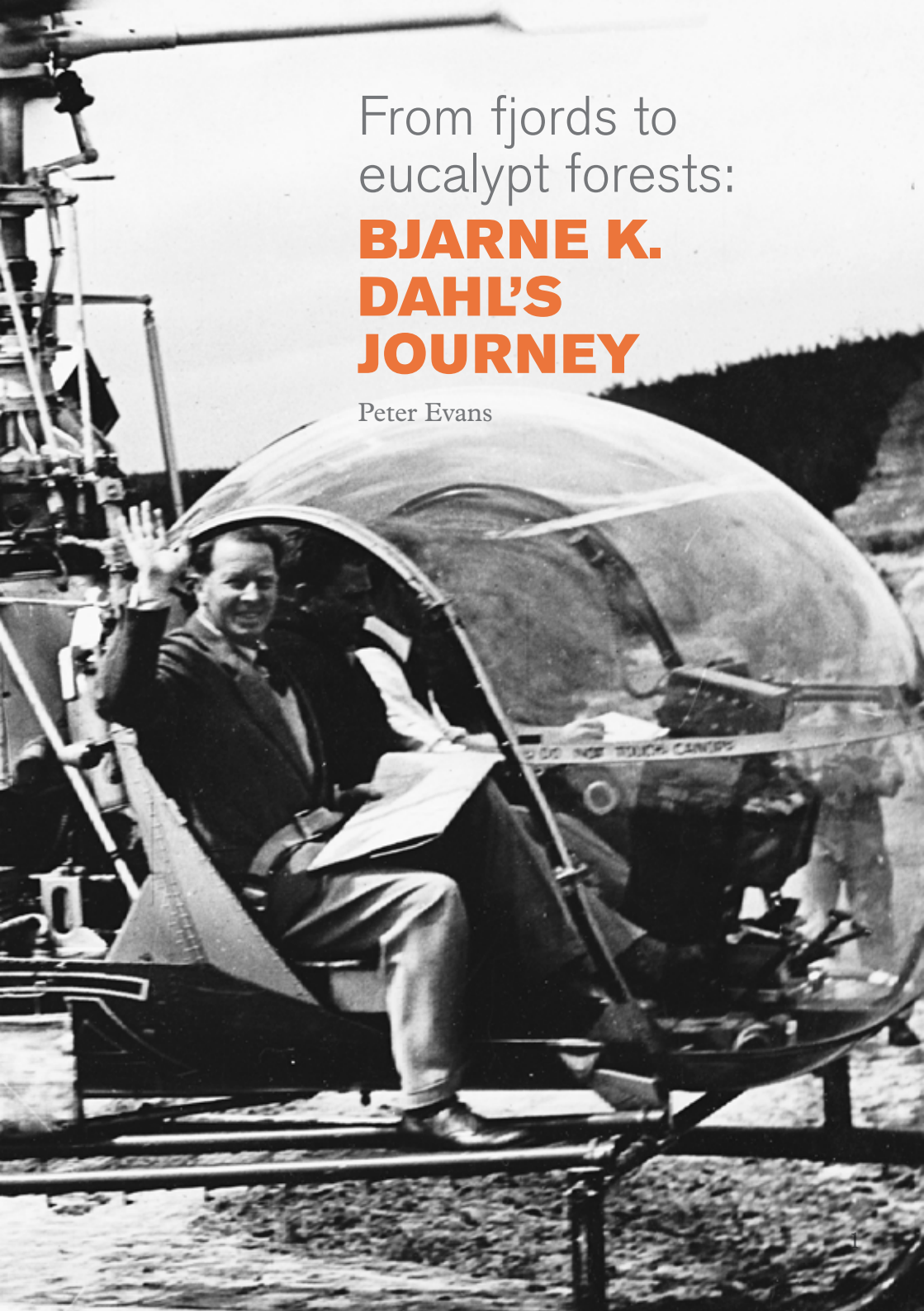


From fjords to
eucalypt forests:

**BJARNE K.
DAHL'S
JOURNEY**

Peter Evans





B. Dahl.



Forest Assessor John Fitzpatrick surveys the panorama of the Delatite Valley, Victoria, from Mount Stirling in the summer of 1948-49. Bjarne Dahl conducted most of his forest assessment across similar country.
Image courtesy Brian Williams.

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Conversion table

1 foot (ft)	= 0.305 metres
1 yard (yd)	= 0.914 metres
1 chain	= 20.11 metres
1 mile	= 1.609 kilometres
1 pound (lb)	= 0.454 kilograms
1 ton	= 1.01 tonnes
1 gallon	= 4.536 litres
1 acre	= 0.405 hectares
£1 0s 0d	= \$2.00 in February 1966

12 pence = one shilling, 20 shillings = £1 (one Pound)

Acknowledgments

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Gib Wettenhall provided editorial advice as this project drew to its conclusion.

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A note from the Bjarne K Dahl Trust

The Board of Managing Trustees of the Bjarne K Dahl Trust commissioned this biography to gain an understanding of the life of Bjarne Dahl, who made the significant bequest which enabled the establishment of the Trust, devoted to an Australian icon, the eucalypts.

This is the story of a Norwegian, his migration as a young man from Norway on one side of the world to the other in the 1928, and his professional life in Victorian forestry thereafter.

It illustrates how good science through the forestry discipline led to sound regional development with the establishment of the private APM Forests Estate.

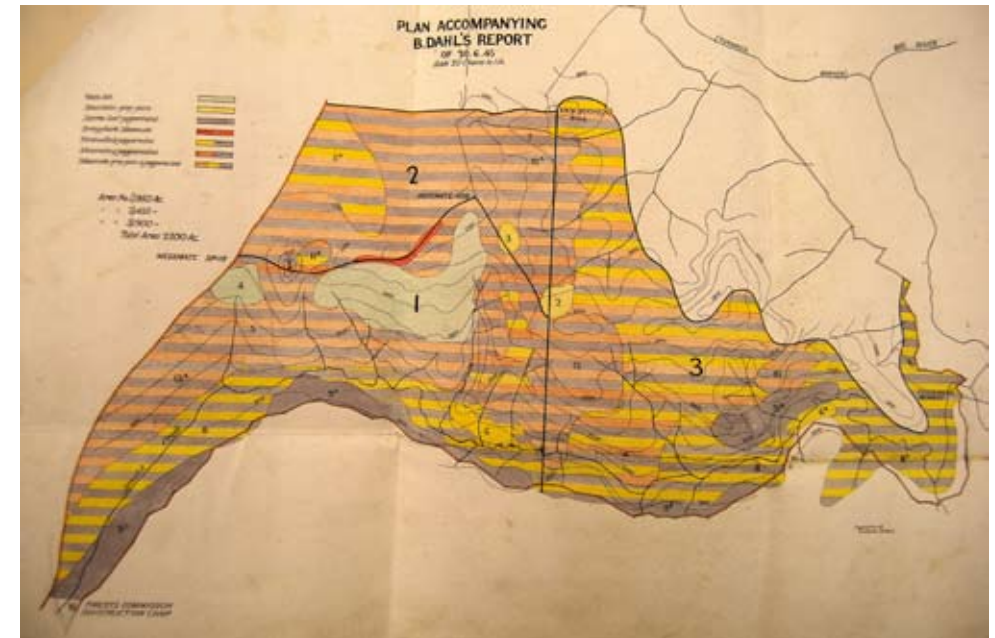
This work is a testament to Bjarne Dahl, his journey and vision.

Alison H Teese
Chair of the Board of Managing Trustees
August 2010

The flowers of
Eucalyptus miniata.
Image courtesy Professor
Pauline Ladiges AO FAA,
School of Botany, The
University of Melbourne



Above: By the time he arrived at APM, Bjarne Dahl had advanced from the days of the packhorse to the latest tool of a modern forester assessor – the helicopter.
Image courtesy APM archives via HVP Plantations, Bjarne K Dahl Trust collection.



Top right: This meticulously prepared map accompanied Bjarne Dahl's report on the Big River Valley, Victoria. The method of assessment by parallel strips is particularly apparent. VPRS 11563/P1 unit 245 file 45/1311.
Reproduced with the permission of the Keeper of the Public Records.

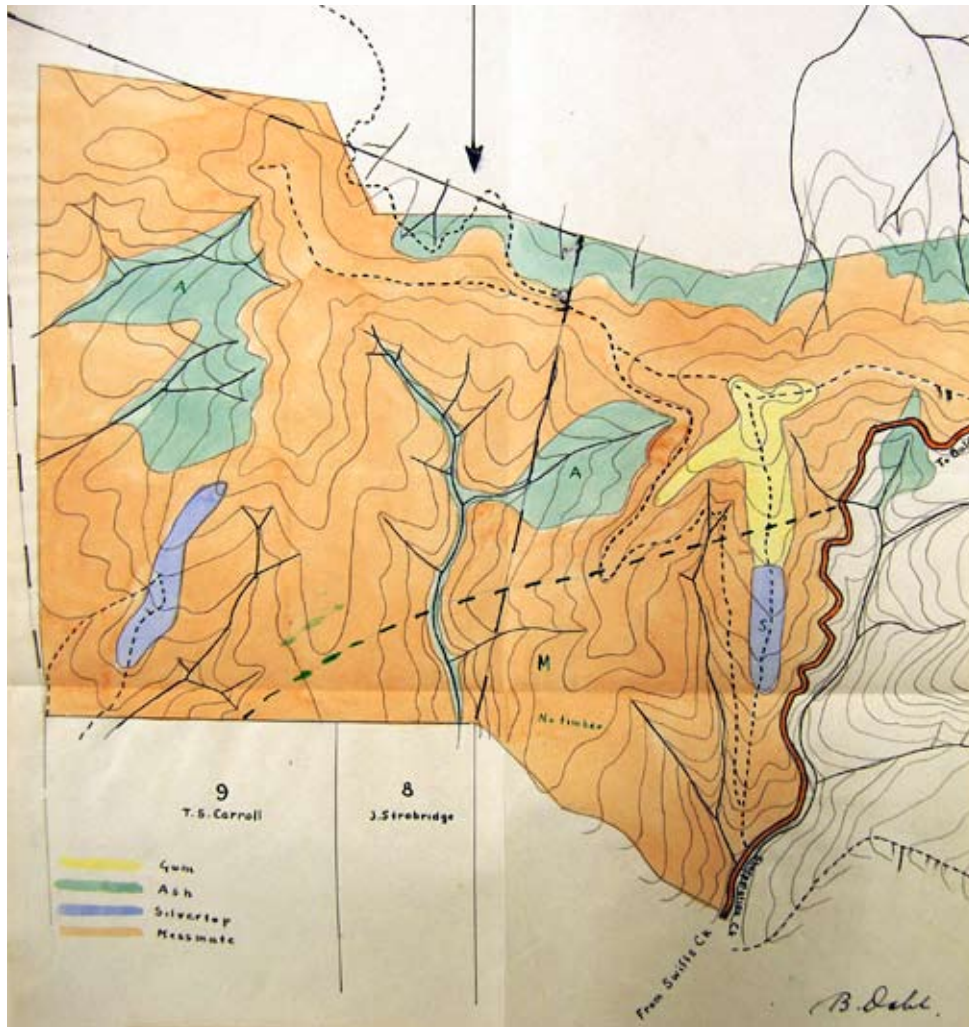
This work is now concluded with production of two maps of approximately 15,000 acres each.

Herewith locality map report (no copies) and tally sheets.

The labour cost was £320, to which must be added salaries and expenses. Due to the irregular times spent on supervision, this latter part is difficult to estimate correctly. I have assumed £200 to be the amount, which brings the total expenditure to £520, or 4.15d per acre.

B. Dahl.

Bottom right: Bjarne Dahl's report on the Bruthen forests included the usual costing for assessment work of this kind. VPRS 11563/P1 unit 210 file 40/3471.
Reproduced with the permission of the Keeper of the Public Records.



Dahl's map of forest species distribution in the Mount Blowhard area, Victoria.
VPRS 11563/P1 unit 222 file 42/0497.

Reproduced with the permission of the Keeper of the Public Records.

Introduction

This is the story of a Norwegian forester transplanted from the conifers of his native land into the eucalypt forests of Victoria; a man who studied those forests in the old weathered soils of the goldfields, in the coastal foothills of Gippsland, and in the lush soils of the Great Dividing Range. Bjarne Dahl began his Victorian career as a forest assessor in government service, and ended it as a forester in private industry, building his wealth from planting and managing eucalypts. A true man of the trees, he left the whole of his estate to establish a eucalypt trust fund.

In his summary of forest policy in the British Empire published in 1922, Sir William Schlich noted that one of the major problems facing Australian forestry was the lack of working plans required for the proper management of forests. In Victoria, a program of mapping and assessment was tentatively begun under the first Chairman of the Forests Commission, Oxford-trained forester Owen Jones. By 1928, the Commission was able to report to the Third Empire Forestry Conference that it had two surveyors and assistants engaged on forest mapping and that “assessment and systematic valuation of the timber resource are being developed with a view to introduction of working plan control”. Neither surveyor, however, was specifically trained in assessment, and one of them lamented that “only a trained man can differentiate between a good and bad milling tree”.

The solution that presented itself was the importation of the necessary skills from Norway to form the nucleus of a new Forest Assessment Branch. Generally, Victorian foresters were imported from Oxford or Edinburgh. While there is no hard evidence to suggest that such a change in orientation was deliberate, in early 1928 the Forests Commission committed to employing three Norwegian forest assessors, one of whom was Bjarne Dahl, the others being Bernhard Johannessen and Kristian Drangsholt. It is clear from their place of birth, similar ages, forestry training, military service and photographic evidence that all three knew each other in Norway prior to arriving in Australia. While Johannessen was to remain only two years before moving on to the Dutch forest service in Java, Dahl and Drangsholt were to spend many years working together.



Bjarne Dahl's christening cup has survived the journey, from Norway in 1898 to Australia today. Bjarne Dahl passed this personal item to the Drangsholt family in his later years.

Image courtesy Peter Evans.

The early, arduous years

Like his two Norwegian compatriots, Klaus Bjarne Dahl was born in Kristiansand on 23 March 1898. He was the son of Frederik Jacob Nicholai Dahl, Chemist, and Henny Lucie Dahl neé Blichfeldt. Arriving in Australia at the age of thirty on 6 March 1928, Bjarne Dahl went straight to work for the Victorian Forests Commission. Unlike his Norwegian associates, whose records list degrees in forestry and agriculture, Dahl's qualifications are not listed. It is almost certain, however, that they were of a similar nature and that his life before Australia, like theirs, included six months compulsory military service in the Norwegian King's Guard. That Bjarne 'Bernie' Dahl was to become, in time, a highly valued employee of the Forests Commission of Victoria is without doubt. His reviews are liberally sprinkled with praise as to his efficiency, consistency, and enterprise.

Bjarne Dahl's first assignment was to complete a forest assessment for the County of Anglesey, an area astride the Great Dividing Range, in which some of the best and most accessible of Victoria's timber grew. He utilised the 'strip method' of forest assessment, which had been devised at Oxford, tested in India and was adopted for use in Victorian forests.

Typically, each assessor had a chainman and an axeman as assistants, and established a base camp consisting of a hut and several tents. Base lines were surveyed and the forest divided into one-chain strips at regular intervals. This was extremely arduous work – the axeman with the compass had to cut a straight line through the bush, while the chainman followed, and the assessor counted and measured trees, marking the data down on pre-prepared sheets carried on a clipboard. The assessor also carried an aneroid barometer and marked 50-ft contour intervals on the strip as the work progressed. Each strip thus provided a set of

‘join the dots’ from which the contours could be drawn for the final map.

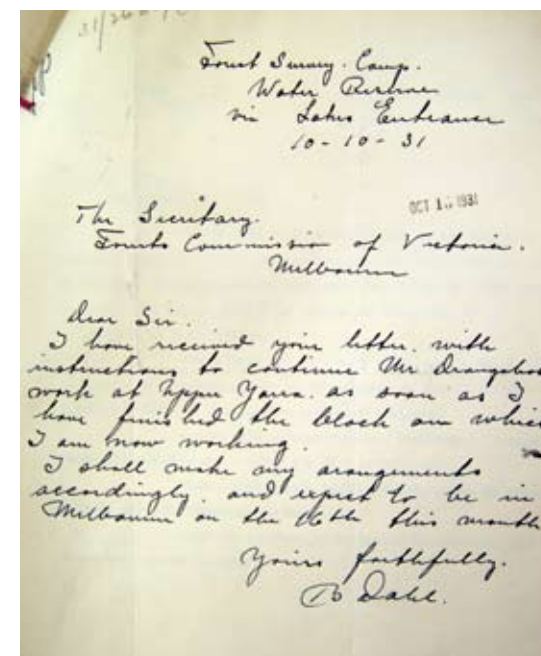
This strip method provided a detailed map and assessment of a given forest area from which the total quantities of timber available could be calculated. Seasonal conditions played a part in determining assessment priorities. Over summer, work was concentrated in the higher and least accessible parts of the forest. During winter, staff were withdrawn to lower elevations or to head office to complete the mapping and the volume calculations.

It is difficult in today’s world of global positioning systems, detailed aerial photography and access to satellite photography on every computer, to realise just how arduous was the job of the early forest assessors. Often, they were working in trackless bush and produced the first topographic maps of many forest areas. Accidents were common, often a long way from transport and medical assistance. Food was generally plain but wholesome, and could only be brought in by packhorse along narrow tracks that had been cut for the purpose. In one instance when a scheduled delivery did not arrive, Kris Drangsholt was forced to try and swim the flooded Thomson River and nearly drowned in the process.

Heat, dust and rain made life difficult. Huts caught fire, tents burned down, and blankets might be in short supply. Assessment parties were often parched through lack of water or soaked to the skin. Furniture was improvised from whatever materials came readily to hand. Washing facilities were to be found in the nearest creek, which might also provide the luxury of a few trout to eke out the weekly delivery of camp supplies. Card games were a common after-dinner pastime. Perhaps the greatest difficulty was the isolation for long periods. This caused tempers to fray and friction to develop – the only antidote being wise management and frequent changes of personnel.

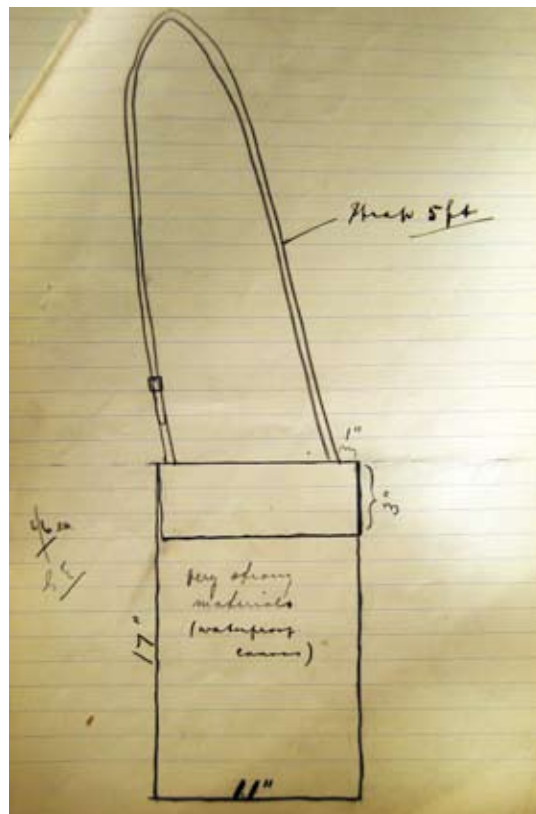


Top: The Drangsholt home in Kristiansand, the town in which Dahl spent his formative years.
Image courtesy David Drangsholt



Bottom: In October 1931, Bjarne Dahl acknowledges the Commission’s instructions to take over Kris Drangsholt’s work in the Upper Yarra. VPRS 11563/P1 unit 81 file 31/2654. Reproduced with the permission of the Keeper of the Public Records.

During his long career with the Forests Commission, Bjarne Dahl probably saw more of Victoria's forests than most foresters ever did. In December 1929, Dahl was engaged on survey work at Myrtleford where pine plantations were being laid out. In October 1930, he was assigned a new assessment task based at Bruthen. In July 1931, he moved to Nowa Nowa, where ringbarking operations in the Colquhoun Forest required more accurate maps. In October of that year, he was transferred to Britannia Creek where he took over a survey started by Kris Drangsholt. When that was completed, Dahl moved further east to survey the Mississippi Valley and Starvation Creek.

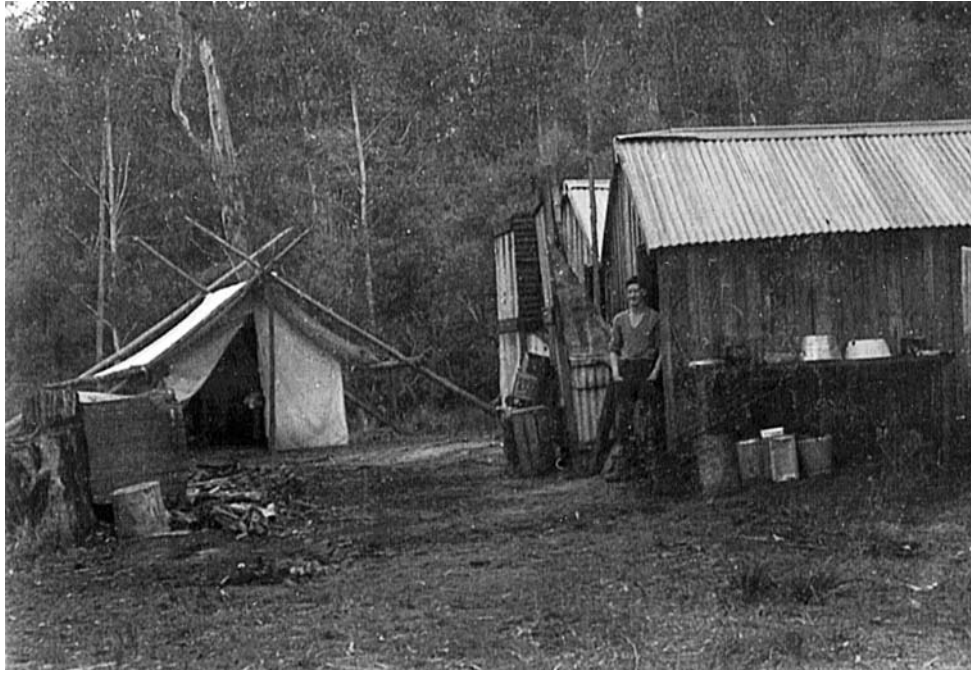


Left: In 1933 Bjarne Dahl requested this case be purpose built for holding his sketching board, in response to the difficulty in carrying his equipment through rugged terrain. VPRS 11563/P1 unit 97 file 33/0520. Reproduced with the permission of the Keeper of the Public Records.

1 Bag :- 6 x 8 Tent and Fly, 2 oilers, 2 mattresses.
1 Bag :- 2 Tents 8 x 10, 1 Fly 10 x 12.
1 Crate :- Safe.
1 Box Sundries 4 frying pans, 7 plates, 4 knives, 3 forks, 3 spoons, 2 tea spoons, 1 camp oven, 1 lamp, 1 hurricane, 1 map tin, 3 bands, (2 ch.) - $\frac{1}{8}$ ", $\frac{1}{4}$ ", $\frac{3}{8}$ ", 1 hatchet, 1 Kero pump, 1 water bag, arrows.
 Also 1 pair calipers and 1 drawing board, stored at Forest Office, Erica.

Top: Kris Drangsholt shouldering a burden similar to those of his assessment team and packhorse, perhaps enroute to swapping camp with Dahl sometime in the mid 1930s. Image courtesy David Drangsholt

Bottom: This list is typical of the items of camping equipment issued to a forest assessment party in the early 1930s. VPRS 11563/P1 unit 72 file 30/4766. Reproduced with the permission of the Keeper of the Public Records.



George Hamson, an assessment assistant, (chain and axeman) off duty at the Bemm River Assessment Camp in the winter of 1948.
Image courtesy Brian Williams



The toll of the trousers:
 George Hamson poses with fifteen pairs of canvas trousers shredded by the wiregrass near Bemm River.
Image courtesy Brian Williams



Two men arrive back at an assessment camp situated among young regrowth forest, mid 1930s.

Image courtesy
David Drangsholt

Slipping conditions on the second night were very bad, & the little sleep the two men were able to get was not sufficient to recuperate them. On the third day Pollard & I decided to leave the five (5) ground sheets in the bush, & carry in our packs as much of the other two men's equipment as we were able. Between us, Pollard & I carried all the remaining food, four (4) hike tents and all but two blankets. The men carried a blanket each, but even so were unable to carry out their jobs. Consequently for the greater part of the third day Pollard & I were again doing all the work. The back chainman was in particularly bad shape, and neither Pollard nor I thought he would be capable of finishing the strip, due to exhaustion, and periodic cramps in the legs. The compass man was also exhausted.

Forest Assessor R. J. Ritchie describes the difficulties encountered during the Walsh Creek assessment in 1946. VPRS 11563/P1 unit 249 file 46/0090.

Reproduced with the permission of the Keeper of the Public Records.



A study in contrasting character:
Bjarne Dahl (in beanie smoking
pipe) stands to the right of
Kris Drangsholt (in headband
holding skis, centre of image)
at a Victorian skiing event at
Mt Buffalo, date unknown.

*Image courtesy
David Drangsholt*



Dahl's Norwegian peers,
Drangsholt and Johannessen
(both on the left of the
picture), enjoying a ski trip
in the Australian Alps. Date
and location unknown.

*Image courtesy
David Drangsholt*

Dahl marries

Clearly, any sort of private life had to occur during the winter when Dahl was normally stationed in Melbourne. On 30 July 1932 at the age of 34, Bjarne Dahl married Ann Peeck in the Methodist church at Balaclava. Born in East Gippsland on 1 December 1905, Ann was eight years Dahl's junior. She was a dressmaker, and the daughter of a grazing family from a small regional settlement. Sometime after their marriage, the Dahls moved to a large and comfortable two-storied Georgian house in Brighton.

During the mid 1930s, it would appear that Dahl and Drangsholt alternated field and office duties to some degree. When Dahl was in the office, Drangsholt was in the field and vice versa; at least wherever lowland areas were available that could be assessed during the winter months. On a number of occasions, they even took over one another's camps and camping equipment. They must have made a study in contrasts. Kris Drangsholt was a large and outgoing fellow, open and approachable, very much at home with fieldwork and with his men. Bjarne Dahl, on the other hand, was very quiet, abstemious and kept to himself.

In October 1933, Dahl was assigned to map and assess 1400 acres at the head of the Toorong River. His next move was to the Monbulk and Olinda forests, followed by a survey of the parish of Yuonga, situated on the steep slopes leading up to Ben Cairn and Mount Donna Buang. Once the report for the Yuonga survey was completed, a survey of 5650 acres near Chiltern in northern Victoria was to prove an ideal winter job in 1934. This was completed in early September and Dahl was transferred to the Niagaroon Forest to complete a survey of the Black Range. Dahl was clearly unhappy with what he found in the Black Range, as this quote from his 1936 report shows:

The original forest can be pictured as consisting of a community of grasses and stringy barks, with scattered shrubs and gums. Today, traces of this order are all that is left. The vigorous and relentless exploitation [of the forest] has brought about a condition of ragged misery through which the new regeneration is fighting its way in competition with dogwood, ferns and wattles.

At the end of 1936, Dahl was transferred along with his whole survey party to Snobs Creek in the Rubicon Forest. Yield tables compiled by Johannessen were used to compute the volume of timber. With the survey completed by the end of March 1937, Dahl retired to head office to compile the maps during the winter months.



The Dahl's Brighton residence
– very different to the primitive
assessment camps in which
Bjarne Dahl spent much of his
early working life.
Image courtesy Peter Evans.

The 1939 bushfires

Nineteen thirty-eight was a year of severe drought, which led directly to a major disaster for Victorian Forestry. Widespread bushfires in January 1939 acted as a pivotal point in Victoria's forest history. Whenever forest management was spoken of in future, it was divided into 'before 1939' and 'after 1939'.

The fires must have been devastating to the assessors and their assistants who had done so much to quantify the forest estate: their work now largely lay in ruins. Still, they had no choice than to pick up the traces and start again – sometimes in even more trying conditions. In the burnt-out Mount Disappointment forest, Assessor John Fitzpatrick and his men had to contend with streams reduced to a series of stagnant pools during the summer of 1939. Water bottles sent from Melbourne in response to an urgent request turned out to be made of glass, not only adding to the weight the survey party had to carry, but also quickly breaking. Heat and 'scrub dust' affected the men's vision, causing some of the lines run to be irregular. When the autumn rains broke early, the field plans drawn at night by the meagre light of a kerosene pressure lamp shrank, making it difficult to match adjacent sheets.



Mountain Ash forest in West Tanjil, Victoria, after the 1939 bushfires.
Image courtesy Department of Sustainability and Environment
Historic Places Section.

War and new technology

With the declaration of war against Germany in September 1939, timber quickly became a critical commodity. Shortages of shipping reduced imports leading to a much heavier reliance on native hardwoods. The race to salvage the fire-killed Mountain Ash from the fires of January assumed a new urgency, as did assessing fresh supplies of timber.

A month after the declaration of war, Dahl journeyed to Cobbannah on the Dargo Road, and thence overland to the isolated Moroka Valley. Storms, high winds and even occasional snowfalls during the summer delayed the work of the assessment parties as well as that of Dahl, who was compiling data for new volume tables for Alpine Ash.

This was followed by further assessment at Bruthen in October 1940. The war was starting to affect the work, and Dahl bemoaned the loss of capable men to the army, the regular changes in personnel and the constant interruptions to the work, which led to loss of time and detail in the survey. His assessment of the Bruthen forest was gloomy yet quietly optimistic:

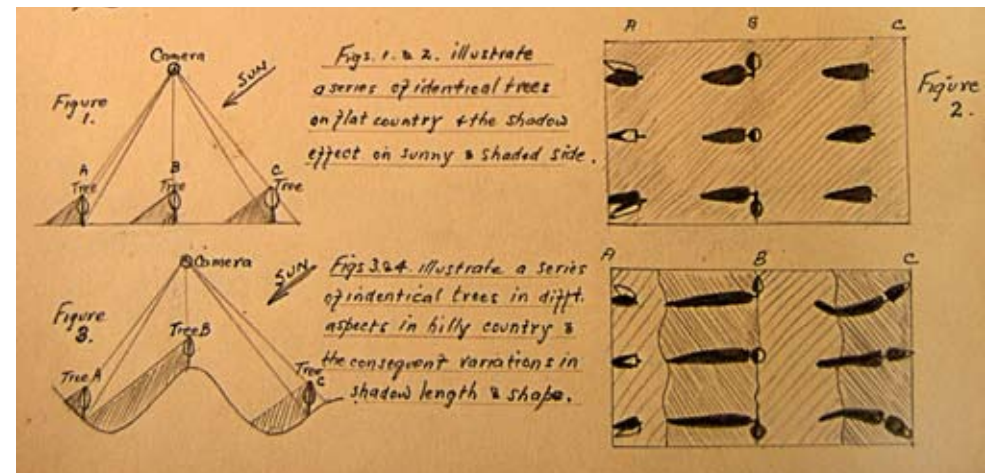
This forest has been exploited indiscriminately for sleepers, poles and piles ever since the railway was built to Bruthen. Fires have been used in clearing the ground to make access to the timber easier, and a great deal of damage has been done. Both soil and vegetative deterioration have lowered the health and vitality to a critical point, and because the forest cannot be expected to recover from any further damage, its productive power is now in jeopardy ... The immense vitality of the Gippsland forests in the face of the damage sustained by fire and the axe is both amazing and gratifying, and gives ground for hope that with more intelligent management a happy future may be in store.



Above: Smoke haze clouds the forest in the summer of 1948-49 as an assessment team leave the nearest road access point enroute to their forest camp at Mount Pinnibar.
Image courtesy Brian Williams.



Left: Forest Assessor Herb Caldwell (foreground) and Ray Brash relax at their camp at Mount Pinnibar in the summer of 1948-49. Note the heavy canvas trousers protecting their legs whilst working in the bush.
Image courtesy Brian Williams.



Opposite bottom: Forester Frank Moulds (a colleague and long-time friend of Bjarne Dahl) describes the effect of terrain on the appearance of tree shadows in aerial photography. VPRS 11563/P1 unit 236 file 44/0883.
Reproduced with the permission of the Keeper of the Public Records.

One year later, in October 1941, Dahl was at Murrindal running survey lines and leading a team assessing timber in 'The Basin'. However, a shortage of qualified foresters, loss of men to the army and even the formation of dedicated army forestry companies contributed to a chronic lack of staff. Consequently, in 1942, it was decided to suspend all further assessment for the foreseeable future.

When the tide turned against the Japanese in the Pacific in 1944, money and manpower were once again invested in assessment. Peace was within sight and there was an awareness that with service personnel flooding back into Australia, a boom in new building with an increased demand for timber was likely. Technology developed in war-time was to also take a hand in changing the way the assessors worked. In November 1943, the Forests Commission obtained recent aerial photographs sourced from the RAAF covering new forest areas being opened up. It was hoped that this would provide an aid in forest assessment, roading and fire protection. A photo mosaic of the Matlock map sheet was prepared as a test. Although expensive, the method proved very successful and was soon extended to other forest areas. In the future, assessors could ignore barren areas in their field studies, and in evenly-stocked areas only small sample plots need be measured. While it would not completely replace ground assessment in the foreseeable future, the method had demonstrated excellent potential.

Becoming Chief Assessor

Bjarne Dahl had taken over from John Fitzpatrick as Chief Assessor when the latter had joined an army forestry company in the early years of the war. He was now in charge of the Forest Assessment Branch, although initially he had neither office staff nor even an office from which to work. By the end of January 1945, he had started an assessment school based at Kalatha Creek near Toolangi. The first intake included all six foresters who had graduated from Creswick in 1944. The course was intensely practical and lasted about three months. Each team was assigned an area and located a tie-in point before running a compass and chain survey around the boundary. Parallel one-chain strips were then run every 20 chains to produce a 5% assessment. By repetition, the necessary skills were acquired, but only the fittest and most agile of the foresters excelled at the task. By 1947, the assessment school had shifted to Kinglake West, where the course was led by John Fitzpatrick, now returned from active service. More theory was taught at this school, especially in trying to come to grips with the integration of aerial photography into the assessment process. The practical elements, however, remained very much as they had been at Kalatha Creek.

The young foresters on the training course found Bjarne Dahl a very quiet and private man who led by example rather than by direction. He had a slight Norwegian accent, but kept very much to himself and let little personal detail slip. He unbent on only one occasion – a function held at the Norwegian Consulate to which several of the young foresters were invited, and where they were introduced to Bjarne's wife Ann. Ann impressed the young foresters as an attractive, refined, pleasant woman of medium height with fair hair, well groomed and rather more outgoing than her slightly 'stand-offish' husband. She had a definite sense of elegance about her, and the young

foresters assumed she was European and therefore Norwegian.

To the Drangsholt children, who came to stay with the Dahls occasionally, Ann was fondly remembered as friendly and warm. Kris Drangsholt had married Gwendoline Vey Scott in 1934, and the couple had three children, Bernard 'Boy' Drangsholt, David Drangsholt and Ann Drangsholt. Ann Dahl may have welcomed their presence in a childless marriage to a somewhat difficult man, known to be set in his ways.



Top: A group of young students at the Kinglake Assessment Training Camp in 1948.

Image courtesy Brian Williams.

Bottom: Forest Assessor Herb Caldwell and party at the Six-Mile Camp, Mount Pinnibar, summer of 1948-49.

Image courtesy Brian Williams.

From field to office

With the war in the Pacific won, the summer of 1945-46 was earmarked for the completion of a major assessment effort of 45,000 acres in the Big River Valley. Six parties were put into the field, and Dahl was kept fully occupied with the training school, as well as supplying the men at the survey camps at Big River, using his utility. By this time Dahl was working less in the field and more in the new Forest Assessment office. Dahl had his own space in the corner, which he shared with his personal draftsman. From here, he managed the logistics of what had become a small army of assessment teams. At any one time, there were up to five active assessment camps, with each camp having as many as 12 crew members. For the young foresters released after months in the bush, the office in the heart of Melbourne provided ready access to social activity. It was here they returned to carry out their computations and final mapping, as well as write their reports. What most struck the young foresters about Bjarne was that while he was well-dressed, including good shoes, he never wore socks in the office.

Dahl's last major forest assessment on behalf of the Forests Commission of Victoria began in October 1947. The survey was to take in the headwaters of the Delatite, King, Rose and Howqua rivers. By April 1948, Dahl was able to report that the five survey parties under his control had between them completed the assessment of 35,000 acres.

Three months later, Bjarne Dahl resigned from the Forests Commission of Victoria on 31 August 1948 to take up a new position with Australian Paper Manufacturers Ltd (APM) at Maryvale. He left a fine legacy, having almost single-handedly restarted the Forest Assessment Branch in 1944. He had gone on to set up the training schools, managing the task on a shoestring and ensuring the Forests Commission was well-

positioned to meet the growing post-war need for timber.

His decision to look elsewhere to advance his career may to some extent have been forced upon him. The route to higher office in the Forests Commission lay through the position of District Forester, then Divisional Inspector and on to a position on the Commission itself and, ultimately perhaps, the position of Chairman. But there was no question of any of these positions going to someone other than a Creswick forestry graduate. No matter how hard an outsider might try, or how competent he might be, none of these plum jobs would be offered to him. Bjarne could stay trapped in assessment, or he could move on. He chose the latter.



Jim McKinty (left) strides out with Bjarne Dahl (right), enjoying the winter sunshine. All of the forest assessors were great walkers.
Image courtesy Rob Youl

Dahl moves to APM

APM's Maryvale pulp mill had its genesis in the need for a eucalypt-based commercial paper manufacturing industry in Australia, and the desire of the Forests Commission to properly utilise wood unsuitable for sawmilling. During 1936, Forests Commission staff paid by APM assisted in the assessment of the available pulpwood resource. The *Wood Pulp Agreement Act No. 4451* of 1936 formalised the arrangement for the supply of sufficient pulpwood to keep the mill running. The pilot plant at Maryvale commenced operations in October 1939 and its initial annual production was to be 27,000 tons of pulp, consuming 4,000,000 cubic feet of pulpwood in the process.

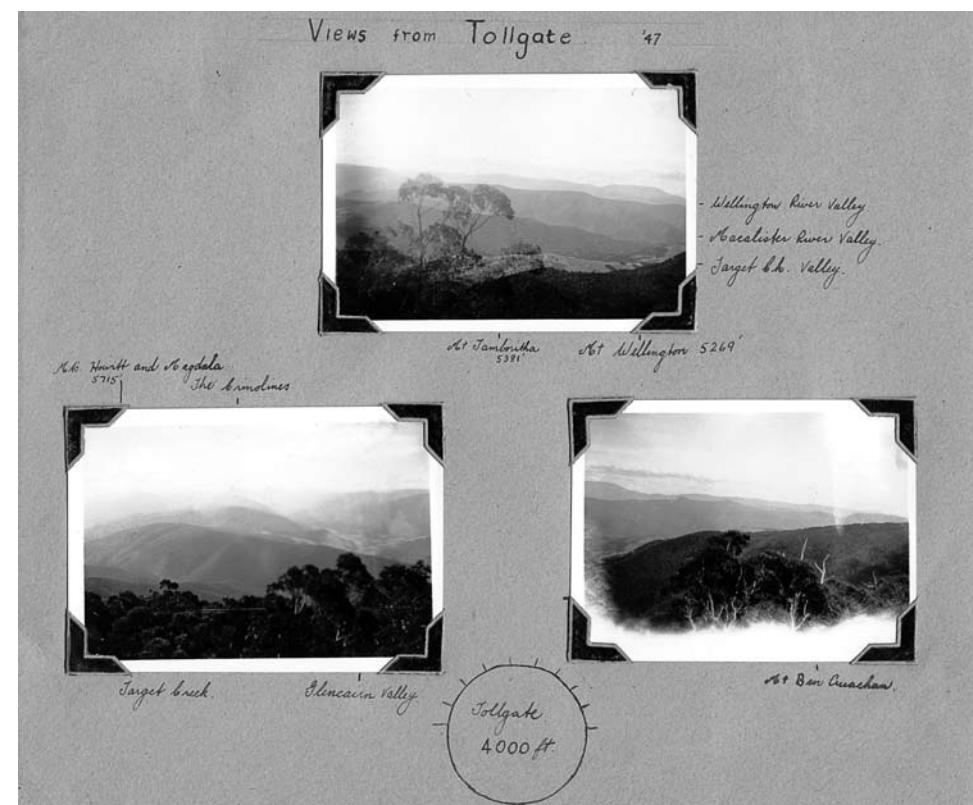
By the late 1940s, with the end of the post-1939 salvage timber resource in sight, a new supply strategy was evolved. APM recognised that it needed a non state-forest resource close to Maryvale, and Bjarne Dahl was employed specifically to create that resource. Bjarne was based in Melbourne and travelled down to Gippsland by car about once a week, staying in local pubs. He was regarded by APM staff as slightly eccentric. On one particularly hot day he drove his car down to Gippsland without any trousers, wearing only his underpants. When he arrived at the town he was visiting, he got out of the car and put on his trousers in the main street. He was reasonably well-liked, but he kept his private life quite separate from his day-to-day work. Even quite close associates knew little of him personally, and few were introduced to Ann.

In 1951, APM Forests Pty Ltd was formed as a subsidiary to APM to take over the latter's expanding plantation resource. In its first five years, the company acquired 84,383 acres at an average cost of £7-12s-0d per acre, of which 45% was reforested with pines and 55% with eucalypts. Bjarne Dahl was the prime agent in the acquisition of this land and, by all

accounts, he did a particularly fine job. Most of the company's forested land was harvested and replanted with pines or eucalypts depending on the soil type.

A frugal man and a canny businessman, Bjarne Dahl built his capital up while still working for APM. As an example, in 1951 APM was offered a pine plantation at Park Orchards, which had been subdivided, but the blocks had not sold. The company quite rightly decided it was too far from Maryvale. Bjarne purchased 12 of the allotments. The first thinning on the blocks paid for the purchase of the land, and he then enjoyed the proceeds on the continuing sale of timber and the eventual capital gain on the land. It is believed that Dahl also purchased similar land in Gippsland and, in this manner, began to build a substantial capital backing, which he could never have obtained had he remained with the Forests Commission.

Bjarne Dahl retired from APM in 1961. Almost his last task was to plant a Mountain Ash seedling signifying the 30,000,000th tree planted by APM Forests, a fitting end to a long career. His legacy lived on in the forest estate he had created for APM. When the Forests Commission came to renegotiate the pulpwood agreement with APM in 1960, the commission acknowledged that the 1939 bushfires had been a disaster as far as pulpwood procurement went. Instead of the promised 4,000,000 cubic feet, the Commission had, at best, supplied only 40% of this. That the mill had survived and even grown was a tribute to APM's willingness to experiment with paper manufacture from less than ideal raw material, together with creating its own forest estate – and that estate was largely the work of Bjarne Dahl.



"Views from Tollgate,"
a reflection on the country and
trees that captivated the hearts
of a generation of foresters.
Photos taken on a Sunday
hike while off duty at an
Assessment Camp in 1947.
Images courtesy Bill Edgar.

Semi-retirement

Bjarne Dahl seems to have found it impossible to retire completely. In partnership with consulting chemist Paul Stops (formerly with APM's research department), he incorporated Dahl & Stops Pty Ltd in August 1962, primarily to deal in wood and timber products, including an attempt to supply a competitor to APM with eucalypt pulpwood. Dahl & Stops traded until 17 August 1965 when Bjarne Dahl resigned as a director and severed his connection with the business.

Kris Drangsholt had stayed on with the Forests Commission of Victoria after Dahl left. In November 1950, Drangsholt was transferred from assessment duties, and ended his career as Assistant Forester at Kallista. Here he built the family's first permanent home, 'Toppen' [Norwegian for "on top"] – a true forester's house on top of a hill in the Dandenong ranges bordering state forest with its spacious grounds planted in a mixture of mature eucalypts and imported exotics. Drangsholt was living there when he retired at the age of 65 in 1964. He was farewelled in the grounds of the Kallista forests office by Inspector of Forests Arch Shillinglaw, who noted that "some of the colour of the [forests] service goes with Kris's retirement". Kris Drangsholt died on 14 March 1968 at the age of 68.

The third of the Norwegian assessors, Bernhard Johannessen, did not make it to retirement. After taking up a position with the Dutch forest service in Java in 1930, he returned to Victoria on at least two occasions, becoming godfather to the two Drangsholt boys. Still in Java when the Japanese invaded in World War 2, Johannessen is thought to have died at their hands in an internment camp.



Top: The Head Office staff of the Forests Commission of Victoria in 1938. Bjarne Dahl is on the extreme left of the back row.
Image courtesy Brian Fry.

Bottom left: Bernhard Johannessen and his Japanese wife at home with a new kitten, mid 1930's.
Image courtesy David Drangsholt

Bottom right: Kris Drangsholt was one of the more flamboyant characters in the Victorian Forest Commission. *Sketch by Leonard Reynolds (1897-1939), courtesy David Drangsholt collection. Image by Peter Evans.*

Tragedy and disappointment

By 1962, the Dahls were living in Bulleen – perhaps the two-storied house in Brighton was now simply too large for the ageing couple to manage, or Bulleen may have been more convenient to Dahl's Camberwell-based business activities. In late 1976, Ann Dahl tragically died in unforeseen circumstances while visiting her family in East Gippsland. This profoundly changed Bjarne Dahl, and he seems to have become more reclusive following his wife's death.

In late 1979, Dahl visited his brothers Henning and Christen Dahl in Barcelona, Spain. The trip was a disappointment. He had been hoping to find a new home for the final years of his life close to his relatives. It was only in Spain that he realised:

how much I owe to Australia which ... helped me to stay alive and prosper with the loving help of dear Ann. I look back on my Spanish adventure therefore ... with little emotion for having been so mistaken ...

A valuable legacy

On his arrival back in Australia Dahl was unwell, and it was some years before he recovered his health. He had, however, prospered financially. Apart from his home, which he owned outright, practically all of his money was in shares. With one minor exception, they all returned handsome profits. In July 1988, he decided to review the provisions for his estate. This required a new Will, the sole beneficiary being the Forests Commission of Victoria. Dahl recalled that:

I was once a Chief Forester, and I owe [the] Forests Commission of Victoria a great deal of gratitude for giving me in 1928 the opportunity to make good in my profession.

Of all the eucalypts, Bjarne Dahl seems to have had a particular affinity with Silvertop Ash, which probably stemmed from his extensive assessment work in the lowland forests of East Gippsland. A fast growing eucalypt, Silvertop Ash was commonly used for house framing (i.e. scantling) and offers serviceable timber. Perhaps importantly for Dahl, the widespread species grows into a tall, handsome tree and makes for an attractive, ordered forest. He recommended that his money be used to plant Silvertop Ash on abandoned farmlands, but if this had not occurred within six years, then a trust fund for eucalypts was to be established.

In his declining years Bjarne Dahl lived alone in his two-bedroom flat in Surrey Hills. He became even more of a recluse. APM decided to keep a paternal eye on its former employees, and Jack Holmes (himself retired from APM) was deputised to visit them to see if they needed any assistance. Dahl did not, however, welcome this intrusion into his private life. His only social outlet appears to have been a wide circle of pen-friends. On 25 October 1993, Bjarne Dahl died at the age of 95.

The Bjarne K Dahl Trust

Bjarne Dahl's estate was considerable, especially for a man of modest income. On 21 March 2002, the Victorian Government announced its intention to establish the Bjarne K Dahl Trust in accordance with his wishes. However, the establishment of the Trust proved complex and it was not until The Honourable Justice Hansen of the Supreme Court of Victoria formalised the Trust's Objects and administration in 2007 that it could be formally established, independent to the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

Creating this biography in testament to the life of Bjarne Dahl was one of the first acts of the Trust. All information about the Bjarne K Dahl Trust is available online at www.dahltrust.org.au



In the last years of his life Bjarne Dahl passed some of his personal possessions to the Drangsholt family, this included his cigarette case. Image courtesy Peter Evans

Principal documentary sources

Note: the Bjarne K Dahl Trust holds a longer and fully-referenced version of this biography.

Original files and records

VPRS 00024/P1: Inquest deposition files.

VPRS 00932/P0: Defunct Trading Company registration files.

VPRS 03222/P1: FCV minutes of meetings 1919-1984.

VPRS 11563/P1: FCV general correspondence files 1919-1984.

VPRS 14910/P1: FCV staff records 1908-1952.

Forests Commission of Victoria (various years): Annual Reports

Department of Sustainability & Environment: files relating to Bjarne K Dahl Trust.

National Archives of Australia: immigration and naturalisation records.

Victorian index of births, deaths and marriages.

Published works

Moulds, F. R. (1992). *The Dynamic Forest*. Lynedoch Publications, Melbourne.

Schlich, W. (1922). *Schlich's Manual of Forestry*. Bradbury, Agnew & Coy. Ltd. London.

Sinclair, E. (1991). *The Spreading Tree: A History of APM*. Allen & Unwin, Sydney.



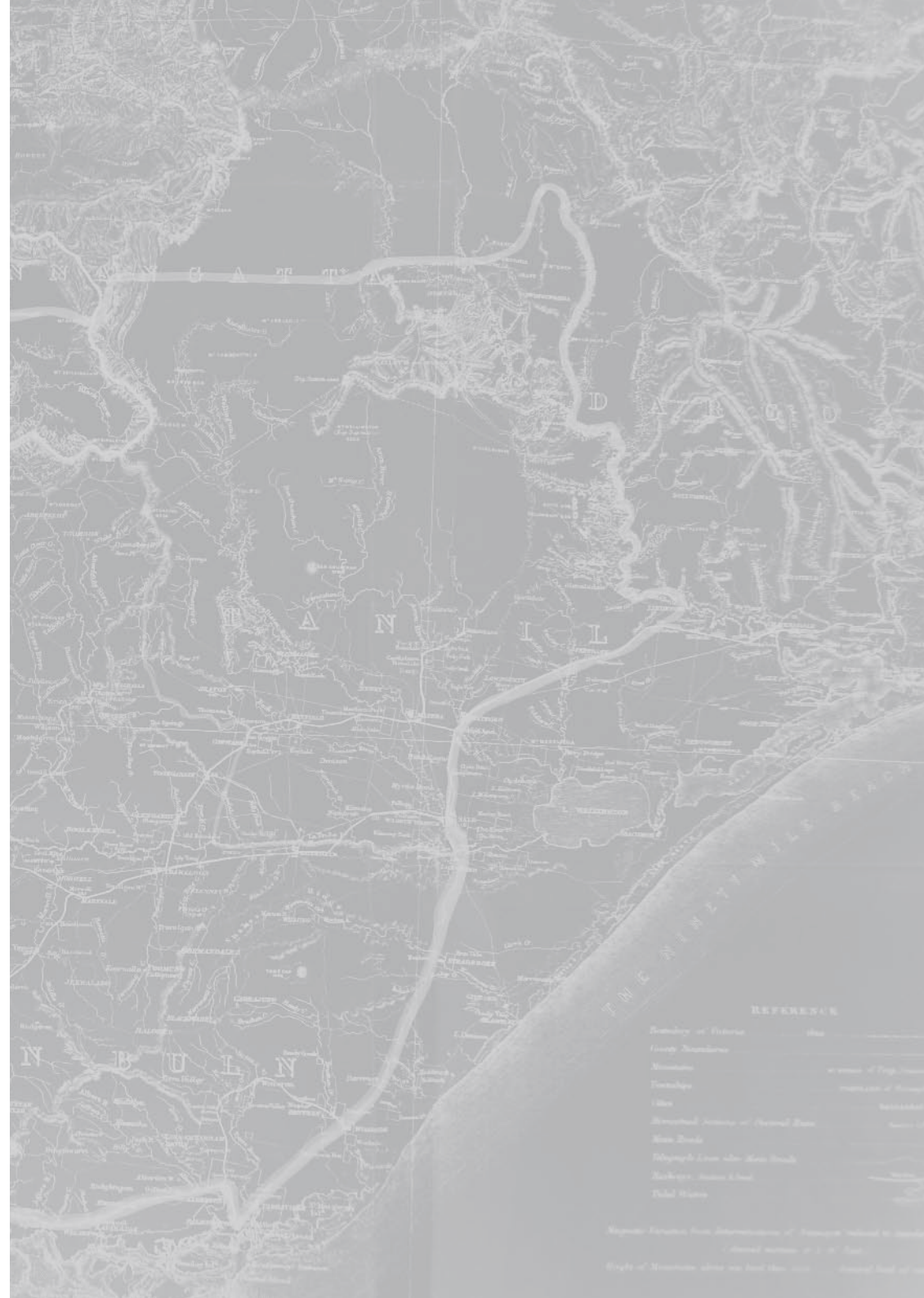


The interviewees

Top (from left to right): Bill Edgar, Brian Williams, David Drangsholt. Middle: Gerry Griffin, Lloyd Wicks and Mike Hall. Bottom: Murray Paine.

Images courtesy the Author, Peter Evans

Inside cover: Map by the Forests Commission of Victoria showing APM's sphere of influence in Gippsland. VPRS 11563/P1 unit 485 file 60/0001. Reproduced with the permission of the Keeper of the Public Records.





Bjarne K
Dahl Trust

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B. Dahl.

