
A Timber Legend

by June Delbridge

A ten metre plank, moist and velvety, slides over the rollers to the stack on the side. It has just come through the mill along with a dozen others.

In the main section of the mill, a mountain ash log, remotely controlled by a man sitting in a small cubicle, rolls on to the breaking down bench. He watches every move, flicking switches and pressing buttons to ensure the log is converted to planks as it goes out the other end.

There is an atmosphere of relaxed efficiency. There is continuous action, but not a lot of noise around the sawmill. Large trucks arrive with their load of logs from the forest; a steady stream of logs goes through the mill. The milled timber is stacked and eventually loaded onto trucks to be transported to its destination. Outside there are stacks of residue logs, unsuitable for timber production, which will go on to the paper mills.

The sawdust is ducted from the sawmill to a cyclone separator which extracts the air from it, then on to a hopper before being blown to a large bin outside. Afterwards the sawdust is transported to Hallam where it is mixed with rice hulls and distributed as garden mulch and poultry litter.

Some logs are picked up by the jaws of a bulldozer and sent end-on into a chipper. The 88 hp, remote-controlled Cummins diesel giant of 42 tonnes converts 25 tonnes of waste logs into chips in fifteen minutes. A large covered semi-trailer receives the load of chips and moves off to deliver it to Geelong for exporting.

A sprinkler system keeps a stockpile of logs wet, to prevent them cracking before they go through the mill, and as a fire prevention measure. Other stockpiles of wide timber beams are air-drying in racks before further processing.

The sawmill uses mountain ash from forests up to 1200 metres in altitude and alpine ash, known as 'woolly butt', harvested from forests above 1200 metres. The mill supplies timber to Melbourne and country centres as well as interstate centres in South Australia and New South Wales. Downgraded sawlogs are used for fence palings, pallet manufacture or other products which do not require top grade timber.

The logging and mill operation employ a workforce of 200 people at the height of the season. The logging season starts in early November, when the last of the snows has disappeared from the mountain forests, and continues to the end of the following April. Then most of the residue on the forest floor is burnt. Residue includes logs unsuitable for timber production, although felled in the areas designated for 'clearfelling'. Before regeneration can take place, the residue must be removed or burnt. The skies become filled with smoke and haze, and the autumn air is heavy and pungent. This pollution drifts for weeks at a time and is visible as far away as Port Phillip.

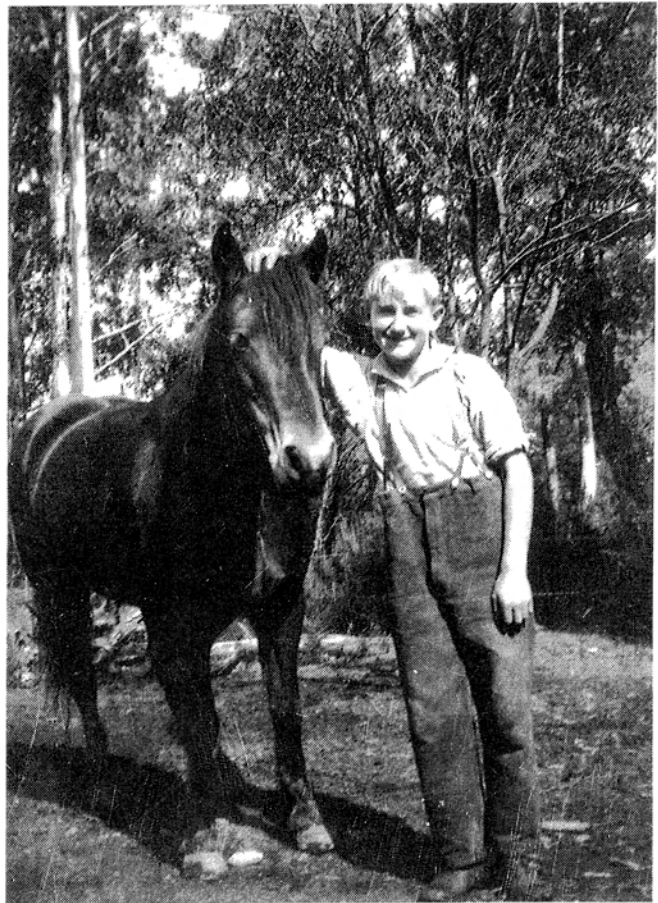
Lloyd Gould was born at Healesville and moved with his parents, brothers and sisters to Marysville in the early 1930s. He was not particularly inspired by formal education and, at the age of fourteen, started his first job for Mr Bill Walker. As a bushman and stockman Bill Walker lived at Marysville and worked in the forests with cattle owners, the Keppel Brothers. He also owned a number of ponies and employed Lloyd to feed and groom them for hiring to visitors at the local guest houses for riding excursions. Bill Walker was a meticulous man. If the ponies were not spotless, they had to be done again. Lloyd Gould considers this learning experience vital.

Lloyd Gould first worked in a sawmill at the Vicoak Mill on the Buxton Road out of Marysville. Here he was paid thirty-five shillings for a six-day week stacking timber, palings and firewood from mill waste. From this he went on to working in the mill itself. When he turned fifteen, the mill offered him five pounds for a six-day week felling trees by axe and cross-cut saw on Mount Margaret. This also included feeding and caring for the draught horses which were used for hauling the logs from the forest.

The Vicoak Mill later employed Gould on a contract basis building sections of the timber tramline used to bring sawlogs to the mill. He worked with pick and shovel, clearing and excavating the route for the line. Logs were hauled by horse to the site where Lloyd split them into sleepers, adzing the ends to hold the timber rails which were five inches by three inches thick hardwood. These were secured to the sleepers with six-inch nails hammered in with the back of the axe head. Steel rails were only used on corners where the weight of the logs distorted the timber rails. The contract price was thirty-five shillings per chain of tramline laid, a chain being about twenty metres.

To reach the tramline, the logs had to be hauled from the forest by horse to an endless cable where they were rolled or winched on to the bogies attached to the cable, then lowered down three-quarters of a mile of steep grade. As one load came down, the empty bogies went back up to be re-loaded. The bogies, with logs, were transferred to the tramlines, travelling on to the mill by gravity. The load was controlled by one man at the back using the brakes on the bogies. Two sets of bogie wheels, linked by chains, took one or two logs of sixty to eighty feet in length each trip. Horses took the bogies back up the tramline to be re-loaded.

The fires of 1939 devastated the mountain ash forests



Lloyd Gould aged 13 years.

around Marysville. Only very small pockets remained untouched. Regrowth of other species of eucalypt, such as messmates and peppermint, took place readily; but the mountain ash was almost totally wiped out. Regeneration of the ash forests occurred, however, as a result of the fires because the species requires fire to ensure the right conditions for germination of the seeds. These trees are referred to as the 1939 regrowth.

Other severe losses from the fires were the timber tramlines. They were never rebuilt. Isolated sawmills located in the forests were burnt and abandoned.

A year after the fires the Australian Paper Manufacturers moved into the area to salvage what was left of the partially burnt forest sawlogs. Lloyd Gould was employed by A.P.M. to pull the logs down the mountain by horse to a petrol-driven docking saw where the logs were cut to six foot lengths, loaded on to motor trucks and taken to the Healesville railway.

In 1945 Lloyd Gould bought his first truck on hire purchase for 960 pounds; at this time the average wage was between three pounds five shillings and four pounds per week. The truck was a Ford, fitted with timber jinker, which is a prime mover with detachable single axle, over which the logs were loaded. The Ford was also fitted with a reduction differential which doubles the gear ratios providing greater traction.

Australian Paper Manufacturers continued to salvage timber, although the price was being cut. Times were tough and even the forestry officers advised Gould to 'give it away' because prices would only continue to decrease. He did not take the advice. Instead, he left A.P.M. and secured a job as a tractor driver for William



Gould Brothers' fleet

Cook Sawmills of Preston, hauling logs from the forest, thus creating work for his truck.

Lloyd Gould was then given another contract by the Forests Commission to load logs from the Big River area for delivery wherever they were required. He was paid nine pence per 100 super feet to load the trucks, each carrying 2800 super feet per load. The volume of logs loaded from the Forests Commission contractor, Cole Brothers, dump at Three Bridges so increased that the following year Gould added two more Ford trucks to make up a fleet.

The contracts continued with the Forests Commission, and Lloyd Gould worked with them carting logs to mills at Fitzroy, Fishermans Bend and many other destinations. His business boomed; more trucks were needed and the fleet of trucks was increased to six, Lloyd Gould driving one himself. From the time he was advised to abandon his truck business to the present day, he has purchased more than forty new trucks for his timber enterprises.

In the mid-1950s Gould was informed by the Forests Commission that it was ceasing its operation. He was given two years' notice that there would be no further logging done in the area and was advised to look for alternative work and employment for his truck and drivers. Lloyd Gould bought a sawmill.

His drive and determination to stay with logging saw

him the new owner of Rouch's Mill in Healesville, which had been idle for four years. It was brought to life once more, and the trucks were kept on the roads bringing the logs in to be milled. At the same time Lloyd purchased a mill from the Robinson Brothers. This mill was situated between Buxton and Narbethong. The two mills kept the trucks in continuous work, and the next major acquisition was a bulldozer. Occasionally Lloyd operates one of these gentle giants, clearing small areas of dead and fallen trees to create picnic spots on Crown land river frontage near his Marysville property. These are available for day use by visitors to the area.

Over the years Lloyd Gould purchased more sawmills, eight in all. The whole operation is now all electrically operated. There is an auxiliary plant at the mill in case of power failure. Prior to the State Electricity Commission power coming to Marysville in 1955, the mill was operated by steam. A 16 hp Marshall steam engine fired with mill off-cuts provided the power.

As well as running the Marysville operation, Lloyd Gould purchased the Ruook Mill at Alexandra. Here he installed finger-jointing equipment to utilize small sections of timber after removing faults in them. The machine routs fingers on the ends of the timber which are then interlocked with another length similarly routed, glued and machined to a smooth finish, creating a longer, more easily utilized board. The Alexandra mill

produces a wide range of building materials as well.

Another factory purchased at Alexandra is used to process kiln-dried beams. Before timber can be kiln-dried, it is stacked in racks in the open air to dry for twelve to fourteen months - hence the stockpile held at the mills. The timber is kept in the kiln for two to three days where the moisture content is reduced to twelve per cent, using heat from steam boilers fired with shavings from timber treatment. It is then moved to another area overnight to be reconditioned, pumping up the moisture content. After this, the timber is taken to the processing plant to be finished as solid beams for construction purposes. Furniture grade timber is also made from the kiln-dried product.

Australian Forest Industries at Myrtleford is supplied with residual logs which are blended with pine for the manufacture of white tissues and toilet rolls.

Good forest management has always been a partnership between officers of the Department of Conservation and Environment and the Forest Operations manager of Gould's sawmills. Discussions regarding management are held regularly in the forests, ensuring the very strict guidelines set down by the Department are observed. This co-operation creates the atmosphere for the smooth running of both Government Department and timber industry. There is mutual respect and rapport.

There is also mutual understanding when suppressing forest fires. During the 1983 Ash Wednesday fires at Powelltown, the timber industry operators, with men and equipment, played a major role in the control of the inferno as they worked with people from the Department and the fire authorities. This was repeated at Warburton this year when the fires threatened that area. The forest and timber workers' familiarity with access roads in the region enabled quick action to control the fires.

Lloyd Gould talks enthusiastically of the future. Because of the tremendous capacity of the mountain ash to regenerate, he says it is almost impossible to assess the logging potential of any designated logging area, or coupe. In the past the actual yield of timber has been in excess of initial estimates.

Further investment in specialized machinery would be warranted, says Lloyd Gould, if the policies laid down by the Government Timber Industry Strategy were fully implemented and fifteen year licences were granted to utilize the available timber, including residue. At present the mill leases a chipper and is permitted by the Government to use residue sawlogs for one year only. Further utilization of residue sawlogs would create more employment and help keep an export industry viable. Most importantly, says Lloyd, it would eliminate the annual waste and pollution caused by burning residue on the forest floor.

Lloyd envisages that future paper mills in Australia will utilize the enormous residual wastage. He believes it is a long way off and also says chips for export should be encouraged for the short term until Australian manufacturers establish plants to process them.

By 1990 Lloyd Gould had been in the timber industry



Salvaging fire-killed ash on Lake Mountain

for 45 years. Some of the people at Gould's sawmills have worked with Lloyd for two, three or four decades. He says there are 500 years of experience, collectively, amongst his staff. Some of his longer-serving associates are Ron Goding, Ted Norman, Ken West, Ted Greatorex, Mick Greatorex, David Goding and Ron Howe, Chris Haden and Walter Vani. Lloyd's wife, Joy, worked in the office for many years as well as bringing up their family. The success of the timber enterprise is encapsulated in the motto:

Teamwork

Coming together is a beginning,
Keeping together is progress,
Working together is success.

Sixteen years ago, while he was a councillor of the Shire of Healesville, Lloyd Gould initiated a tree-planting program. He planted the trees along the roadside for five kilometres on the Buxton Road leading from Marysville. The Council promised it would continue planting throughout the shire.

Lloyd and Joy Gould have also initiated the creation of much of the pleasant parkland within the town, again planting a large variety of trees and shrubs. Lloyd Gould was awarded the Order of Australia Medal in 1988 for Services to the Community and the Timber Industry. □