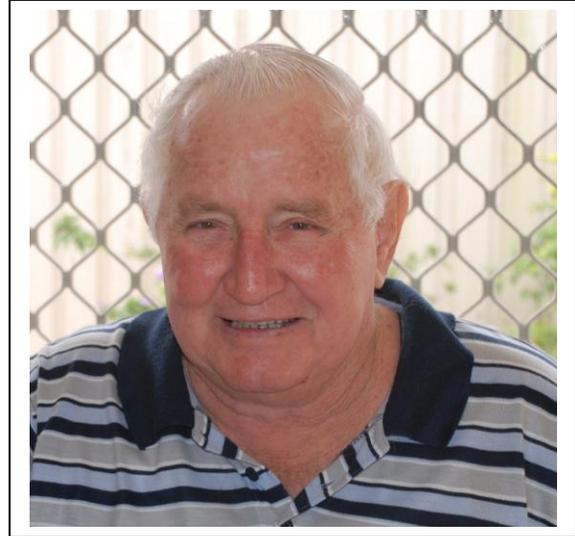


Noel Kitching

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Interviewer: Margaret Cook

Assisted by Bevan Kathage



My name is Noel George Kitching. My age is 79. My father was a coal miner. My Grandfathers were coal miners. My uncles were coal miners. My Grandfather was killed in Aberdare No. 8. My Uncle, Horris Abbot was killed at Blackwater. He had returned from the First World War. We are a mining family and have been for a long time.

My father put me through an apprenticeship so I wouldn't go to the coal mines. That was his idea. But after many years of working as a fitter I applied for a job at Bonny Dundee which was owned by the SEA at the time. I was given a job as a fitter at Sunrise. This was in the late 1950s.

While we were working at Sunrise there was nothing for the fitters to do. We decided we would make steel skips. We did those in the workshops while we were on stand-by for any breakdowns. This was contract mining, not mechanized.

In came the washing plant. They put in a washing plant at Sunrise and this was the first of the mechanical things that was done there. Because we were owned by the SEA, their idea was that we were going to supply the coal to the power houses from these mines. They also bought Scotts Engineering in Ipswich. Scotts Engineering decided they would look at washing coal and they put in some Scotts tables that they used for mineral sands. We tried them to wash the fines at Sunrise because some of the coal was very dirty and we had to wash it all.

When Goodwin bought out Scotts, Goodwin had Goodwin washing plants and they didn't want the Scotts tables so they gave them to us at Sunrise to get rid of them. From then on came Cornwall.

Cornwall then started and it was part of Bonnie Dundee. Then came the job of working at Cornwall and we had a problem. They decided that they would

put a bin down below and we would use an alligator – a self tipping wagon which tip out the coal.

We built the bin below. To get the coal into this bin they decided to put a 50 foot fully enclosed elevator. Never seen one before like it in my life and I hope I never see one again. To get the coal into this elevator we had to crush it and had to take a jaw crusher underground. With the dust of course was unreal. But this was part of the situation that we had to put up with.

It didn't work. It was a complete flop. So they installed a 6T belt from the surface that went down the pit where we loaded at the bottom. We had done away with the bin and the elevator.

Then the pit put in PF Conveyors. What used to happen with the PF conveyors was when it was on a grade the fellows used to crunch into the face, put the pan in, load it down and then they would load slide down other side of the PFS. They would slide toss it onto the PFs, which was quite easy. When it was flat they had to shovel it all. It wasn't a good way of moving it and they couldn't make money. Then we used scraper loaders on PF conveyor chains.

Goodwen wanted to get rid of the Jeffrey shuttle car and we got it. The first Jeffrey shuttle car in Queensland and we got it. Though that was it as well as an old 8BU M & C loader. It was a little loader and we had a

Sampson cutter. We couldn't rotate the head. This was what we had. Everything that everyone else wanted to get rid of – we got.

So we pulled the Jeffery car to pieces. We took it down and we put it back together again. We had an American gentlemen there and he handed us hoses and we put them on without even looking at a blue print. He knew the Jeffery car backwards. The only thing he didn't know was that we had home-made conveyor belts underground. The first car load of coal he took out with that shuttle car, he loaded it on to the belts at full speed. He overloaded all the belts.

So we put a PF conveyor in and made a bin so he could come up and unload the car at full speed. This was somewhere in the middle of the year. At the end of the year we were going to put a 5T underground.

Bevan Kathage: That's a size – 5T, 6T. (200 HP)

After that you could load as fast as you liked. We built all our own drive heads, and we used motors and gear boxes with a chain drive. That was the way we made them.

Bevan Kathage: It wasn't gear drive, it was chain drive. What is important to bring out was that everything had to be dismantled to get it underground because the tunnels were that small that they couldn't take anything big down the tunnel.

It took us 30 hours to get 5T 500 yards underground to the bottom of the 6T Conveyor.

Bevan Kathage: It would have been all over the place, not necessarily a straight line.

We got it working. Then we bought an AB cutter. We used it as a cutter and a flight loader. The flight was on a chain and we used to cut the coal and fire it down and then use these loaders or the PF conveyor.

Interviewer: What is a flight loader?

Bevan Kathage: It is the cutter bar and the cutter bar has a cutter chain with pick boxes removed that runs around. Then they put on these paddles, which are a V, that are pinned on it. As the paddles hit the shot coal it pulls it round and positions it so it goes straight onto the conveyor.

That was what we had – the starting of mechanization that I had anything to do with.

Bevan Kathage: How thick was the seam you were working on?

10 feet to 12 feet high. We overcame the problems. Then Cornwall got a hydra shuttle car that. This was electrically driven, hydraulic pumps that drove the car with hydraulic staffa motors. The staffa motors were good when they got going but they had no torque when they started. This is what we got. They decided they would have a display of this car on the surface at

Cornwall. Everybody came – owners, managers – all came to have a look at this car. It went 5 metres, blew the oil out all over the place. It never moved another foot.

So we fixed it and we took it down the mine. Now, we loaded her with coal. We had a conventional unit, a cutter, a loader, and this shuttle car. We took it down the mine, loaded it and took it out to the belt. The chain wouldn't move, because the staffa motors didn't have the torque to turn the chain, so we had to put a chain over in the rib and a turfer, and got that moving. Once we started it moving, it unloaded. So that was that.

So that was fair enough. So we decided the car went up to the loader and down to the belt so many times. I just don't know how many times. Then we lost all power. It went straight into the belt. What happened was the viscosity of the oil had gone, so we had nothing. The pumps wouldn't handle it.

Bevan Kathage: It was that hot.

The oil got hot, and we had nothing. So here we are, all these men, one shuttle car, and it won't work – and nothing else. So we took 44 gallons of oil down. We'd then worked out how many times it could run up and down. We used to then pump the hot oil out and pump cold oil in.

We had to, because we had to keep the people going. So that was how we did it, until they got a torkar car.

Interviewer: How long were you doing that?

I reckon six months. So that was that. So that was my experience at Cornwall.

Interviewer: How many men were there at Cornwall?

I reckon there'd be 15 men on each shift. I don't know that exactly, but that would be roughly around about the amount of people that would be there.

Bevan Kathage: Pretty steep in parts, too, wasn't it?

It was steep, yes – 1 in 2.5. You know, this is the problem we had, and we got a torkar car, and we put a torkar car, and hydracar was pulled out when it went back to Sydney. We didn't want it any more. That was it.

One of the funny things that happened to me at Cornwall was that when there was all this problem with the hydraulics, they sent up some people from Ifields who were supposed to be THE Australian thing for hydraulics.

Bevan Kathage: The Ifields were Frankie Ifield's family.

So what they did was, they came up and they had bell-bottom trousers. Do you remember the old pointy-nose shoes that they used to have? They had these

pointy-nose shoes on, a dustcoat, and they came up, and there were three of them. They said "Where is the shuttle car?" "Down below." He said to me, "Hey, Kitcho, where's the car– is it in an air-conditioned workshops?" I said, "Yes, it's in an air-conditioned workshops." "Down below?" "Yeah, no problem at all."

So down we went. Here they are, all dressed up. They had no working clothes, just got these on, got the dust coat on. We give them a helmet and a light and down we went. Here was the shuttle car in a section with a brick wall behind it, and they looked at it and they said, "This isn't air-conditioned." I said, "I'll make it for you in a minute." They said, "How are you going to do that?"

It had a big wooden door in it, between the intake and the return, so I pulled the door out.

The air went straight through. So I said, "There you are. Air-conditioning." So I've got to admit, they laughed. You know, they didn't take it seriously. They come up and that afternoon we went down and had a few beers and they were talking to us about all the stuff.

But that was one of the funny things.

One of the worse things that I've ever had in my life at Cornwall was, there was a big fall at Cornwall, and my wife got the message that there were 13 people caught underneath the fall at Cornwall. They rang, and she came and

got me, and I went out there. There was only one fellow under the fall, and the worst thing that I ever did was that night. We worked all night digging him out. I reckon that was the worse experience I had ever spent in a coal mine, because you didn't know what he was going to look like. You didn't know anything. We found him.

Then when you got to the surface, there was TV cameras and reporters. I know they've got to take the news, this is a part of the job, but you don't feel like it once you come out of a mine after working all night in a mine. You don't feel like talking to them.

Of course, they wanted to talk to me because I'd been one of the first ones there and the last to leave, and they wanted to talk to me. I didn't want to talk to them. I'd had enough.

One of Bevan's uncles made sure they didn't talk to us.

Bevan Kathage: The bloke that was killed was my uncle, Gunner Clarke.

There was Bill, and young Bill and they were there with us that night, and were all sitting having a cup of tea after we'd come up.

I know Box Flat was worse, and I had other people injured, but that was my first that I had experience with, and that was the hardest one I had ever one.

Interviewer: Were others injured as well?

No, there was no-one injured.

Bevan Kathage: There was another bloke with him.

Yes, it was Peter. He ran to the fall. As the stone was falling, he was running up the stone. He came out over the fall.

I told him, I said "I wouldn't come back".

Bevan Kathage: He said, "There's no way they're getting me back down there again."

He was a good worker, there was no doubt about it, and Gunner was running out with the steels. These people, their jobs were what they did and they tried to protect them, and he was running out with the steels to get out the things that they were using, you know.

Bevan Kathage: You couldn't afford to lose them.

We had little money. Everything was on the cheap. Well, that's in that early 1960s that ended, and then I went to Southern Cross mine in charge of the mechanical side of the mine. They had conventional units in No. 10, one, they had two conventional units in No. 9, and they had a contract mine in No. 11.

So they were just normal; but what we found out, at No. 10 we bought a Joy roof bolter, and the problem we found

out with the Joy roof bolter was somebody had to stand up on the mast to put the drills in. So you lifted them up off the ground. The fellow operated back down at the back, but this fellow was up there, and we didn't like it, because if anything went wrong, he had to jump off. He could be anything up to six feet up in the air.

Interviewer: The jump could kill him or hurt him badly?

Yes. The other problem they had at No. 9 was the timbering. They had to get up on top of the coal that was already fired down to put the timber up. So we looked at a Tritan roof bolter, which meant that you operated it from the ground. But the Triton roof bolter wouldn't go up our grades, so we had a problem.

The problem was, we got an AB cutter, and we put a Tritan roof bolter, hydraulic roof bolter, on the front of it. So we used the traction of the AB cutter to track it up, so that we could bolt. It was the ugliest looking thing you ever would want to see. It was unreal.

It meant that they'd fire the coal down. Then the loader and the shuttle car would go in and load it out. Then this roof bolter would go in and bolt up, and then the circle would start again. They'd cut the coal, fire it, load it out, and they they'd go in with the roof bolter.

We made two of these, and the one thing I'm sour about is that we never bought one out of the mine because they would have been something to look at today, because they were unreal. So that was the first of the set-ups.

Then came the day we had to increase our production because we were going into Swanbank Power Station with our coal, so it was either another conventional unit or we buy a continuous miner. Now, the decision was made by everybody – not only by me, just by everybody – that we would buy a 48H miner, and we'd put it down No. 11.

So what we had to do then, we had to shut down the contract part of the mine at No. 11, and we then put a shaft down between No. 11 and No. 9.

Bevan Kathage: No. 11 was the upper seam – Wright – and No. 9 was in the lagoon, underneath. Thirty metres?

Yes, 30 metres. So we drove a shaft down, and we put a Syntron feeder at the bottom over the belt, running out of No. 9, so that it went into the bin and the trucks carried it over to No. 10. Then it came the thing was, we had one Joy shuttle car; we had to have another car.

So Derek Cribb and Beres Evans went to Sydney to have a look at a shuttle car. Derek Cribb was the General Manager, and Beres was the Mine Manager.

So I'm sitting at home this night, and they ring me. They said, "Noel, we want you to come down and have a look at a hydracar." I said, "No, I'm finished here. If you are going to buy a hydracar, I'm leaving." I said, "I've already had a hydracar." "No, come down and have a look at it."

Well, Derek got on the phone and he asked me, and I said, "Well, righto, I'll come down and have a look at it." I said, "I don't want it." And that was it. But it had been re-designed. Don't get me wrong, it had been re-designed, and we'd asked Joy would they swoop up the back of their car, because as we went over flat and over grades, the back of the car used to catch.

It's the change of grade coming down, I think, then onto flat. When you go around that corner, the back end of the car, the bumper bar at the back, used to dig into the ground, so they wanted it swept up, and "swallow tail" was what they used to call the back end of it.

Well, they said we were a mob of dills. They couldn't alter it. We were called that many times, I can tell you. The other time was when we said about the 48H. We wanted timber jacks on it, and Bob McQueen told Derek that we were silly. He'd even give us the timber jacks that he'd taken off his miners, so that was another time where we were dills.

But that was fair enough. So I went down and had a look at the hydracar and it went well. Don't get me wrong.

It went well, but I still wasn't sure, so I suggested what we do – so we then asked about swooping up the back, and they said, "Yeah, we can do that." Righto. So then we said "We ain't going to take it down below unless we test drive it". So we made a ramp at 1 in 4 – not in 1 and 3; 1 in 4 – out of stone, and compacted it, and over the Christmas holidays we ran it up and down there, backwards and forwards, with a load of coal in. We used to stop at the bottom and time it for loading. Then we'd stop at the top and unload. We did this backwards and forwards for two weeks.

Noyes was up there with all their technical stuff that I knew nothing about, all the readings and everything they took. So that was fair enough and it worked.

So in the end we had a three months trial underground. If it didn't work, it would be able to be left there until we could get another shuttle car, but that was it. So we took it underground, and it did work. It was really good, because of one reason. It had regenerative braking. If you took your foot off the accelerator, the hydraulics wouldn't let it go any faster. You could slow it from 4km an hour down to nearly zero by just taking your foot off the accelerator, and that was very good on the grades because on the Joy, you had to hit a brake to slow it down. This, you just took your foot off the accelerator. We never replaced a brake pad on the hydracar because the fact was it went

right down to the mine, and that's how it stopped. It was really good in that respect.

So we did that, and that car went in. So the next problem we had was that the coal in No. 11 was very hard, so instead of getting 16% fines we were getting up to 30% - double the amount of fines, because the miner cut it and it was all fine stuff. Grinded out, because it was hard.

So that then was sent to our washing plant, where we used to bypass some of the dry fines. We had to stop bypassing so many because it sent our ash up that we were supplying to the Swanbank Power Station, so we were getting penalties because we weren't competing with what we were supposed to do.

We then were using a lot of picks in the miner. We went to negative picks to try and cut that out. Then we went to Hoy picks, which were bigger and longer to give us bigger penetration, so we'd try to cut down the fine. We did cut down the fines, but the cost was unreal. We couldn't keep up the picks. We couldn't get enough in England to keep us going. You know, that was another problem we had.

We tried everything. In the end, the decision was to put in a water washing Cyclones, so that we could wash the fines. So we overcame that.

Then we had a problem with the hydraulics on the 2nd shuttle car. We

were blowing up pumps like it was going out of fashion. We done six in about a month, and they were costing us three grand a pump to fix.

In the end I spoke to Derek Cribb, and I said to Derek, "Let's go - we're going to have to go to Sydney and get everybody together so that we can sort out what the problem is." There was a problem, because we'd never had this problem, and now we'd got it in the 2nd car and we don't know what it is.

Tape 2

So we went to Sydney, and the problem came that we sat down at a table. There was Ifields; there was Hydrico; Caltex, who were supplying our oil; and there was Noyes (the suppliers of the vehicle), Derek Cribb and I. So the first thing is - a joker brings out his slide rule, and I said to him, "Mate, see that slide rule? Throw it out the window. I'm not here to work about, you know, what it should do. It's not doing it, so let's see why it's not doing it."

So we then went through it. One of the things was that Hydrico came forward and I said, "What have you done? Have you changed your pumps?" He said, "Yes, we have changed the pumps," but he said, "It shouldn't be doing what you're doing." I said, "Well, you know, why?" He said, "Well here's the speck, the oil speck that you use for it. We shouldn't have any problem." Caltex turned around and said, "You ain't

using that oil. You're using a different oil, and that doesn't go with the spec."

I said, "Well, you know, why haven't we been notified?" "You don't buy the pumps. Noyes buys the pumps. Noyes sells them to you. We sent the letter to Noyes." Around the table. So we find out in the end that Noyes had had the letter and had not sent it to us.

But that wasn't the only thing. They had changed from the M and C motors which wouldn't do more than 1400 rpm, and that's a maximum, but M and C never did that. So the maximum the pumps could do was 2800 rpm. They put CP motors on, which did 1480, increased the speed. The pumps were doing nearly 3,000 and we were using the wrong oil, the pumps were over-speed, and we were blowing them up. Now we know why we were blowing them up.

So we went from 4.8 pumps to 6 cubic inch pumps, slowed them down, and we never had any more trouble.

It's a problem that should have been sorted out in the first place. We should have had no problems, you know. But we didn't. We had to go to Sydney to sort it out, and everybody together. So that was that. So the hydracars went in. We had no problems with the hydracars, and personally, we didn't have any troubles with the 48Hs. We increased the size of the traction boxes on the 48Hs. They had the smaller traction boxes on. We increased those

to a bigger size and then we never had any trouble.

But we did have a maintenance section that did this. We had a dog watch on, that used to hose the machine down every night, and the fitter used to check through it all and see that everything was okay. We did not have many breakdowns in that respect. We were quite happy with how we performed.

The coal at the washing plant with the fines washer, we had no problems with the SEA because we could wash so much of the fines.

Well, that was that, but we did have a problem because when Box Flat blew up, we took some of their men over, and we got more coal to the power station. Now, this meant that we either bought more machinery or what. That was when we opened our first open cut. We opened our first open cut, and we open cut mined up the back of Swanbank, and I think we were one of the first open cut at Swanbank.

Bevan Kathage: Yes, Box Flat had been before it went up, but they were doing it over in the gully over towards Rhondda, I think.

Yes, we might have gone into the open cut before that.

I don't know when Beres Evans left. It was just after Beres left Southern Cross that we went into the open cut. That was when we went into the open cut. We went into the one up at old Bonnie

Dundee. Beres and I had had a look at it, and they had a Welsh board?

Bevan Kathage: Most of those old pits, the workings would have been very wide, but only took the clean coal section, so there'd been a lot of top banded coal off banded coal on the floor which was left behind, but not any big pillars in the seam section itself, so we got the lot then, when we open cut it.

We open cut it, but that then turned into more problems. Our problems were that we then received the dirtier coal, not the clean coal. They'd already taken the clean coal, and some of this was very big lumps, because the contractors doing the open cut didn't worry whether they put a lump in with it, or whether they put anything in it. So we had to put grates on our bins so that we could break the lumps.

Then we had 150 ton bins at No. 10. The coal went from No. 10, No. 9 and the open cuts into this 150 ton bin. Now, that gave us headaches. We'd have trucks waiting and all that, so we decided we'd make a live stockpile. Now, this live stockpile was, we made an Armco tunnel with Syntron feeders inside, so you loaded all the coal over the top of it, and the Syntron feeders fed it out, out to our washing plant.

They regulated the feed to the washing plant. This left us with a stockpile there, that after the mines had finished, if we wanted to keep washing, we had stock there to push in with the loader and keep the place going. That was the

next stage that we did to overcome the problems. We took away the 150 ton bin and that.

Now we had an alligator running out of No. 10. An alligator was a self unloader skip like they had at Box Flat 7.

So we argued with Derek that we wanted a belt. He said we can't put a belt in. The Coal Board told them we can't run a belt out of No. 10 – and you can imagine the arguments that were going on there.

So in the end we talked him into it, so we put the belt in with a Fox multiloader structure on it, so that it made a bigger dish on the belt.

Bevan Kathage: It changed the angle of the rollers to concentrate the belt, in other words, not so wide and flat that it all becomes a dish.

So we did that, and at the bottom where the bin was that used to load the alligator, we put a Syntron feeder. In the bin we put a piece of pipe with water in it. Now, as the coal went up, it pushed the water up and tweaked off a timer, switched on a timer, and it used to start the Syntron, and then when it went down and it went away, it used to stop the Syntron. So we always had coal in the bin so that we always had fines to help carry the lumps.

Bevan Kathage: And it's also important that you don't drop the stuff from up here down onto the Syntron – right – because it would pull it out. It's usually held by roof bolts and

wire ropes up to the roof, and it just suspended. So anything falling from a great height, it just smashed it.

So we put grids in, in front of the Syntron, so that the lumps, the fines would go through the grid, down onto the belt, and the lumps then would sit onto the fines so that they wouldn't roll backwards.

Bevan Kathage: But then that's the secret of working conveyor belts with steep grades, put a bed of fines on the bottom of the belt, and then the lumps will stick to it.

Interviewer: Otherwise they just roll off?

Bevan Kathage: They just roll back, and it's dangerous.

So those were the ways we overcame that.

Interviewer: Did anyone else have anything like that?

Not that I know of.

Bevan Kathage: Everybody ended up doing something similar.

Something similar. Everybody, you know, we weren't the only ones. There were a lot of people in the West Moreton field that had the same problems we did, and they had the same problems when they changed over from conventional units to miners. They had the same problems with fines because of the fact that when

we were on conventional units you cut and you blew down with the explosives, so you got big lumps. When you were cutting with the miner, you just graded away. Sometimes you got lumps, but not very often. It wasn't the way to go.

Bevan Kathage: You got lumps taking pillars because the coal would be squashed to death, but when you're in solids you have to cut probably most of it.

So those were the teething problems we had from changing from conventional units to miners to opencuts. Every system that you changed, it went right up the scale. It didn't stop where you just changed it. It went – boom, boom, boom – up, and everything had to be changed to suit it.

But it was all going on at the same time. That's the other thing. They'd all integrated and we didn't shut mines to fix things up.

So everything had to be organized, most of the alterations or that to be organized. We used to shut down for eight days in August, and we used to shut down for three weeks at Christmas. So everything had to be tried to be organized between August and Christmas. If it was a big job we had to try and do it in those times, like, the live stockpile area had to be done at Christmas, you know. The changing over of No. 11 from contract mining to continuous mining had to be done at Christmas time, and all your

maintenance had to be done mainly at August and Christmas.

We never had a Christmas holiday. It was mainly us that had to work, you know, it may be that they were shifting from one section to another or something like that, but mainly it was the maintenance on the machines and washing plant that was the biggest problem.

So we had fitters sitting around waiting for breakdowns, so we decided – we sent a miner away to be overhauled in Sydney, and we reckoned all they did was put a spray paint, they painted it and sent it back to us. I'm sorry to tell you that. So we decided we'd do them ourselves. We'd use the labourers that we had, and we'd use them, repairing these miners while they did it. So we bought a third miner and we worked it that we'd pull one out, overhaul it, put it back down, take the other one out, overhaul it, and rotate them round. We did that.

Interviewer: It kept your fitters working the whole time?

Yes. Everybody was working all the time. They were on call whenever we needed them. We did all of it ourselves, and later on we actually did the hydraulics. We got an old 48H. We used it, and we tested all our hydraulics on this old 48H on the surface.

What we did was, we put brakes on it, and we used to be able to rotate the

hydraulics either forward or reverse to see what leakage of oil we got from the pumps and the motors, so they were a part of it.

Interviewer: And did you have a huge workshops building?

Yes. It wouldn't be any bigger than the length of this house, that's all. We built a skid skillion roof outside, and we did a lot of the work out underneath that skillion roof. We couldn't take it all into the workshops. It was impossible, but we did it out there.

We bought a boring machine off the Ipswich Railway Workshops so we could do all our boring out ourselves at the mine. The fitters that were there, manufactured things that they could do all that. Unreal. The fitters were as keen to do these things as what we were, and that made it a lot easier.

Interviewer: How many fitters were there?

I think we had four at that mine that was doing that, and at every conventional unit or every mining unit we had, we had a fitter with the miner down below, and we had some on the surface as spares. The man down below always went down with the miner and stayed down below with the miner. That was a part of our main setup.

Well, that more or less sorted out the mining. We had to then convey the coal from where we were loading the train to the 500 ton bin to go to the SEA.

We were still sending coal by train in the early part, so we had to have a way to put the coal into the bin to load the train, and we had to have a conveyor to go over. So we had doors, and we could change about and load it over to the SEA.

The problem with the SEA was 22 – I think 22.5 was the cut-off – so, you know, our owners wanted 22% or 22.3%. The moisture was 7%. If you went over 7% it recalculated back to 5. That's what they paid you on. So the owners wanted 6.9% of moisture, 22.4% ash, so they got the maximum.

It was a real game, honestly it was. The clerk up in the office would be ringing down, "We got a bad test today. We went over 22.5." It wasn't always. What would happen is you'd get other coal, there'd be a fall or something in the mine and they wouldn't put it aside. They'd load it out and send it over to the washing plant.

Bevan Kathage: There was also a problem with the sampling as the coal came into the power station. It wasn't so much with Southern Cross and Box Flat, because they supplied it by belt and they could get an automatic sampler or that sort of thing to cut across the coal. But anybody that sent by truck, not every truck got tested. Right? And it was another story. You know, it was a real dog's breakfast, really.

It was. It was a problem, you know, because the people sitting up in the office who did know, only got the

report. They didn't get the report that, you know, that the mine manager had a fall and he cut all the coal up, all the stone up, and sent it over to you – which meant that your washing plant was overloaded with stone and goodness only knows what.

Bevan Kathage: It becomes inefficient. The washing process becomes inefficient, and therefore rock goes through instead of being rejected.

So they were the problems that we had with supplying coal to the power station and, as I say, this is what they wanted to do.

That was all right. Then came the story, you know, Swanbank Power House wasn't going to take our coal, didn't want any more coal, didn't want this, didn't want that, what the stay in was, and all that. Well, then came the story, 'We're going to sell the coal, export the coal.'

Bevan Kathage: New Hope owned Southern Cross at this stage.

New Hope bought it. I got the job as Chief Engineer. 'We're going to export coal.' And the laugh was from some of the men in the mines, was that the only way they'd use the coal from the West Moreton field was to join all the islands up in Indonesia and make it into one big island.

New Hope went into Jeebropilly and was bringing the coal from Jeebropilly,

which was a different coal altogether to the Bundamba coal.

Bevan Kathage: It's a Walloon coal. It's the same as they're going to mine in the Surat Basin. So it's Jurassic coal, as opposed to Triassic, older coal, in the West Moreton/Ipswich/Swanbank area, anyway.

So here comes a problem. We've got to now teach our fellows that it's important that we must keep to the spec, because if we put it on the boat and it doesn't turn to the spec, the Japanese won't have it, won't accept it. So it's another training session that we've got to tell these fellows, that have been used to just watching it run through, getting a penalty if it was bad, but they're not sending it back to us. This was a problem.

So New Hope decided we were going to wash this coal in Southern Cross's washing plant, and they said, "Kitcho, We want to know how we're going to wash the coal." So we went ahead and we started washing Walloon coal. We had problems. The clay stuck to it. It was grey. Instead of black, when it dried it was grey. Oh, man!

So we had to buy another set of screens. So we went down to Wollongong where there was an old washing plant that was out of commission, and we pulled the washing screens out of there. We got them for nothing. All it cost was the transport of them up to Ipswich – and we put them in. Because they didn't know – give

them their due – they didn't know if we were going to be able to do it, and this was their problem, so they had to give us something, and I had to have people who were keen to make it work. I wasn't the only one. There were people keen to make it work.

So we did. In the end, we put extra screens on, washed it off, washed it more with water, washed the clays off it, and made it look black. But the specs would come in from Japan. We'd give them to ACRIL. They would tell us that we could use 80% of Walloon coal, 20% of Bundamba coals.

Bevan Kathage: We used to sell Walloon and Ipswich coal. Ipswich coal tended to break up the Walloon coal.

So we'd get these specs, and they'd tell us what we had to do. This became a problem because, you know, you either wash Walloon coal or you wash Bundamba coal. You can't wash them together.

So what we did was, we bought a hopper from the Railway, one of those old VJM hoppers they had, and we put a belt feeder underneath it. So what we had to do was, while we were washing Walloon coal, we had to put Bundamba coal into this hopper and we had to feed it out at a percentage so that it mixed with the Walloon coals, so we could sell it.

Bevan Kathage: The washed product – that mixed the washed product with the other.

Interviewer: To get the 20/80% mix, yes.

So we had a little roller underneath the belt, and it was driving a generator, to touch the micro-switch, so that when there was no coal on the belt it lifted up off the roller and it didn't turn. The micro-switch cut out and cut your feed from our bin.

So we got that, and we got it working, and we dumped all the coal over at No. 9, on the flat over at No. 9. I think the first shipment we sent away, we had to send it to the wheat terminal on the north side of the river. Forty thousand ton. Every truck had to be weighed at Wacol at the truck weighing station.

And we had to get it down there in just over a week. The railway wasn't in then, so we had to truck it. So we were loading a truck every three minutes, sending it down Station Road – and a truck coming back, so that meant that there was a truck coming there every three minutes, and one coming back every three minutes. So every one and a half minutes we had trucks running past the people's houses, loading it. TNT had the contract to take it down there. Martin Kemp was the joker who they sent up.

He was the cricketer. He came, and that. He came out – he had an Aston Healey motor car – he came out, John Yeowart brought him out. New Hope had a tunnel in underneath the railway line there, and what had happened, it rained and it was coming down this

drain and the pipe had built up. What had happened, the water was building up and going down the tunnel.

So I get in there, and I'm in a pair of underpants and I'm cleaning out a pipe. Martin Kemp came to look for the Chief Engineer. John Yeowart got him to stop. He said to John Yeowart "Where's the Chief Engineer?" He said, "That's him over there." Well, you ought to have seen Martin take his tie off and his coat off in about five sections. I always laughed about that. He was a nice fellow.

But, you know, they were the trials that we had. What happened then was that New Hope bought Tivoli and Rylance. They went under in the flood and, you know, they were washing a bit of coal coming down from Mt Elliot.

Bevan Kathage: Yes, Rylance was washing Mt Elliott and Tivoli was washing Normanton.

They were washing those coals, and they weren't spending any money on it. They'd left it. But our heads decided that we should buy these two washing plants. We had a meeting and Wilf was telling them how – he was the owner of bulk material who built washing plants.

Bevan Kathage: Coal handling, BMCH.

Tape 3

He was telling them how much it would cost to replace them, and all our jokers were smiling and going on. They

said to me, "What do you reckon?" I said, "The best thing you can do is get a D9 and push them into the river." I said, "We'll be had up for polluting the Bremer River." "Kitcho, you've got them. Don't worry. You've got them. We've already bought them."

So we had to make them work. We had to overcome a lot of problems, because as soon as we bought them, all the Mines Department people wanted this done and that done to bring it up to spec.

They wanted it done straight away. Our owners wanted to use them to make money, so we had to keep repairing them slowly as we went ahead. They had three water washing Cyclones in at Tivoli. We put in two more. At Rylance they only had the table. We bought a 3 cell Goodwin washer from New Chum over to Rylance so we could wash Walloon coal for export.

Then we had the barges coming up from Riverside Barges. They had 500 ton barges. We had a 500 ton bin, so we loaded the bin. They used to come up, load the barge, and away they'd go. No problems. They decided that that wasn't good enough, so they made a 750 ton barge, widened it. We got a phone call, the barge was lying over on its side. They'd loaded it with the belt that we had, all on one side of the barge.

So we sped the belt up and we put a chute on there, hydraulically operated

that they could move it over backwards and forwards. But the problem was then they got there with a 500 ton bin but they wanted 750 ton. So, again, we had to put a stockpile outside of the bin and we put another VJM hopper with the belt going through, and that's where they used to load. The VJ hopper, it used to go up into the bin while they were loading. It went from 750 to 1,000 ton.

Everybody was trying to cut down on cost. You were forcing everybody for the better, the maximum you could get out of them. Everybody was trying to cut down labour, which was one of the biggest costs that everybody had.

Bevan Kathage But you should also remember at New Hope particularly continued to use Riverside, the barge people, as competitors to the rail load out at Swanbank, and that was to keep the Railways honest. It was a real fight. Of course, we were dead set scared that the Railways would sue us for whatever, so we always kept Riverside as an option and there was nothing they could do about it. Because New Hope had built Fisherman Islands, they actually had a barge unloading facility built there as well so that coal could go into Fisherman Islands by barge or by train. That's gone now, but that's where it came from originally.

Interviewer: And now it's deliberate policy to keep the two options open?

Bevan Kathage: Yes, very much so.

But you can understand. First off, it used to go to Tennyson. They used a 500 ton barge, which was all they needed, but as New Hope was getting more – they wanted to send more coal by barge, which is as I told you.

Bevan Kathage: But it was also difficult because the washeries which were used were really on the North side. At Swanbank was the railhead, if you want to use the word. So it was a mismatch for some of the things we wanted.

So it all came down to a problem. Then when New Hope decided to build a washing a Jeebropilly, what happened was that this bulk material came up and they went through our washing plant which, let's be honest, you wouldn't do it like we did. You know, it was just something that we had at the time that wasn't going to cost us much money, and we could find out whether we were going to be able to wash this coal, export it and all that.

Then came Fisherman Islands. What happened then was McDonald Wagner and Priddle gave the contract to it. TNT had a certain percentage of it.

Bevan Kathage: TNT had a 50% over shift with New Hope. That's how it came, Queensland Bulk Handling. That's not the arrangement now, but it was when it started.

So there was a fellow from McDonald Wagner and Priddle, a fellow from TNT and myself, went up north to see how they were unloading the coal and

how they were loading the coal into the ships. That was when that came about that we sent it around by rail, because when they sent the coal down from, when we had trouble with Box Flat blowing up, they sent coal down from Central Queensland, and they couldn't get it out of the wagons. It was sticking up in there and they were jack-hammering it. So we didn't want that to happen.

So when we went there. The best way is to tip it out of the bottom of the wagon so the wagon would go over the chute, up, and stockpile it. So we then had to find out whether our coal would stick in the hoppers. We tried it running around. The Railway was quite happy to put it on and run it around and overcome the problem.

Interviewer: And did it stick?

No. That's where the decision was to make that we dumped it out of the bottom of the wagons, and they were the thing.

We then had the trains coming into New Hope, the loop. We wanted to go round the loop and load over near New Hope. Rhondda and Box Flat didn't. They wanted it down the other – they didn't want us to control the loading of their coal.

So we were doing an open cut very close to where the train was supposed to be, so instead of stockpiling the stone that they were taking off the top

of the open cut. We took it down and made the pad. Didn't cost us anymore, but it made a big pad for them to load and we could take the coal down there and sort it out. That overcame the problem, as I told you, with the bin, with feeding the Bundamba coals through. What they did down there, there was a stockpile of Walloon coal and they stockpiled the Bundamba coal, so if you were told that you had to have, in that train you wanted 30 wagons, we loaded 30 wagons of Bundamba and the rest of Walloon coal.

When it went down to Fisherman Islands, by the time they dumped it out, put it on the stockpile, pushed it around with the dozer, it was mixed – but that overcame that problem.

So that's how the stockpile area became that at Swanbank. We wanted to put a bin in over the rail and load it into the bin, and they'd tip it into the wagons, but that didn't go over with the other people in the Swanbank area.

Bevan Kathage: Yes, New Hope was always the odd man out. We never really fitted, let's put it that way, because we had a different view of life.

Yes, it was a different view, too.

Bevan Kathage: Of course it was. We used to challenge everything, just for the sake of saying no.

Look, I enjoyed every part of it. It was something that you had to do, and something that you enjoyed doing. You spent a lot of time at it, but you enjoyed it, because when it was finished and you could see the results, you were doing it where other people weren't, and this made it, you know. Now they swoop up the back of the Joy cars, like we wanted. They swoop them up now. A lot of things they did. Joy were actually over in America doing a regenerative braking on their shuttle cars so that we would work them on the grades.

These were all the things that they learnt from the system that we had to work, and not only me that worked it. There were a lot of people that spent a lot of time trying to make things work.

Interviewer: It's satisfying, then, isn't it?

It is satisfying when you look at it, and when you see the fitters that we trained at Southern Cross repairing miners and that, they all went up to Central Queensland and they all became shift engineers. I mean, we had apprentices; we had tradesmen. You know, they were taught and they knew what repairing miners was all about. That was a system that worked.

Well, then I left New Hope – and I won't mention why I left New Hope; it was over problems I had with them – and I went to Box Flat. There I seen one of the greatest things that I reckon,

but I wasn't interested in going again. I'd done enough.

Bevan Kathage: The FCT?

The FCT that they had. I reckon it was the greatest thing that I'd see since – but it needed people who were keen to make it work, not people who wanted to rubbish it. That was their problem. They needed people that wanted to make it work. They put roof bolters on continuous miners, which meant that while you're roof bolting, you weren't cutting the coal, you know.

Then it's like we did. Instead of starting at the top and working down so we could handle the coal that FCT could give you, it wasn't. It was there from continuous miners, which didn't produce the coal like it could, so we had a problem. If they used all they did, used all the coal they could, the belt system going out wouldn't keep up.

Bevan Kathage: So you know what happens, don't you? They go furiously for the last hour, hour and a half, fill the system up, bury it, and then sit back while somebody else cleans it up.

What's important to know is that that was done in '86/'87. That's over 20 years ago, and UFCT is being installed at the moment in New South Wales. Right? It's not the only continuous hauling system now in use in Australia. There's one operating in Central Queensland very successfully.

Interviewer: So it had huge potential but you didn't realize it?

Bevan Kathage: Yes, it was before it's time, almost.

When you got there and you sat there, you watched it. You could see it. You could see what Bevan's saying. You don't know about the spell – they just overloaded everything, period. The belts would stop, nothing. Shutdown.

Bevan Kathage: You cleaned it all up, usually with a shovel. It would take hours.

So over Christmas we did update the conveyor belts, but by June the place was shut down, so it didn't give it a fair go at all. I mean to say, in my opinion I'd have loved to have had it at the beginning, but at that end I'd had enough. I'd had enough. I mean to say, if you'd worked through it from all the things that we had to do through the time that I was at the mine. I'd had enough.

One story I have was that I was down the mine and a fellow said to me, "If that miner isn't in there another three feet, I'll drop my pants at Nolan's corner."

I'm not going to mention who it was. Mate, we went another 20 feet and we still had a heap on the miner. He left it one Easter and they never brought it right out, and the roof fell in and buried it. They were supposed to bring it out and they didn't. They had

everybody wanting to get away, and they didn't bring it out. It fell on it.

In the end, we got to it, we got a bit on either side. We got two hydra-cars and a big inch and a half hauling rope, and we hooked on it. I sat on and hit it with the car, and they pulled it. I said, "Don't stop. Once you move it, keep going, because if you don't, you'll bury me." And they did. They pulled it out, but it was a long way further down than what – and that was Box Flat.

Bob McQueen gave us a miner. He had a miner, we had a miner on order and he had a miner at Swanbank, and we took that miner and put it down. While they were working that, I had a crew of people to get the miner out, retrieved the other miner. You had to realize that we didn't have that many extra men, so everybody had to pull their weight. Like, the under-manager would be down with the miner making money for the company. You know, as the Mechanical Engineer, I was a spare man, so if there was anything to be done they could use me as a spare.

Bevan Kathage: It was always a team effort. It had to work as a team; otherwise it wouldn't have worked at all.

Everything was a team effort, you know. If you wanted to go away anywhere and you said you were going away, the manager would say to you, "Well, Noel, I'll come out on Saturday morning and make sure everything goes all right." If he was going away, like,

when the fall with Gunner was killed, he'd gone up to Toowoomba. He said, "I'm going away, but I've left them your telephone number. You've got my telephone number up in Toowoomba. They'll ring me." Even though they had under managers, he said again, you know, "You can look after it until we come back." That was the way we worked everything.

So everything in the West Moreton field had to be worked as a crew of people, not one individual could make things work. It had to be worked by everybody pulling their weight, and everybody did pull their weight. Most of them did pull their weight. Some didn't, and some did, but most – you could say 85% of the people did.

Interviewer: Please tell me about the stay-in in December 1984?

It was at Southern Cross No. 12. This is the stay-in they had to get an extra 12 months to supply coal to the Swanbank Power Station, so they got an extra 12 months work. That was that. David Hamill, Bill Hayden and Andrew Vickers were there. When the men came to the surface their wives and children came out to see them.

Graham Robertson was in charge at New Hope at the time. He was going to take care of it all, but Flo came out with the pumpkin scones and whatever, and Southern Cross and New Hope lost all that. They had a contract, they had a signed contract with the QEC, who ripped it up and they walked away

from it. Yeah, they had them on toast, and he gave it all away.

Joh came out in a helicopter and landed up on the top, and walked down and said to them, “Yes, yes, I’ll give you 12 months.” They accepted it, but the accountants got together and worked out how much they were going to get for the coal. Old Joh said, “No, you’re not. This is what you are getting. The day you shut down, this is what you’re getting for the next 12 months.” No increase in price.

Interviewer: So they really didn’t come out well out of it, did they?

Bevan Kathage: No. It was an absolute disaster.

Interviewer: They could have brokered a much better deal?

Bevan Kathage: Yes, but they wanted the publicity. They weren’t really prepared to fight. Anyway, that’s my view.

You’re dead right. They had, you know, they just said, “No, that’s it. The contract’s finished.” They tore it up.

I have a couple of stories. We took a 500 ton bin from Southern Cross to New Hope in about 1981/2. We moved the main fan at New Hope over one weekend. It’s illegal now.

And we had to put stays in the centre of it so that it wouldn’t collapse, and

we lifted it up and loaded it onto the low loader. That’s that.

That was an open cut, over the back of Southern Cross No. 10. The pit was on fire, and that was unloading it, how it caught on fire, when that was taken.

Bevan Kathage: The coal went through the washery and then it was sent by belt straight to the power station and straight into the boilers. All they did was ring up the power station and said, “We’ve got some hot coal. Make sure you get it into the boiler.” That’s what happened. Yes it was washed.

That story in itself is a message about how it all worked. Nothing was wasted.