



Cynthia — Our philosophy is working with nature rather than trying to control it.

Tom — If you are going to fence off a streamside or a riparian area, you think there are a whole lot of things that are going to be important as outcomes, including water quality and habitat, easier stock management. Certainly in terms of business, I didn't appreciate how big the gains were going to be for grazing management and productivity of pastures once we start putting up fences in coastal riparian areas. It makes it so much easier that you can put in some pretty good grazing management systems because you have already got boundary fences most of the way around.

Cynthia — There have been pluses for management that haven't necessarily been the reasons for putting in the fences or whatever to start with.

Tom — The water system — the flexibility you get from a reticulated water system I had not fully appreciated.

Cynthia — We have been saying that this year. I don't know how on earth we would have managed without troughs this year because we have had to fence off the waterholes because stock have been getting stuck. The flexibility we have got as to which stock you put in first or second is a real bonus. You couldn't put cattle in first and then the sheep in later because the sheep would get bogged in the waterhole. We have said quite often this year, 'thank goodness we have had water in place'.

Tom — In terms of the environmental outcomes, there have been a few negatives. Like there are wallabies living in places where they never used to live before — and wombats. So they are not always good things.

Cynthia — Shelter belts and native vegetation that has been left in between paddocks. There's so much wildlife in there that we must be losing pasture growth and that's a negative. In terms of the ecology of the whole place they are not that necessary. Birds coming out into the middle of the pasture are good but in terms of the wallabies, kangaroos and wombats...

Tom — But there are ways — we might have to look at burning some of those.

Cynthia — Actually it is a challenge to a lot of people. We put out surveys quite some years ago and one of the main reasons people didn't want to conserve native vegetation on their place was because browsers inhabited it and they didn't want them in their pastures, especially in places that were highly productive. So it is a big problem and I'm not sure what the answer is to that yet. Visions and planning strategies have to be flexible enough to allow for change, and what works in some places doesn't work in other places as well. And that is what has been interesting about the land up near Ross and we knew it would be a challenge. It's the same in that it's farming with native vegetation and pasture but the environment is so different that the challenges are a lot different and the management is necessarily a lot different. So some of the strategies we have here just wouldn't work up there.



Tom — To manage all these different things it is a matter of allocating the time. We sit down and look at it and say, "Is this an activity that is worth being involved in?" Then "how much time or effort have we got to commit to it?" and then

as opportunities come up we weigh each one up. When we did the Landcare things it became very obvious very quickly that we must get mainstream industry organisations and bodies to see 'Landcare' as an essential part of the wool growing business, and support woolgrowers in their NRM activities. Some woolgrowers are really keen and will become involved regardless, but there are others, and it is probably the majority, who although really keen about wool growing, unless he can see Landcare and NRM as an affordable and profitable part of their wool growing business, won't do it.

Having worked out the time thing, we could look around and when something like Land, Water & Wool crops up, or Sustainable Grazing Systems key program, we can get involved. This is an activity where we can add some value and is along the lines of what we are thinking of, it is worth getting involved with. Then it is a matter of working out how much time you can put to it.

Cynthia — Sometimes it is not the amount of time you spend on a particular activity but how fruitful that activity is. There's time and there are stress levels as well. I don't think stress levels increase if the activity is fruitful and you feel good about it.

Tom — There was one girl who was doing an interview for a magazine after we won the McKell Medal, trying to explain all this stuff and she said "It sounds like common sense to me." I said "That's probably one of the highest compliments you can pay to somebody when you are prattling on to somebody and they say it sounds like common sense" — that's what you want it to be.



Tom — Australian Wool Innovation (AWI), the wool industry research and development body, is a classic because the wool industry is pretty conservative and the research and development



side of wool — whilst they have had some innovative products post farm — a lot of that stuff has been very conservative. As a result of Land, Water & Wool, they wanted a NRM strategy and there are two schools of thought. One is to have a separate NRM program, and the other one is to integrate NRM principles into existing programs, pasture productivity or whatever it is. In terms of the farm situation, it is the later that you want to have. You need to have woolgrowers thinking, 'NRM is part of my wool growing business, it's not separate, it has got to be in there. But politically, organisations these days need to have some paper they can hold up and say 'this is our NRM strategy' and it says very clearly that these are the environmental yard sticks that we are going to use. It's putting your cards on the table, and that's important. It is going to be a bit of a challenge to have a bit of paper to hold up and say this is what we are going to do and to build it into the business. And the way to do it is to make sure that, well one of the ways that will make it happen, is to make sure that the act of building good NRM into good wool growing practices is seen and recognised as the thing to do. Not just the outcomes, but the process bit of it. To get good outcomes, you have got to have good process.

The actual business about woolgrowers saying, "Yes, it is important to manage that riparian area for the marine ecosystem that it runs into, for the animals that live in it, and I am going to incorporate the management of that into my overall livestock management, as a key part of our operations. It is important that they be recognised for doing that, and there is a need for people to see and recognise that. It is a bit like getting some reward for Landcare I suppose. I remember saying at the time that we do in Landcare what we do because we want to do it. It is really nice that other people say you have done a good job but that's not what you are doing it for. So it is exactly the same thing here in a broader industry sense. It is one thing for a

woolgrower to incorporate riparian management as a fundamental part of his business operation but for someone to say and recognise that is an important thing to do is just added value if you like.



Tom — There's a beautiful thing about environmental management. Every little step you take in a positive direction is a positive step to have taken. If you are a hobby farmer with 20 hectares and half a dozen sheep and you fence off the little riparian zone, that's just as significant to that person as Joe Bloggs with 20,000 hectares and fencing off a couple of kilometres of creek. The processes and the bits and pieces that go behind making that decision are the same and obviously a small farm has a limited amount to do, the bigger one has more scope. But in terms of the triggers and levers and everything, they are very, very common across every one and the environmental benefit at the end of the day is essentially the same, it is just more. It is only quantity that changes, not quality.

You see people who have planted hundreds of thousands of trees in landscapes which have been cleared in the past and you think 'How the hell did that ever get to this?'. When you think about it, it is quite simple — you just get a Hamilton Tree Planter and you put a tree in and then again and again and again and again — the process is the same! It is no more important — the bloke who is planting his ninety-nine thousand, nine-hundred and ninety-ninth tree, that tree is just as important as the fella planting his first one.

Everyone is different and have different motivating factors. For some people it might take some particular honey eating bird or marsupial mouse or whatever it is, some wildlife feature. They might want shade or a better outlook from the house or they want this or that or something else. Someone else it might be straight out to add

capital value to the block of land they are putting the trees on but at the end of the day it doesn't really matter — the outcome is the same. What we want is for AWI to be seen as a mainstream organisation saying that it is a good thing to do.



Tom — I'm confident about the future of the wool industry in so much as there will always be challenges and there will always be opportunities to overcome them. It has got huge challenges in terms of land use. It is a very real possibility that wool will become a by-product of the cropping industry and it is in a lot of parts of Australia. If it becomes that, and not the main game, it is going to be very interesting because it will become very difficult to maintain quality and all the different things you need, we are told, that the buyers want.

There are structural challenges as an industry in so much that it is a product that consumers do not have to have. We have got to be able to present a product by building our own demand, which is always going to be a challenge. But for a lot of Australia, it is the most sustainable and maybe the only land use, commercial land use opportunity that there is. If they weren't running sheep there wouldn't be too much else that you could do basically. That has got to be recognised as well. You could run kangaroos I suppose.

Cynthia — It is a good option but whether they will be commercially acceptable or commercially possible, that's a real challenge.



Cynthia — It is getting harder because, like life in general really, the more you know, the harder your decisions get because you have got more things to weigh up and morally you have some idea of the consequences of what you are doing. The more developed, one would hope, as you get older, in sense of morals, so making decisions about land falls into that category too.

Tom — What do they say? The easiest decisions are the ones you make when you don't know anything!

Cynthia — I think so.

Tom — That's a good thought! So you ask somebody who knows nothing and get them to make the decision.

Cynthia — Not necessarily the best decisions.

Tom — No, but they are the easiest ones to make.

Cynthia — But at the time, when you think you don't know anything, you think the decision would be easier for someone who knew more, but I'm not so sure.

Tom — You don't know that it is — you are probably right.

Cynthia — That's what happens with government regulations. Nobody can necessarily understand everything about a farm, and the people who live on the farm don't, but someone from outside certainly doesn't. They are not in the best position to make the big decisions. Which doesn't mean to say that their knowledge is not valuable, but it is only part of the input.



Cynthia — Subdivision is a bit of a concern.

Tom — Subdivision is one of the biggest challenges we have got I think, in the long term. I am a firm believer, and experience has taught me, that unless an asset, any asset, can earn its value or earn its keep, you can't maintain it. So if you have got a block of land and its value keeps going up and up and up, unless you can do something with that area that is going to earn you an income commensurate with its value, whatever figure you like to pick, will give you a return — 5%, 2% whatever you are happy with



in the long term, once that becomes very, very small you can't hold the asset and that's why businesses go broke, because they can't earn enough money from their activities to sustain their capital value and in the corporate world that's what corporate take overs are all about.

Somebody sees more value in a company than it is paying its shareholders so they go to its shareholders and say, "I'll give you so much for the shares" and the shareholder says, "Yep — the company is not giving me that much for it", so they take it and the same principle applies. That's why you get farms being subdivided instead of being passed on as farms. That's why you get forestry companies buying farming land. It is just worth more as a forestry block to that forestry company than it is to another dairy farmer or vegetable grower. The taxation law certainly adds to the problem. Forestry plantation developments are able to attract investors not because they are a good investment, but because they are a good tax deductible expense. It is not a level playing field.

Cynthia — So in terms of Tasmania in general, here as a farm, the biggest threat to maintaining the integrity of the coastline is subdivision.

Tom — Even if we have a vision, we would not sell the farm and we think we can see our way clear for the next 20 or 30 years, to maintain the holding and all of its relevant values in the long term, it has to be economical to do that. Whether we like it or not this world goes around on money. There is more money trading on the Sydney Stock exchange everyday than what has been spent on landcare in the last 10 years. So if the vision is to remain one of conservation, it has got to pay its way.



Cynthia — That is a good thing about sustainable logging of native forest. Because in the past forests were of no economic value, they were just burnt like hell so that you could get some grazing value off them. Once forests became economically valuable, it paid to look after them. Now they are becoming uneconomic again. There was a radio broadcast the other day where old growth forest and native logging were used synonymously. So there was no distinction between the two words. I am concerned that in 20 years time there will be no harvesting of native forest at all. Well, that is my prediction anyway, unless things change, and it is obviously what the timber companies think too, otherwise they wouldn't be putting in so many plantations.

Tom — The forestry operations on this property have changed over the years. Way back, it tended to be selective harvesting just for high quality saw logs for various end uses, including, if you go back far enough, apple boxes and then scantling and building timber and so forth. Then when the woodchip mill was established at Triabunna in 1970 it changed the whole economics and the whole management regime of forests. So instead of going around and just picking out the very best trees it gave us a market for a lot of trees which were either too crooked or too rotten or too old or too small or whatever it was. You could harvest in a much more planned and better way. You increased the yield of not only saw logs but also pulp or woodchip timber. The other thing that that did of course is that it enabled you to build decent roads and put in good infrastructure which put the whole thing on a much better footing than just picking the eyes out of what was there, which was basically what we used to do. Now it is changing again of course with the community perception that logging native forest is a bad thing and basically we have now got to see that the future is going to be in plantations. We think it is a backwards step but if you are going to be in the timber game that is what you have got to do.

It is backwards because of two things.

One is that it is pretty much unsustainable clearing of whole areas of forest and planting single species and managing it just for short rotation. So for a whole lot of reasons you are never going to end up with old forest, it is always going to be young stuff with a whole lot of values you are never going to get to, where as with a selectively harvested native forest that is managed properly, it basically retains all of its natural values and conservation values can be there for a long time.

But anyway — economics is part of it as well in that the quality of timber out of the plantations is of a higher quality for paper-making than native species because these trees are selected for pulp making qualities. There is a bit of market drive there as well but for us anyway the predominant driver is certainly the concern that we are going to end up out of the timber game if you rely on the native forest which is a bit of a pity really.

We are getting second cuts off areas which were originally logged in 1972, moderately selectively logged, we have been harvesting those areas so that's only 30 and a bit years, and they are talking about 15 year rotations on plantations.

It will be interesting to see if they get 15 years in this area. Time will tell I suppose.



Cynthia — We used to spend summers at the coast, at Lagoon Bay, there is a shack down there that Tom's uncle originally built when he farmed here with his father and we would move down there in the summer basically, in the school holidays. Tom would continue to work from down there and the boys and I would enjoy the beach. That was special when they were growing up. We would spend a lot of time on the beaches and do things there. The orientation tended to drift towards the coast.

Tom — It is a very scenic area and it has a lot of history and certainly the more you find out about places, and it doesn't matter if it is in the area you live in or a country you visit or whatever it is, the more significance it takes. We have been here for four generations, the accumulated knowledge is greater, it's additive, you get to know quite a bit, not only about the history, but about all the interactions within the ecosystem.



Cynthia — My definition of home depends on where I have been. If I've been to town for the day it's when I turn into the drive.

Tom — Oh! Is it?

Cynthia — It's not the same for you then! What you learn about someone after all these years!

Tom — I'm just asking, just thinking about that.

Cynthia — I'm just thinking when we came back from South America, it takes some time to — I suppose your mind is not here fully when you have had a big trip. I suppose landing at the airport you feel that you are home. So that's a question of what's home to me? Home is the whole place; it is not just the house.

It really is about my sense of place I suppose. What I feel as my place. It's all about the things associated with the place as much as the physical place itself. Sense of place is very powerful, and it describes the driving force for many people. Farmers have a strong connection with the environment they work and live in, are proud of their place, and protective of it.

Tom — It guess it does depend on where you have been. Once you get through quarantine, well you think you are home when you land at Sydney airport, but in reality you are not home until you get past all the clowns on the immigration gate.



Cynthia — When do you feel you are home when you go to town?

Tom — When you turn in the gate, you are probably right. It depends on the framework, that's right. If you are away at the mainland for a week, you are probably home as soon as you touch down at the airport in Hobart.

Cynthia — I suppose, and I'm speaking for myself because I have that luxury, because some people might not think the same way, having home as a small suburban block, or even a unit. So for me home is the environment rather than the house and I could live anywhere in this environment and feel like I was at home, I'm not attached to my house.

Tom — I think you used to be, didn't you? It was only when you walked out of the one over there where Matthew and Vanessa are now.

Cynthia — The longer I have been here, in this house, the more that has grown and having moved from one house to another, it's reinforced that that can happen, that there is no sort of certainty. But when I first came, it wouldn't have been the same.

Tom — It wasn't until we moved out and let Matthew have the house over there we really realised the house and garden, where you spend a fair bit of your time, wasn't necessarily the be all and end all of it.

Cynthia — I suppose the feeling must have been there before hand or we wouldn't have bothered to move out

Tom — True.



It's the place that makes it all worthwhile



Adam and Grainne, Bob and Patricia (Pat) Greenhill — 'Gala', 'Glen Gala' and 'Riversdale', Cranbrook

Grainne, Adam and Auley pictured above.

Photo Laura Eves.

Adam — Our holding here is 10,000 acres, about 2000 arable, 5000 in sheep runs and the remainder is bush. We currently run multi-purpose Merinos. We diversified back in the early '90s into irrigated dual purpose crops for fattening animals and for seed production, as well as poppies, walnuts and vegetables. Things are changing though.

Pat — Gala was an original grant to the Amos family and it has been in the family ever since. When I was really small it was just Gala and then Mum and Dad bought Riversdale which is down the road where the walnuts are and they bought Glen Gala only in recent times. None of our land has been logged, it is not suitable. Dad said when he was a young boy the Oyster Bay pines came right down to Cranbrook and now there aren't many close by. There's a small pocket of them out Mill Road about 9 kilometres out, but over the years as land has been cleared the Oyster Bays have disappeared.



Pat — Our little reserve out near Milton, one of the main reasons we shut it up was because of Oyster Bay pines and it now has a nice lot growing there.

Louise Merideth talks of walking from Riversdale to Springvale when she lived at Riversdale and they were building the Springvale house and it was honeysuckles and Oyster Bays right through that area and now there is hardly a Honeysuckle left, with the clearing, and the Oyster Bays are only in the reserved bits. The bit that we set aside at Riversdale down near the sale yards, actually



from the Lake Leake Road down, when I was a small girl, the other side of the road was also thick bush and when we went to Riversdale sale we used to walk through with our Aunt getting wild flowers and suddenly they cleared the other side and it is pasture land now. And so we have looked after that land for a while and kept it shut up because we wanted to keep it a little bit in its natural shape.

Adam — Our family has always had an affiliation with the environment or a bit of a green tinge to it. Dad was called a hippie when he was on here because he had a beard. The Federal Government have come up with some great systems to reserve land and there has got to be more of it. The cost of it is insignificant I believe. Their Volunteer Reserve Systems which we have been part of. We have reserved four different areas on the farm, which totals 800 acres. It is just to reserve forest types. They identified, I think, 54 different forest communities in Tasmania and they would like to reserve a certain percentage of the original forest area before colonisation so they try and reserve it in public areas, but then they go to private and they asked us and we receive a small remuneration for the land. It is pretty insignificant but then we covenant it forever. It won't be logged, it won't be harvested. There are all sorts of management that can be written into it. We are allowed to graze, through drought, if we get caught out and our sheep are allowed into it off shears in bad weather. We are allowed to harvest a little bit of wood off one block, just enough firewood to keep a couple of houses going and we are able to harvest a certain amount of posts from trees.

But the whole idea of it is to reserve those forest types. Generally it is land which is not productive to us. Biodiversity on the farm is really important, for hundreds of reasons that

I can't even see or tell you about, but there is always an imbalance in something. If you have something in its natural state next door it tends to even things out.

If you have a reserved forest you are unlikely to have an insect plague start in the paddock next door because you have a population of birds.

With the vegetable seed crops we certainly notice the pollination is a lot better around the reserved areas because the native insects do a better job than the bees.

Last year we paid \$10,000 to hire bees to pollinate our crops. That's a big deal. You think you are doing a better job with the native insects anyway, so what's reserving a bit of bush?

It is not a big cost at all if it is not really valuable to you to farm.

So we are very happy with what we have done there. A little concerned that we don't know what the future brings as far as politics and management of that land goes. There are a fair few guidelines but at the end of the day we have covenanted it and it could stand in the way of us doing something good for our farm or our production. One example is I insisted on really good fencing because I wasn't going to create a habitat for wallabies, Bennets or Rufous, which are really common around here and can get into plague proportions. They really double their numbers really quickly. So we fenced it well to keep them out. At the same time I think we are raising the productivity of our grazing because on the other side of the fence you have a pasture. The wallabies aren't eating that.

Set aside land has been good for us. The system has been good; we have worked well with them. Quite happy with it.

Bob — We have got the advantage in that there is one block we did many years ago, before the schemes started and that looks really spectacular.

Adam — Dad pretty well reserved two of these blocks two years ago, just because they weren't productive blocks and they were good to get nice and thick and healthy again. So we covenanted them though they have been reserved for sometime.

The areas which were grazed, there are shrubs and bushes all over them which would just not be there. Species we didn't know were there. They have found all sorts of endangered species which weren't known to be there.

Native species out in the bush, the amount of sheep we run on the blocks out on the Cygnet River. When you first worked them, when (you) first got here they ran four times the number of sheep as what they do now.

Bob — I've never been too sure what the reason for that is. That country won't carry like it used to.

Adam — But it has been set stocked for 30 years.

Bob — Yeah, I guess that is really the main reason that it had been set stocked for so long that a lot of species had gone or were so suppressed that they were living on and if we were able to spell that country or graze it on a rotational basis we might be able to build it back up, I believe it could.



Pat — One year it rained a lot and the shearers were at Malahide and most of our sheep were out in the bush and we had to bring them home. I was teaching at the school and I went off to work one morning and I came home at lunch time with the kids, and we went out to the river crossing to see if they could get the sheep. They had built a bridge. They had tractors right across the river with the forks up. Every plank and bit of carpet they could find to make a bridge. The men were just bringing the sheep down the hill and the sheep just walked quietly across. If they

had panicked or anything had gone wrong it would have been terrible so I then went home and rang the shearers to say yes, we can start tomorrow, raced into Swansea and bought meat from the butchers shop and we started shearing the next day.

Bob — The river was in flood and likely to be so for a long time and to bring them around was just not on. They were almost single file coming across the bridge.

Adam — I remember when we were younger, just the changes, we used to swim nearly everyday in summer. We have a beautiful river at the front of the house and you can see a trout at the bottom of it in 4 metres of water, it is just that clear. It's only 50 yards walk from the house. We just don't anymore. We are that busy now, with cropping as well. We also used to have holidays up the Swan River, down near the mouth, in a shack and I just can't imagine how we could have got away for a week. It is just ridiculous — you wouldn't be able to get away for a week now. A holiday now is to go away for a night. In winter we can have a bit of time off. We just don't take advantage of what is around us any more. Our lifestyle is just too hectic now.

Pat — We do have lovely bush picnics. It's just that we don't get away for extensive periods.

Adam — We don't even go swimming any more. By the time we knock off it is dark and you don't want to go swimming in the dark. When I was a kid I remember we used to go most days.

Bob — Pat and I used to swim every day too. We had a track mown down to the river, we would swim every night. It was because we weren't doing irrigation. woolgrowers in those days had a pretty cushy life. There wasn't the pressure that even the woolgrowers have got nowadays.





Adam — I believe that our riverbeds have the highest conservation values of any part of the property due to their diversity and greatly undeveloped nature. I really want to reserve these areas to restrict livestock access however I am not prepared to covenant them.

At the moment the riverbeds supply the majority of our stock water on the bush runs and they come under high grazing pressure during droughts. This has led to a fair bit of erosion especially in the deep valleys along the Cygnet and Brushy rivers.

My family has been offered the opportunity to covenant these areas however we have decided against a formal covenant for two reasons. The first reason being that we are losing too much control of our land and this would be exacerbated if we were to sign management agreements for the rivers that dissect our property in long narrow corridors. The second reason being that the bureaucratic process of a covenant is far too involved and drawn out. With today's farming environment, I simply don't have the time or energy to achieve my desired outcomes from the process. I have found that the government departments and conservation groups involved in such a process are not at all coordinated and can not be flexible to achieve a net gain. It seems that we all have the common goal of reserving these high value conservation areas however the departments involved seem to be scared of each other and can't proceed unless the precise bureaucratic process is followed and no one seems to know exactly what process is the correct process.

There are people out there who are genuine about making a difference environmentally and they are losing heart. I feel that everything has to be far more flexible in order to achieve our common goals.

As I mentioned earlier, I believe that these river valleys have the highest conservation values of any area on the farm due to their diverse attributes and fragile nature; however I don't think that any of the current schemes can accommodate our objectives in reserving the rivers. It seems that an area is assessed to fit one or other criteria in order to be reserved. I believe that an area should be assessed in regards to all of its conservation values and then negotiation shouldn't have upper and lower limits.

In our situation we would demand vermin proof fencing to keep native animals in their own habitat and avoid population extremes. On the other hand we can continue to graze the pastures away from the rivers without too much grazing competition from the wallabies and 'roos. Unfortunately we have not been able to source enough funds through any of the current schemes to fence these areas without signing a covenant and management agreement.



Adam — We went through the whole farm planning program and diversity was the big key word back in '91. It was the buzz word and we had all these DPI people bouncing off each other with smiles from ear to ear. Diversity, how many enterprises can you run. One farmer stood up and said, he's a conservative young fellow, and he said "No, I think you are all wrong." This was in front of all these older farmers he said "I'm going to stick at what I'm doing and I'm going to be the best in Tasmania", and that was being a wool producer. He said that and he got arguments thrown at him left, right and centre and in the end everyone said 'fair enough, do your own thing' and I reckon he is right, he is one of the best wool producers in Tasmania. He really proved a point. He was in RCS (*Rural Consulting Services*); he knew he had a lot of potential to improve his profitability through grazing mainly, also through the ratios and getting things in balance and getting the

business really humming because there were a lot of efficiency and management and employment ratios. They have tuned everything and they are incredibly efficient, I've heard 12–14% return on capital. For a wool producer they are very good figures and they do a really good job. The average would be well under five.

We took the diverse lead and Dad was great at finding the right crops and having a go and me just back from school and we set the block up out there with a great irrigation system. It is to a grid with underground piping and all the paddocks are 400 metres by 150 metres, easy to run but we found we couldn't possibly, with just two of us, be good at everything.

There were just too many things to be good at. We just don't have our heart in cropping like some farmers do. For some it is like a passion. We like farming; we do a bit of everything.

Bob — It was a dramatic change in lifestyle.

Adam — It nearly killed us didn't it!

Bob — And so from there we have tended to go back to grazing.

Adam — Irrigating crops for feed for sheep, fattening lambs. With farmers, a few crops that really fit in to the grazing enterprise and RCS make us value everything, grazing days from a seed crop are weighed up and valued and goes into the value of the crop. A good example of that is that we produce clover seed. The clover seed gets us a really good income; I would grow it on its own anyway. Before we harvest it for seed we get several big grazes off of it by stock and then we harvest it in February and we have grazed it two times since then. If you get the right cropping it can actually work in with your livestock enterprise and work well.

Grainne — With clover, they are perennials, so you don't have to work the soil and hopefully get three years out of it.

Adam — Working the soil every year is just not on. We have really good, well structured resilient soils here which can take a lot but we started to find with the potatoes and all that it was compacting that much and our harvesters were telling us, "This paddock needs a break", so now we have found these clover seed crops which are in for two, three or four years sometimes and it really gets the soil back on track. We are making more money off of the clover seed, we are fattening stock, and we are not cultivating the soil so it is really being smart.

With sheep, the market might be up and down but it is a little bit more reliable than cropping. You sleep a bit easier at night.

Grainne — You get more full nights sleeps because you don't have to go and shift irrigation pipes.

Adam — Lower inputs too. More control over it and more risk management too.

The big thing now, through information being available, we are learning what we are good at, what we are bad at, sooner or later you have to have a big family meeting and say "What's the direction of the farm?" and come to terms with exactly where you are at.

This benchmarking and consultancy thing which is going around Australia now is really spelling it out to people that decisions have to be made or farms are just disappearing. The avenues that are open to you, you sell the land or lease the land. We are at that stage now, we have got to decide if we really can make a go of it or if we are not, better to lease it to somebody that can. It's sad. People think they are standing still but they are actually going backward.

With crops we just can't afford to keep taking risks. We are just taking risks, living year by year which isn't how I want to be. Wondering what we are growing next year to make ends meet.



'Curringa Farm', Hamilton. Photo Laura Eves.

Bob — There is the other side to it, some people have green fingers and just want to grow things and I'm sure there are some that are, that work as a family. We are much more interested in growing wool than that side of it. That is a big factor; we enjoy growing wool rather than crops. I suppose it is bred into us over the generations from both sides of the family.



Adam — Our farm can change quicker if people are involved in management who know nothing of the history of this farm. They can ask about the history, they can ask about the past and they can look at the records but get an objective opinion from someone who has been emotionally involved is nearly impossible and that's why RCS has been so good for us. We have other farmers on our non-executive boards of directors who actually look at what we are doing and say "why don't you do this", and drill us. And you have that many blocks to why you haven't done this or that because you think from experience. Which just aren't right. You need objectiveness and I think in the Merino industry this passing down of knowledge has stopped the industry changing. Production gains in the wool industry have been minuscule. You look at what the sheep were 50 years ago and they are different to today's sheep, no doubt about it. But you look at the beef industry, the pork industry, the chicken industry; they have had quantum leaps in production. But the Merino industry has just been standing still and it takes some new thoughts and some out there thoughts to challenge what has been handed down for ten generations to kick start it again. I think that has happened with a fair bit of the breeding.

We started improving our flock down the lines of a very plain bodied, thin skinned sheep with highly aligned fibre. We found the first cull we were doing we were getting rid of some of the sheep that I thought were the best sheep there. They had a fine crimp and beautiful looking

wool and we were keeping some absolute dogs, but one generation into it, it was obviously the right thing to do. We have changed our sheep drastically for the better and we have kept the culls. We were actually looking for other peoples culls, who didn't recognise it as a good sheep because the industry said it wasn't a good sheep.



Adam — There is a lot of animal husbandry things that have been passed down which is really valuable but there is also a lot of blocks which have been passed down which has stopped the industry developing.

Grainne — Things that have been a tradition, there has to be a happy medium. Like the meat and pudding night, the teaser rams, those that have been tradition have been somehow lost. There still has to be that balance of keeping things that have actually been proven to work.

Adam — Our lambing percentage was always about 80%, we weren't particularly good breeders, 80% was pretty constant. The year before last we were 100%. This year we were 115% lambing. Some of it is to do with the fertility of the sheep because they are the four teated, high fecundity ewes. But I think a great deal of it is in the system of teasing the ewes up, which used to be common in the past, years ago. The teasers are vasectomised rams which get them cycling evenly so the rams can cover them better. We have only just come back to this and that was something that was pretty common practice fifty years ago and it has been lost. We must have got 10 or 15% above the average — 15% over 4000 ewes, that's 600 extra lambs. The profitability of that is huge and it has all been forgotten. There are a lot of people talking to the old fellas and getting some of the management back that has been lost.





Adam — We go mustering sheep on our bush runs and there's an old fellow here — Jacky, been on the farm all his life, well into his eighties and we go up into the bush there and I can't keep up to him! He's as fit as an ox, jumping logs and I'm running to keep up with him, panting and puffing.

“Where are we off to Jacky?”

“The Burnt Black Knob.”

“Where's the Burnt Black Knob?”

“You go past the crooked tree, then the oil tin and the third valley on the right — where the cow died, near a certain gum tree...”

Off we go and we are heading up this valley, off our place, onto crown land where the sheep get right up into the hills and sure enough, there's three sheep on the Burnt Black Knob.

I say, “Why are they here Jack?”

“The sea breeze is pushing in and it's (*this*) month and they stand on this side of the knob and they come up here of an afternoon time, they get a bit of air. We've got to come back early morning if they are not there, and we'll find them at *x* watering point.”

It's just a little rock hole in a creek but it is a watering point.

And it is all that, when people used to wander those runs and know their sheep. See all the sheep had a lead sheep and that had a bell on them up there in the hills. There were heaps of people working here. It's all changed that much and a fair bit of it has been lost with Jack.

Pat — Jack never wore a watch because he knew what time the sheep walked along a certain fence to get water.



Adam — Now the focus is to benchmark where you are at, to determine if you are efficient or effective wool producers. I always had 100 excuses, but now I'm just starting to say that those excuses are just blocks in my head.

One of our visions was to have a sustainable farm as well as a profitable farm. We thought that would clash because the way we have been cropping we have been working every bit of the soil as long as we can get a dollar out of it but I think, particularly if we set up the right grazing systems and the right management structure there is so much to be gained and so much more to be turned over profitably and actually improving the health of the environment.

One strategy is grazing systems. Second is fencing off as much river bed as we can. We have up to 40 kilometres of riverbank and if we can find some sort of funding to put good fencing around that to stop the sides of the riverbed eroding away and take the grazing pressure out of them it will put a lot more health into the river beds. At the same time the right fencing will exclude wallabies from the pastures. If we have control over how the pastures are grazed by the vermin we can then leave them open to more controlled grazing systems with the sheep. I think we can raise our productivity greatly if it is fenced correctly.



Adam — We are going with a line of sheep from the mainland from Marnoo, called a Multipurpose Merino which started as a soft rolling stud and their best sheep are producing 220–240 mills of wool a year. So that's a double wool cut that's twice a year, of a highly aligned fibre. But that is not the focus of breeding any more; it's more of a meat carcass. They are using all sorts of different sheep breeds to produce what they believe is a good meat carcass. They are breeding a small chested sheep but a big flanked sheep going in a wedge shape from the

front to the back which is exactly the opposite to the traditional Merino which was a very big chest. They have a very plain neck, like a Border Leicester or something, with very few complications. A very thin skin which should be, from all accounts from the abattoirs, a very valuable skin. Which isn't really a consideration in breeding sheep at the moment, but if you can get four times the value for the skin it can add a lot of value to your sheep.

Their fertility/fecundity is very high. We have been using those rams and admittedly it is a management thing too, but we have had 115% over the flock. About 105% with AI and 10% backed up, which is very high lambing. They are also bred from four teated ewes which are very unusual for a Merino, a meat sheep trait, to have four productive teats so they can rear twins and triplets quite easily. We are changing our breeding drastically. We are pretty much forgetting everything we have been taught about the traditional Merino and breeding off some pretty different principles. Hopefully that will pay off for us; it is certainly looking pretty good at the moment. We are only one generation into it but the initial change is drastic and we are very pleased with where it is going.

A lot of breeders are trying to achieve a sheep that doesn't need to be mulesed and that has been an objective of this stud for five or ten years now. It is not just a clean breach but to be a highly aligned fibre, instead of having crossed fibred sheep. The highly aligned fibre of the soft rolling group does help with flystrike also, so that is one of the drivers of the breeding at the moment.

If we are stopping mulesing in 2010, I think we will be well positioned to have a much more resilient sheep than the average. Certainly the uncomplicated sheep, the plain skin with no wrinkles and very little cross fibre lends itself

to be a cleaner sheep that won't be as susceptible to being fly struck and we are well down that pathway already so we are happy with that progress.

Area wise, you know the efficiencies are that exact you have to have one man to 10,000 DSEs which is the benchmark that we all work off and it sounds yeah, no worries, you just get 10,000 DSE. If you have got a 5000 DSE property, what do you do? If you have 5000 DSE and you love the sheep you just can't expect to stay in the industry. And they are the sort of decisions you have got to make today. You can't just plod along because you might think you are just sitting still and having your lifestyle but you are going backwards really. It is a business now, no longer a lifestyle. Eighty-five per cent of us are in the cities now, there are just more and more people being forced out of the country.

That's what RCS really point out, yeah you can be a highly profitable farmer if you put your life into it, but then your life is gone. Are you sure that is what you want to do with your life? I think that is what Australia is doing too. We are very wealthy but the lifestyle Australia boasts about doesn't seem to be there any more.

Grainne — You can continue that lifestyle easier with less people if you have sheep. It is less labour intensive. It is a nicer industry to be in than cropping. You sometimes get caught up in all this business and you forget all the important stuff. Basically the place you are at. And it is as much the mind thing as doing the physical stuff. Sometimes you think you are too busy because you have got all this stuff you have got in your head that you have got to do, having to get it done and I suppose sometimes even just the guilt from not having got what you have supposed to have got done stops you from taking advantage. You get caught up in things.



Adam — Fuel audit, irrigation audit, refinancing, investment — so many office jobs queued up to be done. Sometimes it's just a nightmare, it all gets on top of you and all you want to be doing is out there moving sheep or something more interesting than office work.

A lot of people feel, you know, with family ties and history, that it's your responsibility, you should do it. It is the way of the environment of farming now, it's just that competitive and that tight that it is just not enjoyable like it used to be.

I have always said we are asset rich and cash poor and what's the point in an asset, it is just a lifestyle and suddenly you realise that that asset can work for us so well. We can use the equity in the farm to do off-farm investments, which are very safe, the safest of all off farm investments. You can split portfolios, whether it is land or shares or whatever. There are hundreds of ways if you have got equity it can turn over a lot more money than your production ever can on the farm. So a lot of people are simply doing that, they are using the equity in their farm for off farm investments which is propping up their lifestyle as a farmer. Which is sad but that's what some people have to do to remain farmers.

Grainne — It's environmentally friendly, it's sustainable, you're doing something that you love and you are looking after what you are doing and you are not taking so much of a risk.

Adam — It seems wrong that we have got to use our money and management skills to sustain the land, look after the environment. We are caretakers of the land, no one really owns the land, it's Australia isn't it? We all own the land really. We have to find money off farm to look after our land for Australia. I think the government has to change policy so the country is looked after better and farmers don't have to use off-farm income to maintain it.



Adam — A program running at the moment with field days, a different topic every time — the 8 x 5 profit group. I have been along to quite a few of these. Some have been brilliant, others I have not really cared for much. It has annoyed me, and like I said, I'm a pretty green sort of person but one of the issues I went there with was to raise productivity on our bush runs and that's what a few of us were asking but the DPI have had people there who were against us doing any sort of trial work to raise productivity on that ground because it is native pastures and they want to preserve native pastures. It's a little bit of a conflict to me.

If they gave our East Coast primary producers \$50,000 there are a few of us farmers that would have it spent straight away doing direct work that will change profitability of the industry.

We want to see if we can establish pastures out on those runs with direct drilling, they are too rocky to cultivate. But there is all sorts of drilling technology now where we can go in with just minimum cultivation and see if we can get some species going out there and different grazing regimes, it's too hard to cell graze, rotational graze maybe, but really learn how to run that country because I think it is really ineffective the way we run our bush country.

Sure we want to save native pastures and there should be money put aside to do that.



Adam — You look at Europe with all their set aside land and subsidies and rebates and la-de-das. They are being paid to care take the land. I think Australia has to stand back and say, "Hey, look. Do we want to keep being the most profit driven agricultural production or do we want to look after the land a bit more?" Actually putting farmers in a position where they don't have to run their land that hard.

The set aside thing is great. They pay off once and they get land taken out of production. The farmers are happy, they have got their payment, and it is not going to a corporate that will run it harder probably.

Strategies we have thought about keeping on the farm are to keep all our land and just lease out blocks. We have set it up now with water, with the infrastructure for people to come in — vineyards, avocados, table grapes, whatever it might be. Come in and lease the land with a long-term lease.

The other thing RCS are looking at is a commune type thing, (without sounding like a hippie). In Germany neighbours have been grouping together and pooling their land to become a viable unit. Neighbours with no blood relation but four farms getting together and becoming big enough to survive and having shares in the company that run it, depending on the landmass. I know RCS encourage any family with multiple farms instead of boys going their own direction, pooling their resources and keeping it as a family unit because efficiencies are vital to survival and that's how you get efficiencies.

On the East Coast here we have a lot of little vineyards and I asked one of the vineyard owners, "Are you disappointed that Gunns have come in, this huge vineyard right next door?" And he said "No, it is going to help us" and I said "Why is that?" He said, "Well, this is how many hectares we have. We are not a wine region. As soon as Gunns come in we become a wine region. Now we have a marketable name. There are big marketing advantages by being a group and being recognised, even with a corporate involved."

RCS are looking into the structures adopted in Germany where maybe our board or like properties in RCS might form a company to get more buying and marketing power. It is the way

of the world. You don't buy one roll of wire anymore, you buy a palette. The little farmer doesn't survive because he can't get the price. It's sad but that's the way it's going. If we are going to remain viable we have got to go with the flow. Keep our identity and control our land if we just pool our resources. Maybe have a company structure that manages 20 farms but you still have your farm and your lifestyle. It's a bit sad but I think it's the way family agriculture will have to go.



Pat — The river was wonderful for us as kids but mother was very strict, we weren't allowed down to the river until we were much older. I traded with my sisters quite a bit; I was always the outside person with Dad, whereas my sisters were always inside with Mum. I used to love eating the sap from the wattle trees. You don't hear of people doing that much nowadays. You actually had to try it, some was sweet, some was bitter. You had to eat the soft stuff, it was like toffee.

When I was a tiny girl and we lived over at Milton and we would go out with the men after the strychnine poisoning and carting armfuls of rabbits, and I would have only been five. I remember my arms aching and first of all carrying the rabbits the wrong way up and getting wee all over me!

I wasn't allowed to help with things like lamb marking. Nowadays those things wouldn't happen without women helping.

So many Hobart kids have had wonderful holidays here. One day two girls were walking along the street in Hobart and a little mini moke went by and one said to the other, "I learnt to drive in one of those." And the other girl said, "I wonder if it was the same one as me?"



I mean there are so many children who learned to drive or had their first periods of being drunk here. They would all stay, right by the house, so they were in a safe environment. I remember Margaret Scott saying to me once, “I don’t think you realise what an important place this is in so many childrens’ upbringing.”



Adam — The other day we had a band from Melbourne come over and record in the old flour mill and they said they had noises they would never get in a studio. When they left they said, “This is the best place!” They loved it! They were sitting down having beers down by the river after they had finished. They had had a big session in the flour mill playing music with computers set up. No one to disturb them. If they were in Melbourne all their mates would be there with their girlfriends and boyfriends and you realise when you have people like that how special it is. People tell you. It sort of makes it all worthwhile.

Pat — My friend came from Singapore with her husband and children. She had been here a lot because we had been through college together and she used to come and stay during the holidays. I thought, ‘What will we do?’ Well my friend and I went off and did our thing and it was just after shearing and her husband and children walked for miles and miles behind the mobs of sheep, returning them and they thought it was magic!

Then we took them to Schouten Island and my friends’ husband went around with his camera taking photos of the sand because we were the only ones on the island. To come from Singapore to that type of setting was rather unbelievable.

Grainne — It’s the same with my family. You think of Northern Ireland, where I am from, where farming is such a huge part of their lifestyle but here it’s the quietness and the freedom. Dad comes back every year, he loves it.

Adam — I have done a fair bit of travelling and I thought Tasmania to be the best place in Australia. It is such a little community; you can always say G’day to someone in the pub. Tasmania has a country charm and friendliness.

Grainne — Here there is a freedom to everything, anybody can do anything. No class system, a supportive community, but it is changing.



Adam — Do you want to know something? And this is fair dinkum — you get off that ferry from Victoria and the air, you smell the air as soon as you get to Tassie. I’m dead-set about that, the clean air. You notice it straight away. Home.

Pat — If you are driving home from the airport, as soon as I can get to the coastal sea, just as I get a lovely glimpse across to Freycinet and Schouten Island I feel, ah, I’m home.

I love the drive across the Lake Leake Road. Some people think I’m crazy, those beautiful trees and it’s not altered a massive amount. It’s a more remote sort of road.

Grainne — It’s the quietness and the freedom, definitely.

Bob — I came from a dairy place up in the North-West, but here is the nicest place I have ever lived. I’ve lived in a fair few places and it’s just this place that has everything going for it, which makes farming here so much easier because it is a place where we absolutely love to live. It’s right on the coast and has all the advantages of the warmth of the coast in Tasmania. It has a river right near the home. That’s it.



A successful blend —

genetics, environment, wool and lateral thinking



In memory of Sue Rapley — 'Roseneath' and 'Plassey', Ross

(31 March 1947 to 10 December 2005)

Photo Jean Bentley.

I have about 3000 acres, there-abouts. I've got the little Roseneath and that is good red-earth productive land which sits beside a beautiful river. Its primary use should be for growing things I guess, as in farming, but Plassey is more of a grazing property and that is the difference between the two. I have the old, the infirm and the sick sheep at Roseneath. If they need a bit of help they come home because it is easier to handle them from there.

I'm not really sure but I think I probably would have been at Roseneath about 16 years and Plassey about nine.

My great grandfather was the first keeper of Lake Leake and then my grandfather was a shepherd and a shearer at Mt Morrision for a while and my father was brought up as a young person at Campbell Town spending much time on the property Windfalls. By way of default I have ended up at Ross. But all of us, when you look at all the generations, have been exposed to country life. So maybe it is just luck of the draw.

As a child we always lived close to the bush, fishing and exploring. I was sent off to boarding school when I was nearly eight years old, coming home for holidays you would take your shoes off and not wear shoes for the whole summer. Just roam free.



My background is in commerce, but I have always felt a tie to the land, and I guess that's something that one has in them. It wasn't that at a certain age I said I wanted to return to the land, it's a transition. Like they say — "You can take the girl out of the bush, but you can't take the bush out of the girl!"



The river at Roseneath is pretty scrubby, it has always been that way. There is a certain amount of erosion, there could certainly be a lot more if not for the scrub. At the moment it is still in situ but the river itself, that is in the hands of others. There are all the things that shouldn't be there, you know, willows, gorse. Work in the river has sped it up, the water flows faster. Some farmers look at it as an irrigation channel.

I could not work out why people are trying to make the water go faster and then it dawned on me that they are trying to pass water to each other for irrigation including water they store on their properties for sale. The rivers become the pipeline. Traditionally the Macquarie has been known as a slow moving river. If you look at what happens when water becomes a saleable commodity, and that's a modern development, the back waters end up drying up because they want to keep water moving in the main stream. So I guess it is in the interest of the people selling the water to make sure that water doesn't add to the backwaters.

But I suspect that further up the waterway there might be necessity and or money driven desire to put the more fertile land into farming rather than grazing, which is fine, any thing that is floodplain. Whether it is sustainable is yet to be seen.

Although I had a vegetable garden as a child I'm not good at growing things. I recognise my frailties. Very rarely would I put a crop in and it would be a success. I have no desire or want at this stage other than for fodder crops. The river is very kind to me.

There is no reason why the Macquarie River can't irrigate, it has been used for irrigation for years. But to clear everything in it at the end of the day to serve the purpose of irrigation then that speaks to me of vested interests. When you see structures put in and you know that the resource is not sustainable then you wonder why.

I just think that the river is under threat and not just the Macquarie. I worry about the rivers in Tasmania. I don't see myself as green, brown, blue or whatever — just my personal views. The future in this country is not just having water, it will be about the quality of that water.

Some may see my view of the river as unusual. It is not a matter of ownership, it's not mine, I am just a custodian of a very small bit of it, for now. The river is there for everybody. People of Ross enjoy the river on Roseneath, kids swim in it, people fish in it and draw water from it. It is an integral part of the township. The river is as important to people now as it was 100 years ago and in another 100 years it will be even more important. The river doesn't belong to any particular person or people or government body. It is an environment that we have to take care of, I think a lot of the people who live in towns also have a sense of belonging, connection with the river.



From one side of Plassey to the other side of Plassey is a convict, man-made creek that runs through. I think it originates somewhere in Verwood and comes down through Ellenthorpe and on through Plassey. It picks up little waterways as it flows down. It has a good flow in

winter and also spills into waterholes in summer. We probably don't get the flow we should get but that's fine and we have some very sustainable waterholes even in the worst of years that I have been there, never even looked like going dry. The Western Tier is kind to us for our water, scuds go around that Tier all the time and I cross probably 6 kilometres from front to back with a differentiation of 2 inches of rainfall. There is plenty of good water out there. It will be dry at Roseneath long before it is ever dry at Plassey.

I think both Plassey and Roseneath are pretty healthy as far as the environment goes. We have three different frog species in the waterholes at Plassey as well as some very healthy small ecosystems. That to me says it is pretty healthy.



The bush at Plassey has had over 150 years of sheep grazing. I'm not sure if it is healthy through good management or saved by neglect!

Anyone who has spent any time in the bush knows [if it is healthy]. You look into a paddock, you know it is tired. You look at your sheep, they are not scouring but you know that they are going to, the shine somehow comes off their backs. You just know. So if you look at the bush, you know when it's stressed, you know it needs a rest, you just know. It would be interesting to see how a scientist would view that.

I can look at a sheep and see it smile, many other people would not see that. Others may see a sheep through different eyes because of their background. I know when the bush is healthy and I suspect that it is hidden in the soils already. It just needs a chance, that's all. I think that those seeds can lie in the ground for a lot of years, it just needs the right condition to tap it on the shoulder and away it will come. So sometimes we don't need to rush out and plant trees, we just need to let it breathe a bit, find its own feet again.

I wouldn't have the knowledge to know if 30 years ago it was bastardised by other species or foreign plants. I wouldn't have that knowledge. I do know what the various species of eucalypts look like and wattle trees but they might say well this would never have been like this it would have been like that. Then comes the debate — Does it really matter? Does it have to be as it was in 1605? Probably not.

If I looked in the bush, what would matter? If I could tell it was stressed, I would get concerned. I wouldn't knee jerk, I would be very mindful of it and mindful of what I did with that bush. Even if I didn't rush out and put a fence around it, I would keep animals away from it. If I have got animals in say run country and I look at it and think, time to come away, you can just tell, and let it have a little spell, a breather and it will regrow. I have locked bush up for two years to let the trees get to a height where animals won't hurt them and that works.



Many may argue that it may not be a sustainable way of doing it but it has worked for me. It comes back to, lets say, necessity and greed. The two go sort of side by side, parallels in business — whether it be farming businesses or any other business. What is the driver? Necessity and greed are really side by side. But if you are starving you are going to do a lot of things that you wouldn't do unless you were starving and if you were born greedy you are going to do a lot of things that others wouldn't do so the two run parallel and are equally damaging aren't they.

I suppose I am in the fortunate position where necessity hasn't been the driver and I have a broad enough commercial background to know that investing in a property is not the best commercial decision that I could make. In other words if I have got x dollars in my pocket and I took it on purely commercial choice,



farming wouldn't come into the sphere at all. Not in an economy which is a growth economy. There are lots of other places I would probably place my money if that was my driver.



The same theory I have when applied to anything, whether applied to buildings, bushland, rivers or waterways — it would be a very foolish Australian of any sort that thought the environment was just for them, or the use of few. I don't think that we own any of it. I think it is owned by all and it is really interesting when viewing people from the more caring side to do with bushland, they have absolutely no respect at all for any animal, or bird, at all that is non-indigenous. They view that animal or bird or fish or whatever as being a predator upon the native, however with care and management there can be a balance in everything. Now what a pity, because here we are trying to form a multicultural country and would it not be a great travesty if we applied that across everything we think. We would not know the pleasure of eating coleslaw. Maybe we have lost some of the original recipes for meringue, pavlova or whatever and what a shame, on the other hand, much has come to replace it. So, for me, the same thing applies to the animals in the bush. Yes there are some that are predators and some that have probably brought the demise of certain species but on the other hand, they may have even brought some asset with them as well. I would be far more afraid of genetic modification and cross pollination of plant species. If you apply that same logic across to Sue Rapley owns two historic homes, Sue Rapley doesn't own two historic homesteads, she just care takes them for the next generation. She has the private use for them while she has them but on the other hand she is only the keeper. So then we bring that down to a river system, how dare anybody think that they have complete ownership. Well may it be played out

right now, with the allocation of water rights etc across the nation where vested interest the powerful player. Immorality at its best. Like stopping a child fishing in the river because it happened to be walking on your land and your old title goes to the middle of the river. How moral is that? So I think we are all charged with the responsibility of just being the caretakers and no matter what we have on the ground here in Australia, we are just that.



When it comes to growing wool, the magic is the blend of two things. You can have the best genetics, the best sheep, put them on the ground at Roseneath and you won't produce the best wool. Put them on the ground at Plassey and you get the best out of them.

Let's look at the type of sheep first. Say the Merino and a British breed. The Merino will take one mouthful and 11 steps, where a Suffolk will take 11 mouthfuls and one step. So that's one of the differences. As far as the sheep are concerned, Plassey provides a dust free environment and the sheep are healthy. Environment and genetics are the most important things, then getting the right mix.

We have introductions of other blood lines in Tasmania so you have nice mixes of genetics. We also have some wonderful run country and some of that run country is very close to what that sheep originated from in Spain and Saxony. Less wool off sheep on run country, but on improved country the wool is dustier. When you look at the shillings at the end of the day I doubt if there is much difference. So that's the truest indicator. You start with the animal, get it through and at the end of the day, wool is the end product. And it is a matter of keeping the balance.



I am involved in wool growing because I have a passion for the animals. I am extremely interested in genetics, the animals constitution, its habits. Shepherds instincts I guess. It's in the blood. I have spent a lot of time in the bush watching the sheep, they lie down and I sit down and it gives you a chance to get really close to what they are actually doing.

Why do sheep coil in the middle of a paddock on a really hot day instead of standing under the shade of a tree? And the answer to that is when they coil they actually create a very cold draft and the only reason I know is because I crawled around in one and it is actually really, really cold. They'll move, you know, sheep number 52 will suddenly move to number 42 position or whatever, maybe just to cool off a bit. But if you get in the middle there it is really, really cold on a stinking hot day. Now any good shepherd would probably know that but I will guarantee you there's not too many.

I guess my observation has been, and it appals me, this is a criticism, I am always appalled to think that as an owner they are not there at shearing. It takes us a whole year to produce. And that tells a story in itself. So it tells me that it is just a product. A saleable product.



Laincot developed as a company marketing garments made of a wool and cotton blend. It was not my idea. It was Bruce Forster's idea and my involvement was purely and simply by way of what I could bring to it commercially. Although I had a passion for wool it would be unfair of me to say that I was the most passionate of the pair of us. I would say that Bruce definitely was. He was fairly infectious though, and the further we got into it the more passionate I got about it.

It was definitely driven by the want to get further use of wool in the market which was essentially at the time down, so it was the time when people were saying, well, you know, wool is too good a fibre to blend with anything and those that know more than us were saying, you know, you are bastardising wool by blending it.



Within the corporation we are only looking at a very small blend as having recognition so in other words it had to be mighty on the wool side and minor on the other sides. Essentially it was an historic blend based on the English viyella. Viyella has been around for years and years and years but the difference between the end product of Laincot and the end product of viyella is that Laincot is woven and then dyed and with the English viyella the yarn is dyed and then it is woven. And if you pre-dye yarns to end up with an end product you end up with a long turn around time, so from the time you spin and then dye and then weave. So what we were aiming to do was spin and weave and hold it until the season came and then find out what the seasons colours are and the demands and do a quick turn around through the dye process. So we didn't have to go the whole full downstream process to address the market at that stage, that quick turn around was being addressed to an extent by garment dyeing. So what they did in Europe was that they suddenly worked out that there wasn't a big gap between colour choices and the season because overseas had four seasons, we only have two, summer and winter clothing, but they, in lots of cases have four lots of releases. So to address that the Europeans decided they would make a garment and then dye it new colours. So that was garment dyeing but that's still around of course but it is of a less quality product.





Photo Laura Eves.

The fact that it was firstly woven, and then it was held in greyish state, which is undyed state and then we would just wait for the orders and the colours that the manufacturers wanted. So that was the idea of getting it together, getting it on the shelf and then downstream dyeing it which in all sense and purposes spinning it was not a hard thing to do, weaving it is not a hard thing to do but the dyeing is the hard thing because you have got animal and plant basically of different pH. Simply what you do to dye cotton destroys wool. So that was in essence of starting into something probably with a great effort of enthusiasm and little knowledge. It was a large learning curve for both of us and we luckily had the help of people who were essentially good technicians and we landed at their backdoor more by accident than by choice. So we were very lucky people. Yeah. But we did have a lot of failures before we had success.



Like I said recently to some researchers from CSIRO, those that have run the industry, and still have to an extent, thought that retailing is run by the filter down system and it may have been many years ago where apparel manufacturers in the world would use a certain fabric, or use certain colours or use certain styles and then people on the next rung down or further through the food chain would mimic them. So it was always the aim to get the people at the top of the industry, to use wool or whatever, with the thought that it would filter down. But I suspect that has changed a lot now and I think that you will find that if not the retail level, certainly it is consumer driven and it probably moves into the companies via the designers and now I think that is where it stops. So it is the interaction between designers and their choice of fabrics along with retail driven demand that actually makes the man out there in the market place. My link is at the retail level. Why would somebody want to buy this product

and the only way I can find out is to go out there at the retail level and speak with them and find out, and watch them and work out what makes them want the product.

I don't leave any stone unturned in anything and basically I have a great interest in many, many things. I think that it is just a matter of being observant and watching and looking and listening and looking for the next dimension, and that was just by way of accident of being able to do it I suppose. But I'm extremely interested in most things. However uninteresting they may be to other people.

I'm involved with getting it out there and exposing it a bit on the retail level. That's about it. I like people — as long as I don't have to take them home.



I think that Laincot has got a good healthy future. I'm probably Laincot's worst enemy, I'm old and buggered, but I see that it doesn't necessarily rest with this particular product and as a company I think it has a good future.

I think that the industry, unfortunately, as I probably said to you before, these people are pretty passionate about their industry and they are very hands-on in the sense of clasping to their product and it seems to me that it just didn't occur to people that yes, you can move off that centreline sometimes and maybe it is to the betterment of the product itself. As in the blending further the other way. Like we won't put too much polyester, we won't put too much cotton or we won't put too much with the wool because it is going to bastardise it because they want it to be the major host. So therefore you are not really inhibiting the product.

I don't know — all that glitters is not gold, you know, and I think that we might tend to, because we know it is such a fabulous fibre, think that it



stands alone and in lots of ways it does but there are some synthetic fibres out there which do a lot of things that wool cannot do. So is it not wise of us to perhaps be more generous in the way that we think about how we might wear wool. And if we just lock it up because it is the crown jewels it means that it will have a very small life. If we are more lateral in our thinking as to how it can be used and we are more lateral, I mean I look at the AWI projects and yeah, they are starting to be lateral and think about filters and all sorts of things that wool can be used in and that to me, makes a lot of sense. And maybe if they are looking at filters they can look at a blend in their filters — I don't know. They are looking at pure wool at this stage, maybe they should look at that but then one harks back to the time when they spent a few million dollars developing cigarette filters until someone worked out how much wool it would use! (It was some way down the track!) But that's not my area, I'm talking purely and simply as an amateur on the side, it is not my area at all.

I am disappointed at the way wool support industries and growers have adopted this attitude of wool now being a boutique industry. We are selling our selves short of our potential. I mean in the construction industry when times are tough, you have men cleaning up the shed instead of being out doing work. You don't worry about the fact that it is tough, you are looking 10 years ahead at how you are going to change that and turn that around. You don't talk about the fact. If your opposition comes in you don't say that you haven't got any work, you say "Oh, we are doing fine. We are just reorganising for another expansion." So why in this industry are we suddenly becoming so injured by the fact that our market is floundering? What makes us different from the barber on the corner or why should it always be booming?



I suppose being lateral about anything in any industry is good. Having the ideas is the easy part, it's taking the idea right through to where it becomes a productive idea and that seems to be a problem. We seem to lack a chain of pathways that people can move down in the industry, unless they go and seek them out themselves. So, in illustration, having just spoken to the people I have just been speaking to about different styles and ways of spinning, they are hell bent on that, but the trail beyond that they haven't walked down yet and I think that you have got to be able to look across the whole gambit. If you have a good idea that is obviously the nucleus that someone can pick up and run with.

If it is a good idea.

But then it would be a lot better for the industry if there were mechanics in place or a body in place that could sensibly, not do it for people, but help them through the pipeline to get those things, let them pay, but help them through the pipeline to try and develop those ideas. Rather than saying we will develop the idea now we will look around for somebody to do it. It is probably far better to look around at what ideas are already on the ground and people flounder from the point of having the idea to the point of finally getting it out there. Like mentoring.



I think that there are a lot of good people in the industry, whether it be in down-streaming or in production in the paddock you know, but historically, and I may be very wrong, but historically it seems to me that the people who grow the wool have been kept apart by the people who broker the wool from the people who downstream it. And then even in that down-streaming chain you know there is the people who scour the wool who are not really that interested in the top maker, or the top maker is not that interested in the next link

in the chain so to speak and it is only now that people are starting to say, hey, you know, we need these links all put together in one chain. One particular designer I know, I'm talking now seven years ago, went to the then body sitting over the wool industry and this particular person had about eleven or fifteen stores in Australia and outside Australia that just wanted to link the wool, the history of where it came from, to the garment so that that garment had a history which could be used as a marketing tool. By saying, "Look, this wool came off Beaufront at Ross and it has been, and it was down-streamed to an extent in Australia, to an extent in Italy and this is the end product". You know, that's where it came from and no-one in the industry was interested in it. But now they are starting to talk about it. So maybe we just need people with a bit more foresight to take and look at the ideas, and surely, some ideas will be blank ideas and will have no hope of going anywhere. But if there are ten ideas that are no good, there is surely to be one idea which is a bloody brilliant idea. And if that is true, it shouldn't be taken away from the person who has the idea, just the path should be put in front of them quite easily as to how they would take that through to an end result. There's nothing around (*like that*) in the industry.



You have got to remember that I have had the luxury of exposure. You know sitting here with these people from CSIRO and telling them what to look for and what they are missing in their thinking. My life is a learning life. I mean what I tell you today I will know a lot more tomorrow, so you will never catch up. So I am not frightened to impart that knowledge, I mean I love to, I love to impart as much knowledge as I possibly can to everybody and especially the young.



If you say wool production full stop, there is no rocket science in wool production but producing a fibre of high quality consistently over a long period of time, there is a bit of rocket science in there you know. People have to be patient, there is no magic formula you can get from the CSIRO that is going to make it all happen for you. It may make it happen but it may not be sustainable but the only thing which makes it sustainable is patience. So it is a long term thing, genetically it is long term and there are some stayers in there that will be there to take it forward I guess and there are a lot, lot of young people who won't be there to take it forward. That is societal, to an extent, it is the agitation of the young, it's more options that are on the ground.

People are feeling it in their pocket, there is no doubt about that. There are other options coming their way. Look at cropping for example. You don't have to do that much work on an irrigator. You do have to do a lot of work on the sheep. If the irrigator produces as much money as the sheep, why the hell would you want to be drenching sheep and crutching and moving them and whatever and so on? Why would you? So the result of that is, you wouldn't! So the youngsters are looking for a quicker and easier, less stressful return. But the damage that that does is it reduces your genetic base.

The unfortunate part is that they shift their focus. When you shift your focus away from your sheep you can lose whole generations. Well you can't turn that around in five minutes when suddenly there is a turnaround in the price of wool. For young woolgrowers I would say be prepared to be in there for the long term. Position yourself in the middle of the market, don't drive yourself down to the fine end of the market.



If you do a job and it is harder and it happens to be more physically demanding it is not necessarily a bad thing. The driver is the satisfaction in your abilities.

If a job needs doing, do it well. They have to get off their backsides and work. At the end of the day that is their sense of success. A sense of achievement.

Getting back to the land, river, the properties; a sense of connection probably hasn't happened for them. That probably comes from age, and association of memories.



I had a talk to two people who are in my mind pivotal to the sheep industry in Australia and I asked both of them and they are probably my age, or one is a bit younger, on separate occasions. I asked both of them "Did they ever think there would be anything else in their life other than growing wool when they left school?" And both of them came off pretty large properties and both those men said no, that there had never been any thoughts about them being anything else other than going back home to the property. And I found that a bit sad because it smacks of lack of freedom — so that is sad. Some people don't think about, we are all caught up in what we do, sometimes we change but not to dream about other things? So if you then take those people out of the square and look at who is left, it is the young people coming up who by way of necessity are going to do a different style of farming.

It is a lot of hard physical work, the wool industry. It is not continual. If you actually sat down and were very analytical at the hours one puts in to running a flock of sheep it is probably not that many hours but when it is, it is intensive and it is long days or it is physical work, a lot of people don't want to do that anymore, especially the young. They don't want to do the physical, they don't want to get their hands dirty.

Other people will tell you that it is called lifestyle, but I don't think that it is called lifestyle at all.

I don't think that should be the reason that one goes into it in the first place because it is flexible and because farming calls for a certain amount of self discipline, doesn't it? Because you can look out the window and think ah they need moving, na, bugger it, I'll do it tomorrow. And there are not many industries that you can work in that you can do that. If you are a teacher, you have got the children there, you have got to go. Or whatever it may be.

I think it is a learned art and it is a taught thing. It's like getting out of bed every morning to go to work. We have got generations of Australians who haven't quite got that right either. So if it then comes to having enough self discipline to push yourself through the day, you have got to find the drivers. What are the drivers, what makes people not like to do it? And I guess not everybody, there are a lot of people in Australia and probably all over the world that have worked out that there are other drivers that give far greater satisfaction than money. But the trouble is that they are few and far between. There are no banks in heaven. So much more joy comes from ones success just through ones abilities than ones bank account, so the hours one puts in. I can't see the two measures are even side by side. So I guess it is young people getting the opportunity to taste that and that hasn't always come their way.

Society is asking more and more of young people to make decisions about what they want to do at the age of 14 and 12. I mean how hideous is that? They have got half a brain! I mean most of the people asking that question, when they were twenty they didn't know what they wanted to do either. And we have just made a society driven by academia that you have to decide, you must go and do this, you must go and get further education. And in lots of cases that is a wise thing to do but in some cases it is not, and to

drive young people to a point where they have to make decisions, actually make decisions what they will do for the next 10 years of their life is a hideous situation. Because if they really should go there they should know they want to go there. It shouldn't be a decision thing, it should be a want thing.

I've never known what I was going to do. Like a lot of people I'm interested in many things so I'm sure if I started it all again there would be another 10 or 15 avenues I could go up as well and still be equally as satisfied and intently interested.



My nephews are extraordinary young fellows both of them, it is not just that they are my nephews. They have had the privilege of being brought up as young people in Tasmania and now they are both professional people, they look to me as though they will stay anchored in Tasmania purely and simply because of the freedom of being able to access the bush which they have done since they were both little fellows and they have grown up with a great appreciation of their environment of the bush.

I mean if they go to the wonderful Plasse, you can see it in their faces, just the absolute pleasure and delight of the privilege of being able to be there and these two boys have guided people through Cradle Mountain, taken film crews to the South West, they are athletic, they get a certain amount of peace and pleasure from the environment. And at Roseneath, they will get up really early and just take a walk up the river well before anybody is up for breakfast, that sort of thing. And at their age, where they are only in their late twenties really, it is a pleasure to see. I think their father has always been, through his childhood, had the freedom of the bush and to an extent he has passed that on to his children. And that has come down from our father — my father and his father I guess.

No orchestra in the world can match the sounds of the bush at the base of the tiers at sunrise. Some people see it and feel it and some don't. I can't explain it, you can only know if you have experienced it for yourself. My whole senses change, I just get this feeling, I feel it in every part of my body, it is not describable. I can't explain it to you, I just wish that all my friends could have been there. I can't explain to you how I feel because there are no words to explain or describe it. The words just aren't there. Everyone can look but not everyone can see.





Fencing around Blackman River. Photo Laura Eves.

All about living



Royal George Landcare Group

- Tony and Joan Gee — ‘Snow Hill’
- Damian Gee — ‘Royslea’ and ‘North View’
- Guy and Debbie Marshall — ‘Rock House’ and ‘Brookstead’
- Trevor and Jeanette Williams — ‘Robin Lawn’

Royal George

Photos Laura Eves.



Tony and Joan Gee — Snow Hill is about 1400 hectares. It has about 40% pasture and 60% bush runs. Mostly dry sclerophyll with a diverse understorey of wattle and shrubs. My perspective is that what we have got in the bush is the result of 54 years of our stewardship. We have Saxon Merinos here and our numbers are right down at the moment, as low as we would ever go.

Dad came to Royslea in 1945 and we came to Snow Hill in 1966. The house was originally built in 1905 by the McGee family. It was originally three rooms and it was added to from there. It is a work in progress; it hasn't turned full circle yet.

Guy and Debbie Marshall — The home place is Rock House and Brookstead is over the river. 1600 acres here and 4800 acres over the river. It sounds a lot but there is a fair bit of rubbishy country. It used to be a tin mine many, many years ago. So there is probably only a 1000 acres of arable ground. One hundred and fifty hectares into covenant. There are not too many patches of bush that run all the way down to the river in an untouched state. I was born here and lived here for 45 years. Went to boarding school for five years and came back because I always wanted to be a farmer.

Dad came here in 1954 and he made a reasonable living off this place. That was when they first came here. He decided it wasn't big enough to support two families so he bought over the river in 1970. That was quite big enough for quite a while. We bought another property in 1990 and that was when the reserve price scheme collapsed and wool prices plummeted just after we bought it. So we sold that off to the brother-in-law who wanted to come onto the land. He now leases that out and lives and works in town. Another property up the road came up 10 years ago so I bought that one and just sold that about

a month ago for trees. It was the only way to make money out of it, selling it to a tree company. With the sheep we have diversified into prime lambs, aiming at 19–20 kilogram carcass weight.

Dad was here up until 11 years ago. Mum lives at Campbell Town now so it is just Deb and Sam here now. The other three have bolted off to town to work and college. Don't think any will come back onto the farm.

Trevor and Jeanette Williams — Our place is just down the road a bit here. It used to be called Robin Lawn but I have changed the name to Misery Farm. It's 830 acres and I've been there for 37 years. Grew up at a place called Wattle Grove, up the hill here. That is owned by my ex-sister-in-law now. We used to have to walk out from there to Royal George to school, which was three and a half miles. Rain, hail or shine. My family has all grown up now. A daughter used to live locally, at Fingal but they are heading off to Launceston.

Damian Gee — The holding here is made up of two places, Royslea and North View. About 2500 acres all up. Mum, Dad and Chris all work off farm and I run the day to day things here. There's a fair proportion of bush. Right close by the house there is a hundred odd hectares. Bush that has had a little bit of wood cut out of it, sheep never really go up into there and it hasn't been harvested for timber so we have put a covenant on it. Mum wanted to do that. She has got a couple of little gullies in the bush that she absolutely loves going to. She is really interested in all that, the flora especially. You can put stock in there off shears or at times but we have let them know that we don't want to put stock in there. We can put them in there when there is a bit of feed around, as long as it doesn't affect seed set and flowering of the plants. Which will be good because we don't get any income off

that area so we can lock it up and get a little bit of income off of it through the covenant and develop a bit of other country that has already been cleared.



Tony — It would be 10 years since the Royal George Group got going. Drought Landcare was the first on ground stuff. It took us about 18 months to get a landcare group up and then Drought Landcare came along and that is when we started and we had 33 projects involved and they are all pretty well complete and there have been a few new ones since then.

Guy — The idea was to link bush to the river. It started off as a Drought Landcare initiative and then other projects building onto that. We started out with a map, putting on boundaries and marking on what we wanted to do. From that initial project most of it has already been done.

Tony — The 33 projects have all been done as far as I can see.



Tony — The general problem in this area is dryness.

It's 40 kilometres from here to the Tasman Highway at Cranbrook and 20 kilometres to the coast in a straight line as the crow flies. There were 11 landowners involved. Wind reduction was the goal in the first place and vegetation protection, wind breaks and creek fencings.

Guy — We had a lot of goes with the shelter belts because it was back in the days when it never seemed to rain. You wouldn't know how many times we would have replanted.

Trevor — The soil was that warm that when you watered them you scalded them!

Guy — Like pouring boiling water onto them! Put iceblocks around them would have been better!

Yeah, that was disappointing, that's where the remnant blocks are good, you just fence them off and let them go! I had one block at home locked up and I thought that it was just a couple of old wattle trees but there is something like 40 species of plants. Somebody came and did a botanical survey. With the shelter belts, they would have been a lot more successful had they put more money into fencing to keep out the game.

Trevor's property was basically the boundary when we decided to start the initial part of the project. It has definitely come a long way, and we are starting to reap the benefits.

Tony — Absolutely, you can even see the stock sheltering, you can see an increase in moisture in the paddocks.



Guy — The Green Corps groups were really good, they came for a couple of weeks, so that was a bit of a bonus. They helped us get quite a lot of fencing done as by ourselves it would have taken us a lot of time, but they sure made a big difference.

Tony — It was so hot here one day we had to tell the guy in charge to warn one of them. There was one girl there that was body pierced and we had to tell her not to go in the river or she would have sunk!

We paddle on the river and we reckon we can paddle for 2 kilometres. Age has caused the paddling. The legs are wearing out but the shoulders are all right. We have always liked the water and we bought little kayaks. It is good exercise. The best thing about it you don't need much water.





South Esk River. Photo Laura Eves.

Tony — There has been work done along the river removing willows. They did a lot of fencing and gorse removal too and protecting South Esk Pines. It is a small pine tree. It does go down as far as Llewellyn, which is where the river comes close to the road half way between Avoca and Conara. They are out there and go pretty well out to Bicheno. Llewellyn used to be a little railway township and a post office. That's going back a bit. The old steam trains used to rewater at that siding. There was an overhead tank and they drew water up from the river. There is nothing there now, just the bend in the river.



Trevor — When we were kids we grew up on rabbits and wallabies and things like that. The first car my father bought he bought with the money he earnt from selling rabbit skins. It used to keep us in pocket money.

Tony — In 1956 rabbit skins were two bob each, two shillings, and that was a lot of money wasn't it.

Trevor — I remember Dad talking about riding his bike out to Royal George and taking some possum skins out there, this was in the mid 1930s. He got 2 pound 10 for some grey ones and 3 pound for some black ones. That would buy a couple of pair of boots back then.



Tony — Growing wool in his area has been a pretty big learning curve.

Guy — It has been.

Trevor — Wool is just about a dead loss at the moment. When I first left school I came up with the idea that the easiest and surest way of making money out of wool and sheep was to go and shear someone else's and in 48 years there is only one thing has changed, I have worn out, partly.

Tony — I'm pleased you said partly.

Joan — You said it Trev!

Trevor — I should still be shearing. I am to have a hip replacement. The specialist reckoned that it would never stand shearing again. I would like to be able to prove him wrong. My father was a shearer and a couple of brothers were shearers. I was probably 14 when I first started shearing. The thing that I like about it is the people that you work with and the animals. People ask, "Why did you work with sheep for so long?" I reckon their intelligence and mine are about the same therefore we understood each other. You get a few no hoppers occasionally but they don't stay there for long. Everything has changed. Shearing has changed so much now; it has become women's work. You know why? It is too bloody hard for men. With all these work place safety things and all the rest of it, it is absolutely ridiculous. People coming into sheds and telling you all the things that you can't do or should do and what is right and what is wrong. My first question is, "How many years have you worked in sheds for?"

"Ah, I've never worked in one."

I say, come back in 40 years time you might be able to tell me a little bit that I don't know.

Life has changed, especially with the children growing up and all that, they discourage you from letting them do anything on farms and a lot when they go shearing are not physically fit or strong enough for the simple reason that they never did anything much. Not allowed to do things. I don't know where it is going to end up.



Tony — Down there is the old shearing shed and Trev's Dad used to come and the shearing machine used to come out of the back of a trailer or ute. It used to get carted about, get dragged into the shed and set it up. Two people would shear on it all day. It would be popping away in the shed there for a fortnight.



I went to boarding school when I was nine and didn't come home for full-blown shearing until I was 17.

Trevor — When I first started shearing it was seven pound, two and six a hundred. When we first started off, a couple of fat lambs would buy a tonne of super. I have got a book down home where Dad got a pound and a penny for wool sometime before 1956. The wool price we got this year was about equivalent to what we got 30 years ago. Thirty years ago it was about \$30, \$31 a hundred to get sheep shorn. A penny a pound, that was good dollars. This was in the late forties, a pound was two dollars.

Tony — That is it numerically but you have got to say, well, you could probably buy a car for 700 pounds, between 500 and 700 pounds. If you could buy a car.



Guy — If we look at current wool prices, too much focus is given to the top price. We should be focussing more on the average price. A lot is blown out of proportion too with the media side of it, with the wool sales. You get your top bale and they say whatever, 3000 or 4000 cents per kilo, which would only be a couple of bales. It misleads the general public. They don't understand. They say, "Oh yeah, what are farmers whingeing about." That top bale might be worth \$4000 or \$5000 and that's probably worth .001 of a per cent of that entire offering



Trevor — One time it used to be Merinos on this side of Royal George and on the other side it was Polwarths.

Tony — No two properties in the district are the same you see. They are all diverse and different, in size and soil types. Rainfall varies about 10 inches over 20 kilometres. From Poatina to the top of the valley here is East West and this is the only East West valley in Australia.

Guy — It gets a bit of momentum up, the wind, doesn't it and cold, and rolls down the hill and straight up the valley. It is quite sheltered here.

Trevor — It wasn't very sheltered where I was this morning, out on the motorbike rounding up sheep. You couldn't make your dogs hear.

Guy — Most of the area has diversified now, wool, prime lambs, a bit of cropping.

Trevor — The micron range in this area is from 14.8 to about 17.9 or 18 this year. The range for the valley would go from 14 and a half to about 23.

I have got some that are a bit stronger now, a few Border Leicester cross ones because they are just about the most profitable sheep because they are good fat lamb mothers. In the last few years you could sell your lambs off at about six months and get up to a hundred dollars for them. The wool side is not worth that much but a lot of those ewes rear twin lambs.



Guy — I put in a pivot last year. Hopefully when that gets up and away it will provide feed for the lambs. Merino/Suffolk crosses. A couple of South Suffolk, Texels. I bought a couple of old rams to try them. With the ewes we get about 19 and a half micron and about 19 for the wethers. I think next year I will probably go right out of wethers and just have all ewes. Wethers are just a bit of a luxury item at the moment. All we get is the wool off them. The only time we ever make much money out of wethers is when we sell them. That is all right while the mutton market is good but if the mutton market fails then that

option is going to go. I think there are a lot of people going down those lines too, bailing out of wethers, just have ewes and then lambs. You still get a jacket of sorts off of them, keep the Merino side of it and then if wool does bounce back it is very easy to swing back over again. Say they sky rocket, which I don't expect to happen but I hope it does, then you just have to buy more rams and you have still got a nucleus of a flock there and away you go. That is why I haven't gone more for first and second cross ewes for the prime lamb side of it. Sort of got your foot on both sides of the fence.



Guy — Every year it just seems to be that little bit drier all the time. We used to grow poppies and then we were axed from those two years ago. They were getting pretty marginal anyway. I grow a few cereals just for our own use. The trouble here our freight is so expensive so that is not really an option. I did grow spuds for a couple of years and then I got out of that. That was a bit of an experience. Same thing with the freight. I do lease ground out to potatoes. That's good. You get paid and they do all the work. We built a dam here in 1986 and enlarged it about four or five years later to about 450 mega litres so that is a good water source. It has never failed me. It has never not filled up over winter. That has opened a lot of opportunities up to grow potatoes and now we have sort of diversified into prime lambs.



Damian — The ewes go back with the Merino ram this time next year and then we will have our 300 or 400 odd first cross ewes. Second cross to probably a Poll Dorset ram which will produce a bit better lamb because the Saxon ewes are pretty small but they do pretty well. We are aiming for about 17 and a half micron. The micron doesn't really concern me. I want weight. Try and keep the type that we have got but with more fleece

weight. We average not quite three kilos, if we can get that up to three and a half to four, that's a long way off, but if we can get it up to three and a half then that will be pretty good.

We bought a pivot and it has just done its second season. That's the thing with the drop in wool prices. The pivot has allowed us to diversify into other things, prime lambs and a little bit more cropping.

We have got a water right out of this St Pauls River and we have got total storage of roughly 200 mega litres. We can take about 75 out of this river. That is of course when it is there. Restrictions come on and that is when we have to use our storage. The catchment above the dam they have just cleared for trees so it is a big unknown. It will be interesting to see how much those trees take.

We mainly crop barley and wheat. We have tried linseed and coriander. A grazing wheat we grew for the first time last year and that did unbelievably well. We got a heap of grazing off of it, probably 500 weaners and 1200 ewes of half a day each. They go on in the morning and come off and the others go on in the afternoon. Then we turned around and got 3 tonne to the hectare off of it as grain. Very handy.



Tony — There has been two massive droughts in two consecutive years. I was reminded by a lady over in Fingal in October last year. She said it is so hard to believe that three months ago, every second day, all day, they were feeding, all day and that's what it was like. Christmas through to July we had 6 inches of rain. July through to Christmas we had 14 inches. So we had the most wonderful spring. We are having a better autumn now than we have had for 10 years.



Marathon Creek. Photo Laura Eves.

Trevor — For quite a few years, my brother and I used to do all the crutching in the district and we were hoping for a wet day to get a break. The numbers of sheep in the area have certainly decreased to what they used to be and there don't seem to be so many wet days.



Tony — It is a global economy now, truly, and we just have to accept that. Take China for example. People will work 12 hours a day, seven days a week and they are happy to have a job and the cost of production in those type of countries are just so ridiculously small compared to here. The other thing of course, Australian producers are so very good at producing, that we produce about 10 times more than we need locally. So you have got to find markets overseas.

Guy — There is an around the world yacht race going on at the moment and there is one crew wearing woollen garments. They go to the equator and the South Pole and they are still wearing it, which is good exposure for it. And then there is the soccer team is it? Wearing Tasmanian wool? That's what the guy from Roberts reckoned the other night.



Tony — You know the Australian community is making a lot of demands on farmers and freehold title is coming under huge challenge. The community better decide if it wants farmers or not and if it doesn't want farmers it is going to end up with wildlife reserves all over because that is all they will be.

We have made a commitment more totally to wool in the last two years than ever, but we have put a time line on it of three years. We have taken the opportunity to chop out what we don't want and we have got less sheep than ever. We also

want to think that we have got better sheep than we have ever had. But we now need to grow sound wool too to capitalise on what we have got and that has been a challenge.

Guy — What happens after three years?

Tony — We are able to diversify into cattle or meat but the secondary challenge that is coming along now is fuel prices so the third option is trees. We have a son-in-law who is into financial manipulation, I don't know what he does and when we told him what we had been offered up the road he just said sell. But like you, what do you do next? So it is not easy.

Guy — Yes they make it very hard not to invest in tree farming. We have covenanted some bush which brings some return. I have logged a little bit of it but the other I'm not able to touch it so I might as well put it into a covenant. They all have different values. I have a couple of blocks down on the river, where the South Esk Pines are, they are worth quite a lot more per acre and then you get this more marginal stuff that is not really worth anywhere near as much. It is a one off payment and you have different categories. That is pretty light soil and I am never able to put stock on it and some covenants they have a lot more of a grassy understorey so they don't mind you putting stock in there to try and keep the grass down. Over here there is no grass, there is only gravel, so you can't put stock in it or take firewood from it. I'm probably best just to look after it and keep a bit of native stuff. There is a bit of die back in this area. We fenced off some remnant blocks with landcare and they have come back. I haven't had sheep in there since fencing it off but they said I could, off shears or whatever. It is good to see the gums and other native trees and shrubs coming back.





Joan — In answer to your question Guy, what do you do next? Not sure what the options are because we haven't done much other than sheep farming. I guess you have a whole community that is displaced.

Tony — Damian has got tertiary education, what about you?

Guy — I wish now that I did a few other things, do a couple of other trades, you know, just as a bit of a back up if I ever went off the farm because there is not very much incentive at the moment I tell you. I have got bugger all.

Tony — I have got bugger all and Trev's got bugger all.



Tony — When I came back to the farm for holidays during school I enjoyed the country side, the shooting aspect of it and just farm life in general. We were lucky that our sport was horses and of course in those days horses were the prime method of transport. Over there in the shed is the buggy in which Grandad came from Launceston to Avoca for the races in 1954. And he arrived at the races at 10.30 in the morning in his horse and buggy. The first four-wheel drive to come onto this property is still up home and it is 25 years old. We had horses and draught horses. When we came across here in 1945 from the East Coast, the family of the guy who drives the tractor down home came here also in a horse and dray and the dray has only just been moved. When we came here there were three cars and the district was alive with people. Trev used to walk to school and I used to ride the bike to school. We had one teacher for one classroom and up to 30 kids and we had every class in that classroom. The education system has just

been changed so that people aren't being equipped to live in the bush any more. So coming home to the farm, that was all about living, and it still is.



Trevor — When I was going to school in Launceston, the big thing for me on the weekend was getting me out of Launceston. People say about my house, you know, in Launceston it would be worth \$100,000 more and I say, "it's worth \$150,000 more to be out here." It's the peacefulness and you don't have to worry about somebody over your back fence. We had to make our own entertainment. When we were kids we used to walk from Lake Leake out to the Snowy River and get a few fish out of the creek when they were up there spawning in the winter time. We would set out from home, at about this time of the year (May) for the brown trout, at the break of daylight, frost on the ground, catch a few fish and by the time we would come back it would be dark. We were never stuck inside; Mum would always be rousing onto us to get in because it was getting dark. We grew up with candles and kerosene lamps.

Tony — My dog ate Trev's pets! Dad and I went up to Wattle Grove, Dad was mowing I think and I took the old hound up there and the kids all had pets in half gallon drums, wallabies and guinea pigs and stuff and he found them and he ate them!



Damian — As kids we used to go down to the waterhole on St Pauls River with Mum in a vehicle and have a swim for an hour or so in the afternoon. It used to be all thick with gorse on the flood plain there. As part of the Landcare project we mulched the gorse and it did a good job. It is starting to come back in places so I will need to come in and spray it or rip it up to get on top of it. At a certain stage of the gorse,

when it is really young, coming up from seed and shooting, the sheep actually eat it when it is still soft. The gorse was knocked down with a big roller on the front of the tractor and then behind it was mulched 6 inches into the ground. The gorse was over ten feet high in places.

There was a nice gravelly bank where you could lie down and we used to cut all the grass around the edges. We slashed the grass near the water so we could see any snakes and there used to be a nice sandy and gravelly island that we would lay on and go for a swim, jump off the side there. It is amazing what the river does, it just changes.

Guy — We used to go down to the waterhole when the kids were young too, but that was many, many moons ago.



Tony — The district is really rich for things to do because quite a few people go to the top of St Pauls Dome. Over at Mathinna there are outstanding trees known as white giants, 90 metres right up. Out here there are the waterfalls and we go to those once or twice a year. They are on crown land and available to everyone. There are organised motorbike rides through the area. These days it is not uncommon to have 30 bike riders through. There is good trout fishing in the river. The river is fishing well. The creeks here used to be alive with fish but the creeks haven't existed with the dry. There were some eels out here by the workshop a few months back.

Guy — We just had a new business open up down the way, just behind Trevor's place with cabin's and fishing.



Joan — I think basically people on the land, their points of observations and fresh air and watching nature produce is really what keeps most people on the land.

Tony — Every day is a free art show. There is a sunrise and a sunset and everything in between. Every day is one. Fresh air and fresh water.

Trevor — If you are in town and you come out into the country of a night time the first noise you hear, you have a good look around to see "What's that? What's that?" For us, if there is a light around, "Who's home? What's that?" We used to run for miles at night time in the pitch black dark and we could see where we were going but now we are dazzled by lights.

Guy — The young ones coming back have a lot more options in town (*Launceston*).



Tony — Along with this we are discouraged from teaching the youngsters because with occupational health and safety there is so much stupidity out there it doesn't give kids the opportunity to learn.

Trevor — When people talk about occupational health and safety, my first question to them is "What's new?" When we first started off it wasn't referred to as workplace safety it was just common sense. When I started out and if I was walking along and tripped over a stick, what would I do? Get up and curse myself for being so bloody useless. But now you are encouraged to find some bugger to sue and they are not encouraging young people to think for themselves and be responsible for their own actions. People are looking for the easy way out.

Guy — Also a lot of the younger ones can see that there is a hell of a lot of work involved in wool growing, combined with everything and there are just not the returns. My boys aren't keen to come back onto the farm. One is interested in acting and the other in playing music. They sort of see the money you know. They see busting your gut all day for minimum return. They figure it's better to have a job, with



weekends off. Wool growing used to be a good way of life once upon a time when the seasons were good and the prices were good and the seasons have been rough and the prices don't seem to be getting any better. The incentive is not there any more. We have still got to try and produce the best product that we can but unless we start getting rewarded better for it, prime lambs will become a very good option. I was at the wool thing with Roberts the other day and a fella from up the road here said that he might be buying his last Merino ram and I said, "What are you talking about?" and he said "Well, prime lambs are looking a pretty good option."



Joan — Litigation is an issue now too. People don't feel comfortable to let people you don't know onto the properties now to learn how to fish or whatever because of the risk of litigation. It's really terrible.

Trevor — Yes, it is a changing world isn't it. Unfortunately a lot of the changes are not for the better.

Guy — What's your perspective on it all Damian? As a young farmer coming on? We have given all the doom and gloom of the old fellas, how do you see it?

Damian — As a challenge, hopefully one that is rewarding when things go right. I like working with sheep, I like that we have diversified into irrigation. I like it all. There isn't much that I don't enjoy. You have a few days where things go wrong and you.

Trevor — Run out of words to say.

Damian — Run out of words to say, yeah, but you keep going and keep doing what you enjoy.

Trevor — You've gotta be like Berger Paints don't you. You've gotta keep on keeping on.

Damian — I did want to be a chef for a little while and I did a week's work experience and that changed my mind and then I decided to come back on the farm.



I wonder what it will be like next year?



Bob and Angie Gee — ‘Royslea’ and ‘North View’, Royal George



Bob — Royslea and North View are one property. Royslea was originally 3000 acres and that is now not quite half. It has been in the Gee family since 1945. 714 acres at Royslea is left in bush. North View is 306 acres of pasture area and 971 bush. North View has pretty much always been a separate area but run as one entity.

I moved here when I was one year old. I am tending to work away more now than ever before. We used to run sheep, cattle and crop lucerne for quite a long period as well as barley and oats. Now since Damian has been looking after the place we have started with winter wheat under the pivot. The first dam I put in was in 1989 and then another one was put in the November before last.



Angie — I was born in East Africa, Kenya and then I went to the UK. An import.

In a lot of ways the landscape is similar to the landscape I was bought up in. Just the gum trees and wattles and the lifestyle, that sort of thing really hit me. So different to living in the UK then coming out here and finding it to be quite similar in a lot of ways to Kenya. Although we lived in a coffee plantation we still had gum trees and wattles and things in those areas so there were a lot of similarities in that way. As a child, I went to a school that was up in the bush. It was a long way from where we lived and we used to do a lot of excursions and look at the environment. Even then we used to go out and look at the plants and look at the trees, birds and animals. So the first time I smelt wattle in the August of the first year that I was here it just really brought back childhood memories. I first came here in 1976 and we were married in 1977.



Angie — The business started leasing the property in 1994 when Bob's father was still alive and then Bob's father died in 1998. That was when we started looking at covenanting. It wasn't until we actually separated the property into titles that we really went ahead and did it then.

About 150 hectares is going into covenant, it hasn't been exacted yet. We are doing a second covenant which is along the river. A small area of 5 hectares with South Esk Pines and Black Gum are one of the main reasons why we are doing that area. We have got a bit of gorse removal to do. I do like the South Esk Pine, it is a plant that is specific to the area so that is why we want to try and keep as many as we can. There are quite a few dotted along the river. There are some little clumps underneath the Black Gum that are unusual. They are usually more underneath the white gums or just dotted along.



Angie — I am trying to take photographs of all the plants that are on the property. Not only in the bush but along the river or any where in the paddocks, just a collation of photographs. I don't know that I will ever get around to putting them into a book or anything but I would just like to identify them if I can so that it is a record so that in the generations to come they can say, 'Well this plant is still here or not there.' Just for my own reference because I like to know what's about. I am useless at Latin names; I know it is a yellow flower with a pointy leaf and that sort of thing. As long as the plant is there and I can identify it in some way, that is all that matters to me.



Angie — I walk in the evening, when I get back from work. I like to go out at the end of the day after work, it freshens me up. You can smell when you are coming near a certain plant; some of them are quite strong scented. The heath when it is out is like snow. You can just get little bright specks around; you see one little bright yellow speck, or a bright heath or something. I can't really describe but it just has this aura about it. There are lots of orchids, the duck orchid, donkey orchid, leopard orchid and a sun orchid. I have a book and I am marking off where they all are. It is like a bible really. The one that we really want to preserve is the duck orchid which is not in any of the books. I try and find it in the book and I write where they are and take a photograph of them.

The bush has this smell and peacefulness about it. Hear a bird now and again, and crows in it, it is lovely. I couldn't describe it, just sense it. Some areas are different senses than others, if you are in a gully or if you are out on a hill or in an open area. There are three or four areas in the bush which each have a different feel to it. Especially in the spring when there is water running. It is a very different feel to the summer when the water doesn't run. It is cooler down in the gullies and crisper up on the hills. Under foot as well as

every thing else. Then it depends what the day is like, whether there is sun, whether it is out or not, whether it is cloudy or not or what time of day it is. I do like the evening, with the sun going down, that is a nice time.



Angie — We used to go down to the river regularly when the kids were younger and we didn't seem to do the same things with our family as Bob did with his family. It was a great meeting place for Bob when they were kids. Phil used to go down with the boys and Joan with her children and people used to go down there.

Bob — Have barbeques.

Angie — They even had a couple of church services down there!

Bob — The minister that was here then, he lives in Launceston, he thought if he can't get people to come to church he will go to where the people are. That was pretty much how it was.

Light a barbeque and that sort of thing, swim in the river and that has sort of gone by the way over the years.

Angie — I don't really know why, we keep intending to do it.

Bob — I would sooner get in the water where I can adjust the tap rather than the river. That's pretty much one reason.

Angie — I suppose the children aren't here in the groups like they used to be either. See Joan and Tony with their children and our children, but their children have moved away. So we don't have those young children in our family groups as we had then. They would get together more in family groups in the past rather than go out like we will now, to the movies or go out to dinner or whatever.

Bob — People travel more now too. If you want to go somewhere you travel to it.

Angie — When ever we do get a group together we say, we must do this more often. We just don't do it often enough but it is just a matter of making ourselves do it. You know the swimming hole, I used to love going down there with the children when they came back from school, "Let's go down for a swim" and you know we would be down there within half an hour from when they got back from school we would be down there swimming. It is a place that is remembered by quite a lot of people in the valley, the whole farming community. It used to vary every year depending on the flood. It would wash the areas, because it is gravelly, fine river wash.

Bob — It was very fine river wash if you like. It wasn't sand; it was more of a gravel. Even so it was good to get into, if you walked into the water.

Angie — At the beginning of the year we would go down, "Oh, I wonder what it will be like this year?" Whether it is a narrow channel from the river into the waterhole or whether it was wider or if there was any beach to sit on or whether we had to sit on the bank. After the winter and the spring we would go down and "I wonder what it is going to be like this year?" because of the change. Apparently years ago Neil McShane built a swimming block so they could train and do a turn as a training for swimming. Neil McShane had lost his leg below the knee and so he had to have an area where he could sit and get in the river. That just shows you how much they must have used it to go to the effort of doing something like that. It is just nice to go down there. It is very private there.





'Roislea' and 'North View', Royal George. Photo Laura Eyes.

Angie — I don't like clearing the bush. I just don't like it. But I don't press my views on anybody because I know that you have to make a compromise somewhere about it because you have got to make a living. If I had a choice I just wouldn't clear it. There would be no hesitation about it. You have got to take all sides of it. Even though they are putting them back to trees they are the wrong type of trees for the area and I don't like that. Bob asked me to go and have a look at an area up there and I said "No, I don't want to see it." As long as I don't have to see it, I don't worry about it. If I go up there I feel quite saddened about it.

Bob — As far as I'm concerned it is another crop which we can use. I mean it is hard at the moment trying to negotiate trees to go in to an area that we don't use. It is not good enough to clear for pasture; the cost is too high to clear for pasture now the way things are so we will put trees in because it will bring in 450 acres into production of a sort that we can't do ourselves.

Angie — That is my compromise. If we can have a covenant at least I am doing something about preserving some of the bush. If Bob wants to do that over there, that's fine, at least we are trying to do the right thing by keeping that area. I am quite happy to negotiate about something like that. I can see the good and the bad and the need and unnecessary clearing. It is the unnecessary clearing and total clearing that I don't like. I am not paranoid about it because I try to see both sides of it. I do prefer to not do it. It is a tricky one because we use wood for two fires and we need wood for building. We built the kitchen and we needed wood for the kitchen. So you can't be paranoid and say you can't timber these areas because you need the wood for the paper. You look at what you need; you have got to have it somehow. So if it is in a farming manner and it is regenerated, replanted or whatever for produce, yeah that is another compromise. But to just clear fell it just for the sake of doing it and not

replant it. To me that is just not on. If you are going to do it, you have got to use it again in some way or another. We have got to keep some areas that are for pristine bush. We have got to keep those areas because if we don't, it just upsets the ecology of the whole planet too much.



Angie — When I go up into this bush here I just feel that it is a bit of therapy for me, a way of getting away, but I also feel proud of the fact that we have been able to keep it the way that it is. And when you walk up somewhere like the Dome, you know that it is not going to be tampered with, it is State Reserve, you feel really proud that it is in your area. It is a landmark in the area that you sort of own in a way. The Dome is very significant to us. We live below the Dome, without that Dome and the way it looks, it just wouldn't quite be right. It's funny, you go over the West Coast and you come past Deloraine and you look over this way and you see The Dome. Home!



Bob — I always like to see on the farm a small number of our Bennets wallaby, a small number of Rufous wallaby, a small number of deer. I would like to see that. But at the present moment, every where else that you go as well, the numbers are increasing to such an extent, I suppose the thing will happen similarly to the devils. There will probably become a disease in there some where which will knock them out over a period of time because of the number.



Angie — I am a bit concerned with the planting of the nitens trees up above us here in the catchment and the amount of water they need to drink. I thought it was at a certain stage in their growing period that they needed a lot of water. I wasn't sure if it was early or a bit later,



because where they are feeds the creek here and this dries up in the summer anyway. So we are concerned that the trees will take a lot of the water and we won't have any water in the creek. I don't know. The thing is, as the trees grow, you always learn in your school days that the rain falls over where the trees are, so will it cancel each other out? I am concerned about what might happen. There is nothing that we can do about it now. We should have researched it before they wanted to do it but we didn't. We will just have to see.

Bob — We didn't even give it a thought that the trees would use a lot more water. Nitens need a lot more water than our gums. It won't happen in this area but in other areas they reckon now that the nitens will be harvested in 10 years.

Angie — We use the water for stock and we are allowed to fill the dam between certain months from that creek. So if we can't pump from the creek into the dam in those months then we can't fill the dams which then means that we don't have the water to irrigate. We have got a short period where we can use that so if there is no water in the creek then we can't use it. There are a few holes in it which do stay full for a period but usually about December it is about the end of the creek.

Bob — The creek this year has been bone dry since towards the end of November. Even with all the rain that we had in early spring.

Angie — I think so, it dried up quite quickly and then we had a big rain in February and it ran and it hasn't run since. It might be trickling now but it is not running and what are we now? The end of May.

Bob — We haven't had a 3 inch rain and that is what we need to get a creek going. So it will be interesting to see what happens there.



Angie — We did quite a lot of landcare work with direct drilling in remnant areas and wind breaks. We have plodded along. We have got to the stage now where we have really got to do some of our own fencing rather than landcare fencing. What, two years now we haven't really done any landcare. We will get back to it I suppose. We really did do quite a lot. We had the Corridors of Green project to try and get the corridors going from one side of the valley right through to the other side of the valley and that is partly why we have the laneway with the trees because it goes over the road and it goes down to the river so that joins both sides of the valley there. And there are a few places where they have tried to do that further up I think. We are quite pleased with what we have done in that respect. There are quite a few remnant blocks which have been fenced off. We have done replanting too. Money that was left over we have replanted several times. By the time you have got to the second or third time of replanting and they don't grow then you know that it is not going to happen. There were some areas that won't be planted again.

We have all taken it in turns with the executive committee of the group, share it around. The next thing that we must do is a planting for the beautification of the town. The local residents there have talked about, when you come into the George, you have got the sign Royal George and on the right-hand side there is a corner area where they are going to try and landscape and put shrubs and trees and beautify this end. So that is the next landcare project that is going to happen. It needs to be planted and done this winter. People are still wanting to continue what they have begun, and we will probably apply for funding in the future to do that. For gorse control, salinity and water monitoring. There are small patches of salinity. It isn't a problem in this area and we don't want it to be so we are wanting to monitor it to make sure it isn't a problem.

Bob — There are a couple of spots on this place that could become a problem with irrigation.

Angie — So that is what we want to do, monitor it and make sure that it doesn't happen. Weed control is still a big issue in this area too.

Things just sort of quietly happen and it doesn't happen in big bursts but it just keeps carrying on. It does happen. It doesn't happen over night but it does happen. So quite a lot of time and a lot of effort has gone into the areas that we have done which is good and it needs to keep going. I suppose you sort of get to the stage where you just can't do anymore landcare and you have really got to spend the time doing stuff on the farm because you are the only one working on the farm. You have got to get your priorities right. We have been there and done that for the moment and probably come back to it.



Angie — When we first started with landcare I propagated our own trees because I wanted our own seed to go on our own properties so I propagated our trees for a lot of the areas. This one down the road was a Drought Landcare one so I didn't have anything to do with that, but below the road are some of my trees and we have got another area down on the other side of the creek which are some of my trees as well and further towards the George. They are seeds that I collected and propagated for our own use. I quite enjoy doing it. It is quite fiddly work. It is time consuming. When I started working as an office administrator at the Primary School, then my hours became a bit too much to deal with. I haven't done any for a while and I think that probably I will. If there was no landcare money and I needed to replant I probably would because it is quite a simple process. It doesn't take too much to do. It is just time consuming, that's all, and make sure you water them. So there are all these plants here that I try and make sure I know what they are. Some are

so similar that you really have to get close to see if they have got hairs at the back of their leaves or not. That might be the only difference. I am not very good at that. I just like them. I love them and I just want them to be there. I just don't want them to disappear.





'Marathon', Deddington. Photo Laura Eves.

Helping nature look after itself



Andrew and Diana Cameron —
'Marathon', Deddington

I (Andrew) have been here since about 1977 but it has been in the family since 1906. It was just a sheep and forestry run before I moved here. Someone did live here in the 1800s. The property is 20% rough pastures and 75% bush runs for sheep grazing which are mainly covenanted as a Private Forest Reserve. There are also some small areas of stringybark forest set aside for sawlog production.

We mainly run fine Merinos based on Merriville bloodlines with the adult sheep averaging about 18 to 18.5 micron. The run country here is fairly well timbered, so I run less than a sheep to the hectare for 8–10 months on about 1150 hectares. There are about 280 hectares of paddocks which run about five sheep to the hectare over winter and provide summer grazing for the bush wethers. We have just started joining our old and cull ewes to the Coopworth for breeding fat lamb mothers. So we will see how that goes in diversifying our income. The Coopworth is a long wool New Zealand breed developed using ABVs for fertility and meat production. They are meant to have a calm temperament, which makes them good mothers and good doers, whereas the Merino is quite nervous. The Merino must burn up a lot of energy in nerves. It's good to see that Merino breeding research now recognises the importance of temperament and is starting to work out practical ways of measuring it for selection.





Andrew — I have always been interested in native grassland or woodlands — native run country that didn't require fertilising and also produced a high quality product. That is why I stayed with this piece of land. I am attracted to low input systems of farming because they are less vulnerable to cost price fluctuations. When we had a lift in the wool market in the late '80s, and everything went quite berserk — we had a lot of people developing land for the purposes of wool growing. A lot of healthy native run country (on marginal soils) was cleared ploughed and developed with fertiliser dependent pasture species. When the wool market collapsed in the '90s so did the ability to maintain the fertiliser and the pastures deteriorated to be less productive than the original native bush. A lot of effort and money was wasted. They lost a whole lot of natural values and biodiversity which have economic values today. And that was a pity really.



Andrew — I have been involved with the successful marketing (not growing) of organic wool in Europe since the early '90s and know first hand that there are benefits to be gained by producing to an accountable standard of sustainability and biodiversity. If we want to sell our wool in Europe we must ensure that we have little or no chemical usage on our wool. I try to do everything to the best of my ability to ensure that we don't use chemicals on the wool. Once in the last two decades we had the misfortune of getting lice and having to treat the flock with one of the safer treatments available. But as far as fly strike is concerned, I don't use any synthetic chemicals for treatment of flystrike. I don't have a problem with flystrike; three or four sheep get struck a year and get manually treated with natural pyrethrum and culled. That's the limit of applying chemicals to the wool here. The reason for the low fly strike incidence is mainly to do with natural diversity in the pastures (plenty of

weeds and native grasses) that are naturally fed, i.e. pastures that aren't over fertilised, such that the health or immune system of the sheep is able to resist fly strike attack. Fly strike is not only about wet wool, urine and dirty bums — there are other factors that come into play and I think a healthy diet and natural immunity have the most significant effects. You will find flystrike occurs more willingly on areas where sheep are on highly improved pastures and highly fertilised pastures producing unhealthy grass like those awful industrial vegetables you buy in the supermarket.

It is easy to see that choice and diversity are important in the diet of sheep. It's always observed when you move sheep from paddocks to a bush run where there is a lot of young wattle, that the sheep will go for the wattle straight away and they really go for it as if their life depended on it. But after that initial feast they will only pick at it from time to time as if it was a garnish in their diet or maybe the sheep are taking the opportunity to "self medicate".



Andrew — Liver fluke can be a problem in the bush runs, it can be a killer when you don't expect it — after a dry autumn and poor spring — because sheep go into damper areas that are normally sour and ungrazed and pick up the fluke. Stomach worms etc can be problematic towards lambing time if we have a wet summer and there is plenty of moisture and shelter for worm larvae to survive. Both liver fluke and stomach worms have to be treated using conventional drugs when required. Tasmania's temperate climate makes it difficult to manage internal parasites and produce fine wool. The fine Merino has not got the immune system to overcome these parasites even with a healthy diet. The meat breeds may be a different story.



Andrew — In respect of the Land, Water & Wool project, we are working towards our property having good credentials for biodiversity accreditation — in that we grow wool on a property where 75% of the property is in Private Forest Reserve. We run sheep on the grassy woodland reserve which is part of its conservation management — to stop it from getting rank and overgrown and to help maintain a wide range of native fauna and flora species.



Andrew — The other part of what we try to do here is to keep our major streams fenced off and help maintain good water quality in the catchment. We have nearly completed our main objectives — that is fencing off all our river frontages and major streams and water courses. The upper catchment of the Marathon Creek is in forestry areas and then it runs through us for 4 kilometres. Our Nile River frontage runs for about 5 kilometres along our southern boundary.

Many of the landowners in our catchment group (*the Nile River Catchment Group*) have been working along the same lines — trying to prevent erosion, turbidity and livestock contamination in the streams and river and trying to improve the quality of the native vegetation along the river. Most of the Nile River is now fenced off from intense livestock grazing and a lot of work is being done to tackle the weeds along the river. There are still significant areas of high quality native vegetation communities along the river; they are of a high conservation priority too. Forests along the river vary from ovata to viminalis to blackwood forests. The understorey in many places is still in good enough condition to recover.

An important community good that comes out of fencing off the river is maintaining good water quality for domestic use in the townships of Deddington and Nile. It makes a difference to every body's quality of life if we have clear clean water that we can drink and use without treatment.



Andrew — I started fencing off the creek 18 years ago, back in the last wool boom. It has started regenerating naturally. I first fenced off about 2 or 3 kilometres. Recovery has been good for native grasses and sags, wattle and tea tree recovery, but slower for white gums. Wallabies and possums are pretty hard on eucalypts. Where there is some remnant native vegetation and the ground is stable there is not much point doing replanting. If there is a bit of tea-tree and a few sags and tussocks it will regenerate over time and flooding will help spread and germinate more seeds.

I planted trees back in the early '80s for shelter and bank stabilisation reasons. I don't think we need to plant trees for biodiversity reasons because there is plenty of nature here already. We have got about 8 kilometres of streamside exclusion areas distributed through our flats along with our Private Forest Reserve in the hills. It is quite expensive to get trees going because of wildlife. Everything has to be fully guarded to get trees started.

We support thousands of wallabies on the place. Local shooters help to control them on the flats and the meat is used for pet food. However being surrounded by bush there are always hundreds more to replace them each night.





Photo Laura Eves.

Andrew — I chatted to the guys who do the bi-annual river health surveys. They were testing at a site down at Deddington and up here by the bridge. They walk through the river, turning the rocks over and with a net, as they turn the rocks over; they capture what comes out from underneath the rocks. This river gets a high rating for aquatic life and diversity. It is crystal clear and well aerated water but up here we don't have the slow moving meandering pools and broad-waters that can produce the quantity of insect larvae etc required for good trout fishing. On the other hand on a hot summer's day it's the most beautiful river you could imagine to swim in.



Andrew — We are lucky in that the State Forest in the Nile catchment is mainly *delegatensis* (White-top Stringybark) and forestry has finally twigged over the last 10 years or so that you don't need to clear fell to harvest this species. It responds better to a selective logging process because there is always a crop of younger trees standing on the ground waiting to take off when it has sufficient light made available, so when you remove some mature trees a new crop of immature trees will take off. You don't need to reseed it and you don't need to burn it. *Delegatensis* is unique in this way because unlike most eucalypt species it doesn't seem to get stunted by a disruption in its early growth.

There are a few plantations in the upper catchments of the major creeks in the valley. Not so many as to be alarmed by them but enough to be reminded of their insidious spread. I'm not crazy about *nitens* plantations funded by funny money through managed investment schemes. Time will only tell if we have a problem with autumn and spring flow rates in the Marathon Creek when the trees start growing full steam.

The Marathon Creek is not a permanent creek. At the moment it flows on average 10 months of the year.



Andrew — Superfine Merinos are not my thing. But we are surrounded by some of the country's best superfine woolgrowers. The Nile valley is famous for its superfine wool and the world records it has broken at auctions over the last 40 years. That is just proof of what sort of country it is. The dolerite hills are low in phosphorous but they provide stable supply of healthy native grass cover year round, so tensile strength is high, there is very little dust and you get beautiful soft handling wool. World records are not only to do with the land — they are mainly to do with the people who are committed to excellence in breeding and managing their sheep and preparing their wool.

The native pastures here are more based on wallaby grass, kangaroo grass, weeping grass and velvet tussock rather than the spear grasses and silver tussocks you see in the open native grasslands on the Midland plains. The rainfall is comparatively stable — we average about 750 mm per annum and it has not been below 600 mm more than 10 times in the last 90 years. There is enough rainfall here to keep the grass growing steadily and the wool well washed without damaging it.

We are reasonably protected from the wind as well. If you have a good spring and a good summer, with a few rains, there can be green pick right through. But like every where else in Tasmania, autumns are notoriously irregular. Without an early autumn rain to get things started when it is warm, winter growth can be very slow. Nothing will happen then until September. This year has been an exceptionally good season.



The creek flats are at an altitude of about 250 to 280 metres and the top of the hills in the runs are about 600. It is about 15 kilometres to the base of Ben Lomond ski field's road from here. We get a few days with snow up in the hills in most winters. Frost can substantially limit growth during the late autumn, winter and early spring.



Andrew — Ever since the 1950s the wool industry has been on a downward spiral in terms of wool prices versus the costs of production. That has been the sad truth about it. So in the long term the wool-growing may only survive where wool growing is the most or only suitable land-use. Competition for land and water resources is heating up and if wool can survive at all I believe it will survive in the Nile valley because the input costs are low and the quality is second to none.



Andrew — Apart from sub clinical deficiencies of selenium and iodine, which is corrected with a salt lick now and then, I think the soil here is well supplied as far as micronutrients and minerals are concerned and that is why animals here remain in good health to an old age.

Diana — We have an old horse and when she came onto the property she was bit of a mess — down in the dumps, harsh coat and an auto immune disorder which affected her skin and mouth — the vet said she had had it for a long time and it would not heal. After a year of being here she was a different horse the auto immune condition had cleared up completely, her energy levels were high and her coat was soft and glossy.

I think her soft coat says it all about the wool. It wasn't a great year when she came here. I think it was just the balance of nutrients she was receiving via the soils. I had heard someone else mention that by monitoring the health of their horses it was a gauge of the health of the land. They are very sensitive to what they eat.



Andrew — We are very privileged to live and work in such a beautiful part of the world.

The birds alone are enough to remind you each morning how lucky we are. The riparian bush and forests with all their flowering plants attract all the native honeyeaters, wrens and different thrushes etc. In the cooler months the Black Cockatoo and Currawongs come down from the mountain and follow the bush areas along the river.

John Glover came to live and paint across the river from here at Patterdale about 175 years ago. He was one of the country's first recognised artists along with likes of von Guerard and well before Piquenet. The river flats may have changed a lot since then but many of the elements of the bush, landscape and the light are still as he painted them.

It's great to have such an early botanical record (going back to the 1830s) of the trees and plants that were growing in the area — my favourites are his paintings of the Nile River, especially the one in the National Gallery in Melbourne.

Diana — Last time I saw it there was a notice next to the painting saying — 'people who live in that area say that the trees really look like that'.

Andrew — Earlier critics have made shallow assessments about his strange tree forms and plants flowering at the wrong time of the year but his observations and interpretations of the landscape with its strange new plants were

essentially correct and quite radical if you think about how long it takes ourselves to understand the little nuances of nature's forms or how to identify differences between species of eucalypts.

People think that a eucalypt tree is a solid object like a pine tree or an oak tree but Glover objectively observed that with eucalypts you can see through them because they diffract light to survive in drier marginal environments, not absorb it like European trees. With Glover the landscape is often observed through the sparse branches of eucalypts.

He was obviously interested in botany because within a short time of being here he was able to capture the subtle differences that identify the different species of eucalypt and acacias.

It appears from his paintings that the west facing slopes of the surrounding hills were covered in more open grassy woodland than the wattle and eucalypt forests that exist today — perhaps this is a result of changing fire frequency — you can imagine the valley flats and partial wetlands under aboriginal management being burnt to encourage wallaby numbers and the fires being carried up the west facing slopes by the prevailing winds.



Andrew — Well before land care started I had a rude awakening about the importance of water quality. This was impressed upon me by my neighbour when I first started farming. I had done some ploughing and put in drainage lines without forethought and my neighbour made the comment, that my topsoil was seriously muddying his water intake. I felt ashamed about that. Not only was my precious topsoil being washed away but I was causing difficulties for my downstream neighbour. This was not acceptable. I didn't like the idea of water coming into my property in good condition and leaving my property in worse condition.

Diana and I are now both active members of the Nile River Catchment Group. The community population dynamics have changed considerably since then with many more commuters now living on bush blocks and in the villages of Nile and Deddington and the larger farms not retaining many permanent staff any more.

It is important for all sectors of the community to participate in land care initiatives — we share the same environment, water resources etc and it's a way of getting to know and becoming part of the community.

Diana — Even within a small community we have a broad skills base now that enables us to work together successfully — like working out everyone's needs and applying for funds or lobbying local government as well as complete the practical tasks. People can be very considerate and helpful to each other when given the opportunity.

Andrew — I think the rural community cooperates better than it used to, particularly with things like the river. I think it is important in a catchment group that people can speak their mind freely so contentious issues can get aired or at least be understood. If issues like water quality are considered to be too contentious to talk about then nothing will improve.

The Catchment Group was formed after a bit of a crisis over water quality in the Nile about five years ago. Since then we have seen a terrific amount of work being done along the river and local creeks and there has been no ongoing problems with water quality. Everybody has a clear understanding of what effects water quality — man-made and natural and there is much more co-operation.

In the catchment group, everyone is represented along the river. There are irrigators, there are graziers, and there are town's people. It is not just about a bunch of farmers, it is about all



people who have an interest in the river so when something is decided it has to be taken into consideration the effect it has on other people. We have meetings and if we apply for funds as a group we decide how those funds are spent.

An ability to work together also attracts assistance from government agencies etc. The Department of Primary Industries and Water have put a lot of resources into helping us prepare a river care plan; mainly about vegetation management along the river.

If you have a lousy water quality then it reflects on the whole community and affects their quality of life.

Diana — it has been very energising to see different people work together at problem solving and quietly achieve improvements along the river.

Andrew — If there is money available through a grant scheme we sort of crank up into gear to get everybody to apply and do something while the money is available otherwise you miss the opportunity.



Doing the best that we can



Tim and Jane Parsons —
'Curringa Farm', Hamilton

Tim — Curringa Farm is a 300 hectare, mixed farming business. We have 3000 sheep, of which 2500 are for wool production, 500 for meat production. We have a diverse cropping program with poppies, cabbages and this year we have vetch. The cabbages and the vetch are for seed so we are trying to specialise in niche seed crops. This year's cabbage seed is going to Japan.

The sheep are medium fine wool, between 18 and 20 microns; it is getting finer all the time. A small flock so we are looking for opportunities to niche market that as well and form relationships with buyers so that we can tell a story about growing wool and its end use. People are interested in hearing the whole story. My original ancestors came out to Tasmania in 1823. He was a commissioner of stores on Sarah Island on the West Coast. Jane and I have got a tourism operation here to feed and water guests that come in on cruise ships and I guess my ancestors were involved in the same tourism game because he fed and watered his guests that came out to Tasmania!



Tim — We have the self contained cottage for holiday accommodation and we also have coach tours coming into our function centre for a high quality barbeque, sheep shearing demonstration and farm dog demonstration and a tour around the farm looking at the environmental management. We have put a lot of energy into marketing our tourism product and us as farmers traditionally haven't really



marketed our produce. Attaching a story is just a way of doing something a little bit different to the main stream. So it is a big story in amongst all that.



Tim — We have a long term vision of planting 20% of this farm to some sort of perennial plant, shrub, bush or tree. It is a pretty big target but I have visited farms on the mainland that have achieved that and in doing so their production on the remaining 80% is far greater than their neighbours that have got zero conservation area. The time frame that we have on that is our working life. We have got about 7 hectares of what we call our remnant bush. Some of it is sandblow with native *Danthonia* and *Themeda* popping up in it. Some of it is rock scree and most of it is just sandstone outcrop with dry sclerophyll scrub. The eucalypts are mainly *pauciflora* and *viminialis* with a little bit of *tenuramis*. So there is a bit of a mix over there so it is probably more open woodland than dry sclerophyll. It is pretty fragmented. Then we have got about 5 hectares of tree plantations that we have done over the last 10 years. Around 12 hectares out of 300, so about 4 or 5% at present. So just little steps at a time.



Tim — We are right on a discharge area for the whole catchment behind us so there is a big story to tell about salinity. We can put bandaids on the symptoms but we can't really fix the problem because it needs a catchment approach of planting 10, 15, and 20% of the hill country out to perennial vegetation. And that doesn't have to be trees; it could be lucerne or deep rooted perennial pasture plants. But obviously some shrubs and trees would be desirable.



Tim — For a variety of reasons we have scaled down from the farming operation of the '80s and '90s. We have diversified into tourism that my parents set up. They put in a great base and platform in there and Jane and I have taken that on as part of the farm package. We see a very strong future in communicating how farms are farmed in a sustainable way to people because it is a great message. A lot of eco-tourism stuff takes place in rainforests or in bush or along nice rivers with solar house and eco toilets and duck board paths where you have got all these signs looking at animals that live in forests, or wet forest.

Jane — A lot of people come to Tassie thinking that they are coming to see all forests and waterfalls where in actual fact there is a fair bit of open agricultural farmland and grassland.

Tim — And when you are telling that story about why those hills haven't got trees on them, why the old trees have got tin around them and the old trees are dying and we get into die back and tree decline. We talk about possums and the export market of possums. There is something like 14 species of Tasmanian small furry cuddliest and we have seen about 10 of those in the 30 years that we have been farming here. So that is quite an impressive list that up until we became interested in the environment and landcare, we just took for granted and treated them as pests.



Tim — We have got 61 species of native Tasmanian plants in the little conservation block over near the cottage. We really appreciate this amazing feat in this open farmland location where you look around and struggle to find another block with that number of different species growing in it, intact and quite happy. So we treat that as very important. Like a heartbeat for the rest of the farm to build upon.

Here at the house you look out the windows and you just see a desert. I mean it is a fantastic year but it is actually a decertified landscape. Over at the lake, our farm is right on the edge of the modified landscape and the intact vegetation systems running to the West Coast. So a bird that lives on a tree in our place can flit from tree to tree and get a feed all the way to Strahan on the West Coast. But if that same bird wanted to go to Swansea or Launceston or the East Coast somewhere it has got to cover tracts up to 5 kilometres in between secure habitats for it to be able to stop, to breed up and eat food and be comfortable before it migrates up further. That is easy for birds. When you start looking at bandicoots, quolls, bettongs and all the furry cuddlies to get from this edge effect to Bothwell or Gretna or Swansea, they have got to get through all this open farm land that has been so heavily modified in the last 150 years.

In saying that though, we are kidding ourselves because all we are doing is creating a little island inside a heavily modified landscape. There is a lovely river and there is some tracts of bush but there is die back and tree decline and that vegetation there is just as sick as what ours is. So we are saying that in 50 years time, our farm here, if we did nothing to it and just kept on farming the same as our ancestors have done for the last 100 years, we would have zero native vegetation on this farm so what we are doing by planting out our 20% is creating this little idyllic island and we will know that we did our best. But it is still bloody crook (laugh).



Tim — It is my view that anything that we do and touch, if you are going to plant a tree somewhere or divert a bit of water to prevent erosion, or pull out some weeds — it is a universal thing. It is doing good and fitting in. What we are doing on this farm and the farm next door and the farms right through, it is generational contracts. It is lifetime stuff. So

I think if somebody wants to plant some trees somewhere, be it on that hill or down in that gully or whatever there is a benefit. Even if it is just a benefit for bees or butterflies or insects and ants or birds. It is just a little toe hold.



Tim — I hate using chemicals but they are a necessary tool. They have been very effective throughout our tree planting program. However I have also used them in the wrong situations and learnt a few lessons. The insects, to have a look at a seed sample of the cabbage seed and run your hands through it and have lacewings and ladybirds and little spiders just wandering around in the pure seed and know that they are all beneficials is absolutely fantastic. We wouldn't have that happen had we relied on chemicals for insect control.

I think we have made reasonable steps in the last two years with insect control by using molasses as a pest deterrent and attractant for beneficials. That seems to be working OK. I won't know until we harvest again this year and it is really only early days and I am following in the footsteps of other people but I reckon it works OK. Growing and stimulating crops with fish oil, mainly just the cabbage crop. I bought some organic fertiliser for the poppies this year from the mainland at huge expense and did half the paddock biodynamically and the other half conventionally. Haven't noticed any visual differences all the way through on the two sides but the only remaining quantifying thing remaining is yield and alkaloid content and we will determine that at harvesting time.



Tim — I think that we have got a lot of work to do on our soil fertility as it is just starting to decline a bit now and that is through looking at weeds and plants and how plants are growing. This is where the biodynamic business comes into it. We are just embarking on a liming



'Curringa Farm', Hamilton. Photo Laura Eves.

program to address that by including lime as a natural product, a way of getting calcium back into the soil. We are running about 10 sheep to the hectare, call that 50 kilos each. That's 500 kilos to the hectare of animals and you add on a few rabbits and birds and spiders, so call that 550. We don't know how many animals are living under the surface, all those little worms, bugs and critters. We think there is somewhere around 10 times the weight of the domestic animals on the surface in mini beasts under the soil. We don't even know what lives under there. So every time we put a chemical on or a nitrate fertiliser, sure we know that we are doing good for our pastures and domesticated animals but those little critters that are the factories for the soil, we don't know enough about them, you know it is really scary.



Jane — I grew up in Launceston, my father has a strawberry farm at Hillwood. I went to school in Launceston and then came to Hobart and did my nursing at The Royal Hobart Hospital and met up with Tim. I nursed up here at Ouse for a few years and then stepped into our tourism business.

At the moment I mostly focus on the children and the tourism side of the business. I do most of the cooking and organise the staff when they come so they work in together. It is like a big open air function centre where we set up trestle tables for the visitors, food is prepared in our commercial kitchen and we have a shop area as well. It's a bit nicer than a barbeque. Tim is much better at the marketing side of it. There is quite a lot of talking with people, a lot of phone calls; he is really good at selling the product.



Tim — The things you take for granted. When I was the age of our children, Sarah and Jock, seven and nine now, I can remember, we had small depressions on the farm that used to hold

water for three or four months of the year. As kids we used to catch frogs and we used to catch like big 4 litre ice-cream containers and we would fill them up with frogs and the frogs would be the green and gold bell frogs. To us they were just frogs; they were everywhere, thousands of them. Then we grew up and I went away to boarding school. I was away in town for six years and I started doing adult stuff and getting involved in the environment with landcare. So 20 years later somebody says, "There's no green and gold frogs around any more, they are a rare and threatened species", and over the last few years they have just started coming back. As kids they would fit in the palm of our hands, they were huge big things.

Jane — And our children are not used to them. Actually, you went and dug up some rabbit burrows one day and you gave Sarah one of these frogs to hold and she was terrified, practically terrified, because they are huge.

Tim — They are in the long grass around the waterholes and they get in the irrigation drains. I have probably only physically held four in the past four years. So that is heartening to know that they are there. But as a childhood memory, that sticks out as a big circle in life. The rain, you know, we used to have really soaking wet winters and we used to get bogged.

Jane — It is not really a priority for our kids to have gumboots, it doesn't really get that wet.

Tim — As kids, the wet, boggy winters is my biggest memory. And more recreation time. We used to go over the back and play amongst the cliffs and rocks and trees. Of course when you are little everything is just so much bigger. I mean a cave now is probably no bigger than the table but when you are seven years old you would get in under that. I can just remember, where there are lots of stump holes now, a much larger population of these old remnant paddock trees and that's something that my kids will never



see. All they will know is linear shelter belts. Where there are little depressions in the ground now, there used to be fit, healthy growing gum trees that have just succumbed over time and I am remembering this over a 30 year time frame so to me that tells a story that this stuff happens so slowly and it is really hard to remember what it used to be like 30 years ago.



Tim — People always ask, “Why are the trees dying? Why do you have tin around the trees?” I try to be specific about this. I believe it is a combination of four things, and those combinations on their own get counteracted anywhere across Tasmania. So it is random combinations. If we knew the answer we would be able to fix it and we don’t know the answer. But it is a combination of one, old age and poverty. These old paddock trees are over 100 years old and they have to reach the end of their natural lives at some time.

The second thing is a change in the pattern of rainfall and I will elaborate on that by saying prior to 1975 we had those super wet winters that I referred to when I was a kid and they were soaking wet and that water would store up in the underground aquifers. Our long-term 100 year rainfall is about 17 inches which I tell people on a coach, is less than a foot and a half of rain. In the last 30 years our rainfall has declined to 16 inches. Now one inch less rain is not enough to kill trees but a large proportion of our rain is in the summer time and it is evaporating and blowing away. So it is not as effective as when we used to have a huge amount in the winter and it was stored up, and those gum trees would use it right through the summer. Now there is not enough in the aquifers. Interspaced with this there have been some chronic droughts where we have been down to 8 inches in a year and we have never been able to rebuild that storage capacity.

We are also watching the natural tree line recede behind us. Look how the trees have been harvested right up to the skyline and you can see through the trees. So they have left the skyline but, by crikey, it is only one tree wide. We don’t appreciate how much vegetation, natural bush and stuff is out there. When you can see through the skyline retention block, I mean you know things are changing so rapidly. And that’s the thing about climate and global change.

The third thing is the loss of the understorey. These old eucalypts now are a monoculture in an improved pasture situation. When they were little trees there were still big trees in an ecosystem and they were almost too big for the old tractors and horses and carts to push over, back 60 years ago. So they were left there but anything smaller got pushed up. So now they just can’t hack it. They used to be the dominant plant in a forest. Now they are a monoculture and they just don’t like that. It is not that we as a group of farmers, intentionally cleared all this area for sawmill timber or to get rid of it. It is just that the old trees died and every time a new little baby tree tried to grow there was always sheep there nipping it off and so we just put a stop to natural regeneration 150 years ago. So, loss of biodiversity, which took me six years of working with Greening Australia to realise the importance of the whole ecosystem, not just look for the big, tall trees. You have got to start with the mosses and grasses and orchids and herbs and groundcovers; that’s the first step. You have got to get them back before you will get a natural regeneration of eucalypts.

The fourth thing is pressure from possums. As farmers, we have done a fantastic job of planting clovers and grasses and fantastic succulent plants for possums to eat. Possums are living in the holes in the gum trees, so they have got this fantastic diet so they are breeding up to match the amount of feed available. Then we have droughts and dry times and possums are adapting their gut to tolerate the toxins in eucalypt leaves. I have

seen possums completely defoliate a tree in an experiment that has happened by default through putting tin around the trees. Two trees side by side, the tin blew off one tree and stayed on the other one and in three months the possums completely killed the tree the tin had fallen off of.

So they are the four reasons that I believe, but it is a combination of things because the balance of possums is OK out in the bush because there is not the clovers and pastures, so they hold their own sustainable balance. But we have increased it here with clovers and pastures.



Tim — If you can imagine these hills 100 years ago when they had trees dotted over them. It was just like an open woodland, trees, wattle trees, just scrub. When the wind blows, it hits the tree and it breaks up and the wind disperses, so it is not as aggressive on the contours of the hill. The trees provide shade and there are lots of different plants and pastures growing on the hills. Fast track 100 years and we start to take all these trees away and we get open areas with a dozen or so trees. Then the wind isn't broken up, the speed of the wind is faster across the top of the hills and it dries out the soil and the soil doesn't retain as much water. There is a huge change in the make-up of the system. So that is what has happened. As we lose these old remnant paddock trees on the tops of the hills, they are speeding up the wind, drying out the soil, changing soil temperatures, altering the organisms that are living in the soil.

Also with rain, all of a sudden we have got these big bare domes that are solar panels. The hills here now are acting as these huge solar panels which have an increased soil temperature and dryness index and so every time a rain bearing cloud comes over we have heat waves radiating off these big solar panel domes which are saying to the cloud, "Go away, go away, don't rain here because there is nothing here to rain on." That is why we are getting less rain as well. But in saying

less rain, 17 inches back to 16 inches, our long term average is really not all that less. We are having peaks and troughs, so we are having droughts and then this year in 2005 we are having our super wet flood year, fantastic. Which is just like it used to be before 1975?



Tim — On this farm 5 kilometres to the west of us is the remains of a glacier. The Broad River System, the Derwent River was a glacier coming down off Mt Field, that's about 5 to 10 kilometres away. All of this was under ice only 11,000 years ago. Now 11,000 years ago is only five and a half times the length of Christianity, if you call Christianity 2000 years. It was only 15,000 or 18,000 years ago that the coast of Tasmania was 15 kilometres further out off the shelf, before the ice age. But 1 kilometre to the East of us there is an open cut coal mine. I think 60 million years ago, the whole place was tropical with dinosaurs and palm trees, very high temperatures. So we have had this huge high temperature and ice age low temperature and us good old Europeans came out here nearly 200 years ago, we have only been here for such a tiny period of time and we are complaining that we have droughts and hard farming conditions and it is a tough country to work in. So in the scheme of that, we have just got to do the best that we can with what we have got here and now for our own personal 60 year farming lifespan and leave it better than how we found it.

It is easy to acknowledge super cold and super hot, and I agree with the scientific community when they say that the rate of change over the last 30 years has been very, very fast and it is that rate of change that is creating a lot of our problems now. What has happened right across Southern Australia is that it has been cleared at a huge rate of knots in the '40s, '50s, '60s and that has affected climate right through faster than that had happened before. And that is not to say that



huge bushfires did not ravage right through Australia back before European settlement and may have done the same thing. That's the big picture stuff.



Tim — Things were pretty tough in the '90s. We had good farming years right through the '80s, good income, Australia was riding on the sheep's back and then we had the wool crash, we knew we had to do something radically different. We started block grazing and cell grazing.

We also decided at the time to stop cropping because we went through a bit of a hard core greenie phase of not raping and pillaging ground. So we ran out of work to do! We did some gross margins and we worked out that we grossed \$27,000 worth of cropping income one year and netted \$270. And if we did it again it would probably still come up close to that and that was frightening. We were just going up our own bottoms really. So my brother and me said, "Well, let's go and work off farm." I was the first one to go, it just coincided that a job came up with Greening Australia and I applied for it. So it was by chance that I got a job with Corridors of Green. For six years it was fantastic and I wasn't experienced but I learnt a hell of a lot and my mentors were Jock Waugh and Alan Gray and they taught me. We just got out there and did practical work and it was great. And I matured and learnt more and as my experience increased my level of responsibility increased to the extent that I was managing the Bushcare Support Team, working all over the state. It just matured at a rate of knots and to the extent where the bureaucracy just burnt me out and the time came for me to say, "Tim, look, get home onto the farm."



Tim — I think all farmers are conservationists at heart. But our attitudes, we think, are fairly tame and one of the things my grandfather said to me

early on, 'I'll never make it, I am just far too silly, I should be spraying chemicals around and doing this and doing that'. And just before he passed away he said to me, "You are on the right track boy, you are doing all right." And that was really nice. He didn't do anything wrong, my Dad didn't do anything wrong and I'm not doing anything wrong, but it is just this different era in agriculture. It was really interesting.



Tim — We have got high possum numbers and they are a pest and a problem but our 300 possums that we are harbouring on this farm are not enough to harvest or do anything significant. The New Zealanders have coined a new operation called Merino Mink. They are blending possum fur with wool. Now the New Zealanders can't get enough of this fibre so they are asking Tasmanians to help supply them. We have asked an ex-employee who lives in Hamilton who comes on to this farm three or four times a year, and he goes to lots of farms in the area and he is shooting possums and skinning them and that fur is being shaved off the skins and sent to New Zealand to blend with Merino Mink wool. It is a purposeful use of that fur and it is a lovely product. You have mohair and cashmere which is really, really fine and then wool which is fine and beautiful, but the possum Merino Mink is somewhere half in between, just a different product that people can do things with.



Tim — I think that farming goes in troughs and cycles and I can't wait until the next peak comes along but it is going to be a long hard road. The tourism has been a great diversification for Curringa Farm, we really enjoy it along with the people that we meet and the stories they tell too.



A couple of years down the track...



**Lindsay and Rae Young —
'Lewisham', Ross and 'Green Valley',
Bothwell**

Lindsay — Since we last had a chat a couple of years back I haven't been up to much. Rae and I got married a few months back and have settled here at Green Valley. Green Valley is 1330 hectares (3300 acres) of mountainous exotic and native pastures ranging from 140–470m above sea level. We have four permanent creeks and 7 kilometres of frontage to the Clyde River. Before we looked at Green Valley we knew we were going to like it. We wanted something that we could make a difference to and enjoy the challenge of doing the work. I always wanted to own native country, and the silver tussock hills here are just magic. The property has good soil types and permanent water with striking grassland areas, particularly on the south facing slopes that have silver tussock and other native grasses.

Rae — There are some beautiful swards of kangaroo grass as well, which I love. Our challenge is to manage the landscape to improve the soil condition and pasture composition while earning money. We want to improve the natural values we have by removing weeds and managing the grazing. We have a lot of hawthorn, briar rose, gorse, horehound and mullein across the property and it is going to take a long time to get that under control. It is interesting working out how to get the best out of the work we do and we think working paddock by paddock will give us better production sooner and remove the weeds in a strategic way. In addition to this work paddock by paddock is not nearly as overwhelming as looking at the whole thing!



Marathon Creek. Photo Laura Eves.

Lindsay — That is why we came here really, the rawness of the place I suppose and the fact that we can make a difference. Everything that we do is going to be a positive really; we have good soils and a reasonable amount of scale, so we should end up with a productive property.



Rae — When we first came here it was hard to work out where we were. It was hard to believe that you could drive such a long way and still be in the same paddock. And I used to wonder how I would ever get sheep out of the paddock. The longer we are here, the less daunting it all seems.

Lindsay — The funny thing about it was the dogs were all at sea too. They didn't know where they were or where the sheep were supposed to be running, where the gates were. My old dog, Kelly, could go into a paddock at Lewisham and you hardly had to say anything, she knew which way to run to gather that paddock and which gates we would be going out.

Rae — We would like to protect our native grasslands, and with large paddock like we have we cannot limit grazing so fencing is a priority for us. Already we have done 11 kilometres of fencing, mostly to land type so we can rest areas and push sheep into areas they may not voluntarily go to. We will fence out our good native areas and only graze them at certain times of the year, and avoid grazing them at all when we can. We aim to get a decent amount of grass to grow above the ground and a decent root system below the ground, increasing the organic matter in the soil, in turn improving the water holding capacity of the soil — pretty important with our low rainfall.

Lindsay — Years of set stocking have left the soils devoid of organic matter and soil life, it is our priority to reverse this. Water holding capacity is essential in low rainfall areas like this. We will be fencing to land type as much as anything. Having the large paddocks gives us the opportunity to

fence how we want rather than being guided by what is already there. In addition to the fencing we have done 66 hectares of pasture, and 200 hectares of aerial sowing and fertiliser on the dry bare hills. We are hoping the fencing and fertiliser will make a difference to the quality and amount of food available to our sheep.

Rae — Our aim is to be able to feed our lambs in September. We have 4000 sheep here and we have 2000 ewes lambing this year. Green Valley is quite different to Lewisham which is mostly improved pasture, whereas here we have native pastures and improved pastures. Hopefully the microns will drop a bit, the wool will be a bit whiter and we are trying to avoid a lighter cut.



Lindsay — Our initial focus is to get productivity up, get the income coming in and then we can do other things like weed management and improving the condition of our section of the river. I have a positive outlook for wool in the future, probably naively so, but anyway, I am positive about the future of wool.

It is quite different here to what I am used to. It is the same sort of work but needs to be approached from a different angle. The main difference is knowing how the farm reacts throughout the year and how the sheep respond. When you live on one property for a long time like I have at Lewisham you get a feel for how the property responds to different seasons and different circumstances. You know how far you can push the system: how the farm will respond in a certain way when it does rain or when it doesn't rain. We have to learn all that down here.

Rae — We want to manage the property in sympathy with the landscape. We want to know that the sheep are not degrading the landscape, and we feel with the work we are undertaking we can do that. It is also essential to us knowing they are happy, well treated and healthy.



Lindsay — It has always been an aim of mine to get to the point where we don't have to mules and I guess the mulesing debate brought home to me that to make a change like that at some point you have to actually take the step. So we decided to bite the bullet and have stopped mulesing.

Rae — One of the things that surprised me when we came here was how readily the sheep adapted. They came from flat country with beautiful green pastures and I thought they would sulk when they came here, but they love it! They love the hillsides; they race up and down them like they have been here all their lives. They certainly have a very nice view. I hope they know that they are looking on the Snowy Range or Mt Field or the Wellington Range. It is definitely the best 'office' I have ever had!



Rae — We have very few trees, a small area on the hill to the north. Before we moved here I had hoped we could fence off areas and eventually have regeneration trees, but now I know the place better I can see this will not happen in our lifetime. We would like to plant areas out in the middle of the farm to get back some trees and shrubs. This will give shelter to small birds moving across the landscape and will also give shelter to some areas in the paddocks.

Quite a lot of the native grasslands are weedy. They typically consist of wallaby grasses and a bit of spear grass and flat weeds and thistles and annuals like barley grass and crested dog's tail coming up so they are neither good pasture nor good grasslands, they are neither one or the other. We hope that some of these areas will improve with no grazing and return to native grasslands.

Lindsay — We hope to end up with 50/50 of improved pastures and managed native grasslands.



Lindsay — Lewisham is looking good; Mick Burn is running it for us. He has been a stockman in the district all his life and has a real affinity with livestock and the land. The stud is going well. We have got a core group of people that support us. Obviously we have expanded our flock so the stud has been handy in supplying extra rams for us. We muscle scan now as we breed dual purpose sheep. We are improving the wool and the carcass and have found it interesting the way that the two work together. Our experience is that you can get sheep that will do both quite well. We will run a dual purpose type of Merino at Lewisham with an emphasis on fine wool at Green Valley.



Rae — On Lewisham we use EU Ecolabelling and hopefully we will qualify for it here. We have developed a brochure for Lewisham that talks about the farm and the way we manage it. We use it as a marketing tool and hope to do one for Green Valley.

Lindsay — That works well with what we want to achieve here to. And also to make it into a nice place to live. We hope to leave a positive mark on the landscape. There are a lot of nice spots on the farm. Last Sunday we went for a walk early, up on the northern, there was a northerly wind blowing and it was quite chilly and we found a sunny spot out of the wind. We could see for miles. There are places like that over the whole farm. Jacobinas Backbone would be a favourite spot.

