

Annie MacDonald – transcription of interview in Gaelic.

We didn't leave until summer, in June. We were asked to report to the Labour Exchange. They wanted me because I was then 20 years old. We had a choice of where we wanted to go, whether we wanted to go to the Forces, or to the Land Army or to the Forestry. A few of us chose to go to the Forestry. We were sent away down to Kincaig, between Aviemore and Kingussie. They had built huts for us there beside a large river, some distance inland. There were four huts and a cookhouse. We were quite happy there, with ten of us in each hut. The first job we had was stripping the bark off the trees, until we became more experienced. Then they sent us to a Pettar saw, which cut the trees to certain lengths, to be used in mines as pit props. They were two and half feet to nine feet in length. We stored them in separate piles according to size. Many's the day we were tired carrying them on our shoulders because they were very heavy. Then on a certain day they loaded lorries to take them to the railway and they were taken by train to where they were needed.

We spent a year there, and after that they took us up to Alness. There was a forest being felled there. We learned there how to cut the trees down and how to clean them; taking off the branches with big axes weighing between three and four pounds each. We got pretty expert with the axes and we could swing them really well. We had to take the branches off cleanly and we had to cut the wood in the base of the tree in sizes that would fit the sawmill. Tractors used to take that timber to the sawmill where it was cut into sleepers for the railway lines. We worked hard and we had good muscles in those days. But the worst thing of all was the midges. They just about ate us. We used to make fires with the branches to try to keep them away with the smoke. That gave us some relief, but we were out all day and the midges used to wear us out. We started work at eight in the morning until six in the evening. When the boss came in the morning to get us out, it was so dark we could hardly recognise one another, he would shout, "Come on lassies, it'll soon be dark." There was no sympathy there.

The last place we were sent was near Lairg, near Loch Shin. We were better off there. The huts we had were better, we had electric light and we had water in the huts, which we didn't have before then. We felled 100 trees a day, when we were on piecework. When we started off, the pay wasn't very good, but we got better pay when we were up in Lairg. In Alness and in Lairg, there were boys there from the Irish Republic and they were really good singers. They used to have beautiful songs. The bosses used to send an ENSA van up when we were at Lairg which showed films on a screen. We used to knit and laugh and joke together. Everybody was frightened that they would have to get involved in the fighting. It was difficult to choose what was best. Fortunately nothing happened to us in any of the places we worked. We used to see the soldiers training when we were in Aviemore. They used to go up the mountains every morning leading mules with panniers on each side. That was to teach them how to make their way through the mountains.

