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History

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

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MEET SOME LOCALS

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FILMED INTERVIEWS

Meet Jack (Jaroslav) Wirth

Jack Wirth was a young 20 year old farmer when he came to Australia from Czechoslovakia in August, 1950. He arrived at Port Melbourne on the ship "Fairsea" after a 33 day journey from a refugee camp in Germany. Jack and his two childhood mates had been to a series of camps since their escape from the communist regime that swept through Eastern Europe in the 1940's. Jack had hoped to stay with his friends, but their opportunity to migrate to Australia had come six months earlier than his. The friends' path was not to cross again for another two years.

Jack disembarked from the "Fairsea" and went straight to Bonegilla by train. The trip was a slow one. He looked into the backyards of Melbourne homes, and then watched the landscape change as the train travelled into rugged bushland, and the hours rolled by.

Finally, he arrived at the Bonegilla railway siding. It was late at night and very cold. People's names were read aloud. He was issued with canvas sheets and blankets, and was sent to a room full of army beds. Like the other migrants, his bed did not have a mattress, so Jack placed his sheets on the wire frame and wrapped himself tightly in the blankets to keep warm. The corrugated huts were unlined, and the gaps in the floorboards were big enough to let in the cold draught.

For five weeks, Jack stayed at Bonegilla. Some days he collected wood with other migrants and, during his time off, would walk to the Hume Weir dam wall to admire its construction. People were friendly, but five weeks was long enough.

From Bonegilla, Jack was relocated to Daylesford to work in a forestry camp. He stayed there for two years and then moved to Adelaide to reconcile with his two mates.

After working in an Adelaide motor vehicle factory and at a hospital as a general wards man, he furthered his study to become a radiographer. While practicing radiography, he met his future wife, Lorraine, a nurse in the same hospital. They married in 1967 and went on to have six children.

