

Voice of the Mountains

OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE
MOUNTAIN DISTRICT
CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA



December, 1974. No. 3



Featuring the
Ecology of High
Mountain Grazing
and Protective
Burning

Voice of the Mountains

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Association of Victoria

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TAMBO RIVER

(By W. J. Wye).

Tambo River, Tambo River,
Singing thy song where the reed beds quiver;
Melody born of the streams.

Tambo River, Tambo River,
Ripples attune in my soul forever,
Thy music of golden dreams.

Song that springs from the heart of the mountains,
Sweet as the waters of snowfed fountains,
And fragrant as wattle gold.

Song with the cadence of endless glory,
Mellowed by time through the ages hoary,
Gleaming with sunshine and dew.

Old as the oldest of all creation,
Voicing the spirit of life's elation,
Song that will ever be new.

When by the waters of peace befriended,
When this mortal journey has ended,
Freed from earth's trials and themes;
Fain would I rest on thy banks, old river,
Lulled to sleep by thy song forever,
Wonderful river of dreams.

OMEEO MOTEL

(E. M. & K. G. Faithfull)

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Cattle grazing on high mountains and plains



There is an age old form of stability in the grazing of stock over the whole earth. It is historical. It is a pattern of land use that has supported empires to the back of our known history. It is a pattern of balance in the law of return that re-cycles the fertility of the soil where all living things are interdependant upon each other.

The question of what kind of grazing is less important than no grazing at all. No grazing in any form is to deny the re-cycling pattern that is the harmony of the living soil, growth and re-growth. In the denial of grazing, other factors would inevitably arise as a substitute balance. These other factors are decay, disease, plague, insect infestation and holocaust wildfire. Continuous repetition of this pattern leads to a dead and decaying mountain bushland bereft of life in all its multi form.

Therefore I accept grazing here in our high country -- as in other high countries all over the world -- as a necessary and beneficial ecological process.

Much can be said now as to the form of grazing and the good husbandry and control of it.

A form of grazing in plague proportion can be far less beneficial than grazing under the control of the good animal husbandry of the shepherds, their keepers. Wild horses, wild cattle, wild donkeys, goats, rabbits or what it might be, out of control, would arise, only to reduce their own numbers by excessive grazing and consequent starvation in competition. Here there is not the desirable control as in the case of domesticated animals under ownership management.

The mountain cattlemen control all this within their own individual areas. It is not the way for experienced mountain cattlemen to overgraze. This only reduces the condition of their stock and is a monetary loss to the owners, although this heavier grazing may prove to be beneficial to the areas in the following good season.

I have seen mountain villages mushrooming into being in extreme fire hazard locations, with long, dead and decaying grass throughout the entire area. A case in point here is the village on Mt Baw Baw. Here, to add to the inflammable risk is the accumulations, over the years, of unprotectively burned and grazed mountain sides below it. More intense grazing, coupled with protective burning, should be encouraged around such places.

In the minds of many people now, are the thoughts that mountain grazing is a damaging factor to the environment. A similar trend of thought was prominent in the last decade regarding the complete suppression of all bush burning. Now the voice of the mountain cattlemen has at last been successful in swinging that whole pattern of thought in the opposite direction. We are beginning to learn, in public opinion, our mistakes and misunderstandings.

I trust that in future this voice from the mountains once again shall re-educate the people to the benefits of grazing in the high mountain areas. We cannot afford to sell the fertility of our soil and allow it to crumble in unproductive use. It is the use of the fertility that rebuilds the bacteria of life eternal.

There is no need at this stage -- and probably at any stage -- to rush in and eliminate mountain grazing. Hold it. Hold it as a pattern of example in proof against what has happened, and will continue to happen within the million and a half acre National Park of Mount Kosciusko, where already the mistakes are being learned.

If the cattlemen are removed from the mountains they will never be replaceable. The history, the traditions, the folklore and hospitalities will be gone forever, only to be replaced by a regimented, metallic injustice that is an affront to nature.

My advice to you good people is, on returning down the mountain side and beyond; "Be individual and creative in thought, be aware of usurpers, for this is the way to avoid disaster."

Annual meeting of Cattlemen

"No part of Victoria has such a multitude of interests and uses as the Alpine area," the Minister of Lands (Mr W. A. Borthwick, M.L.A.) told the annual meeting of the M.D.C.A.V., held early in July.

Mr Borthwick, who had been invited by the M.D.C.A.V. to open their annual meeting, spoke on the formation and workings of the Land Conservation Council, which will be issuing a study report on an area including the East Gippsland grazing leases shortly, and one on the Alpine study area in 1975.

VOICE OF THE MOUNTAINS

It was resolved to have the next issue printed as soon as possible. Mr Graeme Stoney was appointed as assistant Publicity Officer to Mr David Treasure. Members are asked to help with items and photographs of current or historical interest for the next issue. They are also asked to mention this magazine to business people who would find benefits from advertising in our "Voice".

It could be pointed out that this way they can reach, directly, many hundreds of people interested in cattle, horses, camping and travelling in the bush generally.

Mr Bob Diprose, from P. McGowan and Associates, attended the meeting, and presented a submission prepared by him to present to the L.C.C. on behalf of the M.D.C.A.V. This lengthy and well documented submission was well received by members, who were impressed by the care and exactness with which it was prepared.

OFFICE-BEARERS

President, S. J. Treasure; vice-presidents, L. McCready, J. Commins, C. Hodge; secretary, T. Phillipson; public relations, D. Treasure, G. Stoney; branch delegates: East Gippsland, J. Connley, T. Ventry, J. Mulligan; Gippsland: C. Hodge, D. Treasure, E. Cumming; Mansfield: G. Stoney, J. Lovce, J. Purcell; North-East: L. McCready, E. Weston, D. Kneebone; Omeo: B. Fitzgerald, J. Commins.

CATTELMEN MEET AT ORBOST

The Land Conservation Council report on the East Gippsland Study Area of Victoria was discussed at a meeting of the East Gippsland branch of the Mountain District Cattlemen's Association of Victoria, held at Orbost.

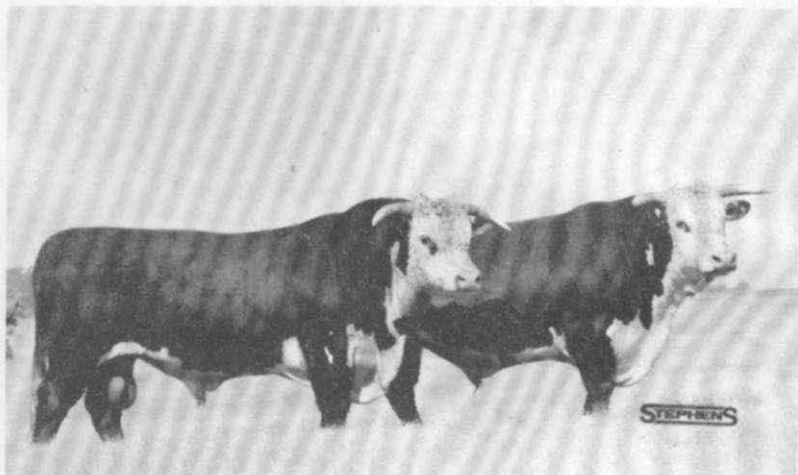
The meeting was well attended by members of the local branch and visitors included Mr Lyle McCready, president of the Myrtleford branch, and vice-president of the M.D.C.A.V., and Mr Graeme Stoney, president of the Mansfield branch of the M.D.C.A.V. Also attending was Mr Bob Diprose (P. McGowan and Associates) who is preparing a detailed submission to the L.C.C. on behalf of the association. Mr McCready, responding to a welcome by Mr John Mulligan, president of the East Gippsland branch, said that the visitors were very pleased to travel to Orbost to meet local branch members. He said that unity and frank discussions were very important at the present time between all members of the M.D.C.A.V.

SUBMISSION

Local cattlemen spoke at length with Mr Diprose about the L.C.C. report, and suggestions were made which will be included in the submission which will be made to the L.C.C. on the East Gippsland region.

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John Mulligan (President, East Gippsland Branch), Lyle McCreedy, Myrtleford, senior vice-president, M.O.C.A.V., Bob Diprose (P. McGowan and Associates), Jack Connley (secretary, East Gippsland Branch).

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THE BRIDLE TRACK

By William James Wye.

There's a bridle track on the Gippsland Hills,
That leads to the Crooked River,
It links with the past and present day,
The days that have gone forever.
'Tis seen, at times, through the undergrowth,
In the wilderness of mazes,
Where, pointing its windings by stream and spur
The gum trees still bear the blazes.

The trees that were blazed by the pioneers,
By mountain peak and hollow,
In the pregnant days of a nation's birth,
Where children unborn might follow.
In fancy, one hears the ring of the axe
That startled the mating thrushes:
And the bush still echos the sound of feet
On the early goldfield rushes.

In a silhouette on the skyline dim,
Where the topmost heights defined them,
One visions the stalwarts who blazed the track,
And the crowds that tramped behind them.
So, thrilled with the spirit and grit of yore,
These links of the past restore me;
I turn from the picture of old romance
To the modern scene before me.

Down the bridle track in the glen below,
That winds through the smiling valley,
A holiday crowd in a limousine,
Pass gaily with joyous sally;
With never a thought of the days that were,
The songs from their young hearts springing,
Re-echo along the old, gold track,
To blend with the thrushes singing.

From the distance comes on the passing breeze,
The music of mirth and laughter,
That rings from the young bride's old, loved home,
And ripples from every rafter.
In the glad abandon of carefree youth
The pathways of pleasures treading,
One senses the rhythm of quivering feet
That dance at a school-mate's wedding.

From the young life filled with the joys of May,
Again I turn to December,
For the old bush road is a living thing,
To those who, like me, remember.
Down the long, lone track to the Golden West
That leads to the silent river,
From the bridle track on the Gippsland hills
The diggers have passed forever.

Mansfield viewpoint

(By Graeme Stoney)

The Mansfield Cattlemen's Association was first formed in September 1959 by cattlemen whose families have run up to 2,000 cattle in the Mansfield Alpine bush areas for many years, some since the turn of the century.

This association was one of the first to join the Victorian Mountain District Cattlemen's Association of Victoria when it was formed in 1969.

The members of the Mansfield Association like their counterparts all over Victoria have a deep love and understanding of their mountain country and are often concerned and bewildered by the uninformed and inaccurate statements made in the press, regarding the cattlemen's role in these areas.

They feel that many of the articles are biased when full use is made by the critics of reports of damage to vegetation by cattle (this cannot be proved and with controlled grazing the reverse is true) and the fouling of dams (these have been solely constructed for the use of cattle to keep them away from the springs of moss beds; which they do).

No mention is ever made in these articles of the cattlemen's huts left open for all to use, or the vast knowledge that cattlemen have of the Alpine areas which is open and readily called on, for example search and rescue work. Also comments are not forthcoming on the convincing arguments that cattlemen put forward denying that the Alpine areas have deteriorated because of the presence of cattle or simply the immense value to the Nation of the extra number of cattle it is possible for cattlemen to run because of their grazing leases and agistment areas.

Since 1959 the Mansfield cattlemen have pursued a policy of harmony and co-operation with the Forests Commission and Soil Conservation Authority who control stocking rates on the Mansfield Alpine and bush runs.

An advisory committee of three elected cattlemen regularly discuss the stocking situation with their local District Forester and twice

yearly reports on the state of the Tops are sent to the local Soil Conservation Office. Regular inspections have been held at the grazing runs every few years, the cattlemen organising and hosting representatives from S.C.A., and F.C. local council and other interested people.

Recent Inspection

In February this year the most successful and interesting inspection took place with thirty four people and twelve (12) four wheel drive vehicles taking part in the two day trip.

Representatives attended from the Soil Conservation Authority, Forests Commission, Land Conservation Council, Mansfield Shire Council, Mansfield Conservation Advisory Group, Victorian Natural Resources League, G.P. McGowan and Associates and local cattlemen.

Those present remarked at the good state of the runs in general, and how some of the small exposed areas which had caused concern in the past, had a markedly improved cover of vegetation since the last inspection.

Mansfield cattlemen are convinced that many of the misconceptions about cattle running on the High Plains and in the bush generally could be overcome if the true story is told correctly. We also believe that the tradition of running cattle in the Victorian Alps is part of the National Heritage and should be allowed to continue under strict supervision for all time, so that future generations of Australians will be able to see a romantic link with our early history still being carried out in much the same manner as it was in the 19th century.

How many other such links with the past has Australia in 1974? How many will it have by 1980?

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TELEPHONE OMEO 3

A legend of Dargo

(Author unknown)

It was on the Upper Dargo, in the spring of eighty-four
That Cargoola township boasted of a Salvation Army Corps;
Which was needed very badly, for the Upper Dargo then
Contained a population of most irreligious men;
And the daddy of the sinners, owing neither God nor boss,
Was a grey old drunken Scotchman of the name of Sandy Ross.

Now Sandy, as a sinful man, was very hard to beat.
His oaths were fresh and fierce and strong; they scorched you with
their heat.

He was drunk at early sunrise, he was drunk at sunset too;
And when drunkest told his biggest lie. He sang "We are no Fou' "
He would steal, or beg, or borrow; he was always on the cross;
And the parsons - classing sinners - gave the cake to Sandy Ross.

But the Army girls got at him, for their hearts were in their work,
And the Hallelujah lasses have never been known to shirk.
A hopeless case, an uphill fight; salute them as they pass!
For a worker of the workers is a Hallelujah lass.
So they tackled Alexander with the story of the cross,
And a change became apparent in the life of Sandy Ross.

Now, about this time, it happened that a direful deed was done;
For the parson's ducks had vanished; yes they vanished one by one,
And the solitary trooper, for the honour of the force,
Spent watchful days, and sleepless nights, and sorely tried his horse;
Till at length a whisper went abroad; a calumny most gross,
And the finger of suspicion seemed to point at Sandy Ross.

But the Army wouldn't hear it, and they gave that yarn a lie
When they entered Sandy boldly for the coming "Bye-and-Bye"
Then each night upon the platform, in a broken voice and low,
He informed his fellow sinners he was "whiter than the snow".
And then the parson's pretty daughter - the enthusiastic Floss,
Told her friends, in gladsome accents, "There's a change in Mr Ross"!

Then the teacher at the State School, who possessed a merry eye,
And had doubts of Sandy's fitness for a mansion in the sky,
Wagered gloves that, at a meeting, the converted man would scare
And demoralise the godly with a most prodigious swear.
But the girls they booked their wages, and enthusiastic Floss
Said she felt just like a sister to the convert Mr Ross.

The night arrived, the hall was full; men spoke, and bye-and-bye
 Came announcement from the chairman; "Brother Ross will testify!"
 And Sandy Ross rose and told once more how he excelled the snow
 In whiteness; but no further in his tale could Sandy go,
 For, heard by all, and seemingly proceeding from the back,
 To the horror of the Army came a duck's protesting quack.

The speaker paused, and glared around, then had another try.
 "I thank the" --QUACK. "I thank--QUACK,QUACK!---
 "I thank the lord that I
 Am whiter" --Q-U-A-C-K- "See here young chap!" ---
 then out the torrent burst

And Sandy ripped, and tore and swore; it was fearsome how he cursed!
 He cursed the teacher; cursed the ducks; he cursed till all was blue.
 The solitary policeman came, he cursed the trooper too;
 He took his coat and waist coat off; he would have taken more,
 But the solitary trooper led him cursing through the door.
 Thus back upon society, came old time Sandy Ross,
 Fearing neither man nor devil, owning neither God nor boss.

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A FIFTH CONTROLLING BODY?

(By A. J. (Jim) Treasure)

There is no reason why a fifth controlling body should be brought into the grazing areas of the mountains. Those bodies already in control have proved over a long period of time and co-operation that they can serve and conserve all the elements in the mountains.

These bodies are The Cattlemen, The Forest Commission, The Lands Department and The Soil Conservation Authority. These bodies are equipped with trained staff, knowledge, equipment and money. They are doing research which enables them to develop techniques to handle the situations and conditions that are unique to this type of country in this part of the world.

The Forests Commission, although still hampered by some laws are doing a better job each year with regard to preservation of the area and huge quantities of timber are being milled on a basis of permanent production.

Fire fighting equipment and trained personnel are available at all times, and some, although insufficient, fire breaks are being burned each year.

The Soil Conservation Authority is a body of trained staff whose responsibility it is to see that the soil is maintained in a condition whereby productivity can be increased on a permanent basis.

The Lands Department is capable of controlling vermin and noxious weeds.

The Cattlemen are the oldest active body in the mountains. These men have been here for over one hundred years and the fourth and fifth generation are now active in carrying on the traditions of their forefathers.

The preservation of the mountains has been uppermost in every cattleman's mind. Endless time and labor has been spent on keeping the country free from noxious weeds, such as; St. John's Wort, Briars, Blackberries, Ox Eye Daisy and many other weeds.

Many species of grasses and clovers have been encouraged and productivity has been increased twofold. Any money made, has been returned to the land in maintenance, mainly fencing and building and weed destruction.

The onslaught of miners digging for gold for forty years from 1860-1900 introduced noxious weeds into many areas. This was mainly due to the fact that some of them had flower gardens and the plants went wild and multiplied. The stockmen i.e. the cattlemen, held the noxious weeds at bay for the last eighty to ninety years.

Although weeds have taken many areas of the lower country such as the lower sections of the Ovens River and the Dargo River, none have persisted long in the country that the mountain cattlemen regard as their responsibility.

Long before the days of hormone sprays, salt was used, sometimes being carried for twenty miles from the homestead on the saddle to be put on patches of St. John's Wort. To get the salt to the homestead

it had to be packed on pack horses from either Harrietteville 28 miles, or Dargo 30 miles.

A team of pack horses was used every summer to bring in provisions of salt and materials. This even for years after the general store closed in 1911. It was not until 1940 that a motor vehicle could compete with pack horses on the Dargo High Plains.

What a contrast to the days when all people had to walk to get across this country. That weeded them out. They were fine types of people and few passed without calling just for a chat and to see if they could be of any assistance. The kettle was always boiling when mother was there, or grandmother before her.

Long before the dawn of the Forests Commission era, fires burned until nature stopped them. How else could they stop? And yet until just lately in 1939 there were beautiful stands of woollybutt timber. These were destroyed after a 20 year policy of "put out all small fires and there will be no big ones".

But there was a big one, a hell of a big one. And now they are milling a huge patch of woollybutts that did not burn in 1939 because it had been burned slowly in 1936, and naturally.

Put out all small fires and there will be one big one that will kill all in its path including birds and animals. It only needs one or two more overseas professors of that sort of thing to come here and tell us that fire is necessary here and is a part of our environment as it has always been, and the would be controllers of this country would sit up and take a little more notice.

People have got to get back to nature a little more and stop trying to control and direct everything themselves.

Regarding the future control of this country. I have explained that those who are in control are capable of handling it and have the job at heart, and no good would come of handing it or even the smallest part of it over to another body.

Under the present control the crown lands of Victoria are permanently reserved under a flexible system of common sense. No land can be alienated from the crown without first the permission of the Lands Department, The Soil Conservation Authority and The Forests Commission.

All of these bodies have sensible men in them and they would not recommend that any land be selected if it was not to the best advantage to the community. Most areas are too steep, others are better growing forest. Most areas are not suitable for settlement because the arable land is too small and isolated to support a viable community, and all of the mountains are doing a good job for the State if they are left in a natural condition.

Most people who go into the bush today are encouraged to do so by advertisement put in by money making organisations or by people who are gaining recognition by it.

If people are left alone they are free to enter the bush the same as they have always been. And if they wish to enter it they will on their own initiative. These people are usually a better type who do not wantonly destroy. So if there are no more roads cut into the bush and a little less said about it, and a strict eye kept on it by those who are now in control the bush will survive and improve. Exploiters must be kept out except under special circumstances which can be agreed on by those now in control.

FIRE AND THE BUSH

ATHOL HODGSON. FORESTS COMMISSION. VICTORIA.

(As delivered at Mountain Cattlemen's Symposium, Myrtleford, Vic.).

After these two days, I think I am in general accord with Jack Treasure and the philosophy he expounds about forest fire, particularly its past history and its role in the forest. I disagree in a few details but that would not be anything out of the ordinary - it would be remarkable if two people did not disagree about some aspects of this subject.

I might explain also that I have been interested - as a job - in the ecology of fire for around about ten years or so, but my association with fire and with mountain grazing goes back a long way further than that. I was born and bred not far from here and my family and I had a hand in some of the burning-off that used to go on nearly 20 years ago. As a young forester, when I finished my training, I worked in East Gippsland and I, too, can remember the days when Bill Ah Chow and Charlie Pendergast were employed to do burning in the high country, even in the months of January and February, something that would be completely and utterly frowned upon today. But this actually went on not more than 20 years ago.

I also remember the burning - very good burning - done by the Rogers family in the far east of Gippsland, so I have got more than a last-ten-year association with fire.

In looking at the history of fire in Victoria, the late Norman Wakefield has shown me evidence of a rip-roaring fire that occurred in the Western District of Victoria forty thousand years ago, give or take a few years. There is evidence from charcoal from river deposits in Gippsland, and charred wood that we can dig up in our mountain areas, of fires in the forest some hundreds of years ago - certainly long before white man came. The writings and records of the early explorers are studded with reference to burning the land. Curr, in 1883, in his "Recollections of Early Squatting in Victoria" quotes numerous instances of widespread - what we today would call low-intensity - fires in northern Victoria. More recently Alan King of C.S.I.R.O. has collated a great number of references to the prevalence of fire in the early days of colonisation.

I took some details out of Forests Commission records of lightning caused fires, and in one five-year period from 1961 to about 1966 there were more than 500 fires in State forests that were caused by lightning. I am not aware of how many fires lightning started in private property over that period but, with regard to Jack Treasure's reference to 130 in one day, on that particular day there were 73 fires started by lightning in State forest in Victoria.

It is indisputable that lightning causes fires, although I still meet people who just cannot believe it. Lightning has been around for a long time and the sorts of fuels that fires occur in have been around

for a long time. So lightning must have been a significant cause of fires in the days of early colonisation and before European colonisation.

The aborigines caused fire. They used it for cooking, warmth and for driving game. I am less sure of my facts when I talk about fires caused by aborigines. I am aware that the influence of aborigines in Victoria was greatest in these lands that are now alienated for agriculture - the savannah woodlands of the western district, for instance. As a forester I haven't much interest in those lands because there is not much forest there. In the mountain country, I believe the influence of aborigines was considerably less than in the savannah woodlands but undoubtedly they did penetrate the mountains at specific places and at specific times, and they may have caused fires. But you can forget about the aborigines, if you want to, and still postulate without much fear of contradiction that fire has been in the mountain forest for a very very long time. So let us leave it at that. I think the fact is indisputable.

Perhaps one of the other factors of evidence of fire in the forest comes from the character of the vegetation itself. I refer very generally here to the eucalypt type vegetation itself. Eucalyptus is characterised by having a thick bark which insulates the cambium or growing layer, and protects it from the damaging effects of heat. Many eucalypts, not all, also have a peculiar physiological feature called a lignotuber which is a mass of food materials and dormant buds, and some of you, I know, were down on your hands and knees at lunchtime today looking at these in the snowgum. They allow a eucalypt to survive if it is cropped off by an animal or if it is burnt.

In addition to this, many eucalypts have dormant buds beneath the bark on the branches and limbs, and if the crown of the tree is destroyed either mechanically or by fire, the tree survives when these dormant buds burst into life and produce foliage to allow the life processes of the tree to carry on.

Now this, of course, does not prove that fire has been in the forests for thousands of years, but it does show that if fire has been there the vegetation has physiological characters which allow it to live with and to tolerate fire.

Some species - and we have seen some of them in the last two days - the ash species (the mountain ash and the alpine ash) do not have these particular physiological characters so well developed. They are relatively easily killed by fire, but the species itself is adapted to fire and, in fact we believe now it owes its very existence to fire, because it does not appear to be able to regenerate or recycle without certain physical and chemical effects that follow burning of the site. This particular forest type appears to be adapted to a devastating fire which, whilst it kills the trees, gives the seed bed and the germination conditions which are required for the species to recycle. All the stands of alpine ash and mountain ash that exist today, apart from some that were planted, can be traced back in their history to what could be called a catastrophic fire - a fire that devastated them but at the same time gave them this ability to recycle.

There is a good deal known about the effect of fire on a number of other species, not only eucalypts. The acacias and the heaths are characterised by having seeds with a hard coat which will lie dormant in the ground for many many years until such time as that hard seed

coat cracks and the moisture activates germination and a new plant grows. Fire is one of the things that will activate or recycle a colony of heath or acacia. One species, *Epacris*, lives for about 15 years, give or take a year or two depending on the site, and if that site is not disturbed in that time, that species will die out and be replaced by something else; if there is no fire or no mechanical action, other types of vegetation will take its place. But, if the area is burnt in 15 or 30 years or even 50 years' time (because the seed has the ability to remain viable for many years) it will regenerate and the heath will grow again. And there is a similar story with wattle.

Many other species have the ability to respond to fire, not all in the same way, but certainly the ability to respond. There is a Country Roads Board wildflower reserve on the Hume Highway not far from Seymour and a few years ago a devastating fire went through the area; two women and five children were burnt to death but the wildflowers did not worry too much; they responded to this sort of burning and were present in greater numbers afterwards. I have photographed them for a number of years since that fire.

Unfortunately I am not well versed in the effects of fire in the alpine vegetation. My work with fire over a period of ten years was concentrated in the lower country, and I cannot tell you specific examples of the effect of fire on the different types of vegetation in the sort of country we have been looking at in the last two days. However there does not seem to be much doubt that the snowgum has the ability to regenerate either as seedlings or from those massive butts with their lignotubers at ground level that we were looking at today.

Mt Wills was burnt severely in 1939 and although the dead trees are still evident there, the snowgum is still present; it is recycling itself. It is slow, certainly, and I am not suggesting for one moment that this is a good thing. All I am saying is that this vegetation type is able to live with fire. There is no doubt about this. Of the other species in the alpine area. I know very little about them from the point of view of their response to burning, but in looking through newspaper records I believe Mt Buffalo was burnt in 1926, 1932 and 1939; the Dargo High Plains were burnt in 1926, 1932 and 1939, and some of the things we have been looking at in the last two days, some of these beautiful flowers, I suggest, must have been subjected to fire in those years. I suggest also they must have been subjected to fires in years that are not recorded in the newspapers. They have been subjected to deliberate burning and to lightning fires at times when the fires do not reach the headlines in newspapers.

I would suggest that when you talk about the effect of fire on the ecology of an area, there are three things that are important. One is fire intensity. By fire intensity I mean the rate of heat output. How much is released and how quickly determines the effect of the fire on the things around it.

A forester would call a low intensity fire one in which the total output of heat is quite low and is released very slowly. In contrast with that is a high intensity fire, where a great deal more energy is released very quickly. It does not take much imagination to realise that the effect of those two fires would be quite different. You can imagine how a kangaroo would survive in one perhaps, but not in the other. Even man might survive in one but not in the other. The tops of the trees would

survive in one but not in the other. One would probably burn everything right down to the mineral soil; the other would not.

Fire intensity is one of the things you have to consider when you are talking about the effect of fire; and you just cannot say all fires are the same.



Athol Hodgson

Two other things are important about fire in determining their ecological effect. One is the frequency with which fire occurs on a particular area; I personally believe that this is far more important than intensity in determining the type of vegetation and the types of birds and mammals you have in an area. I believe this is the real key to the effect a fire has on the ecology of an area.

Imagine a time scale from 0 to 350 years, and think about mountain ash. Mountain ash grows from a seed and it first produces seeds to reproduce itself in twenty years (or something of that order) and then lives for another 300 years or so. I am generalising here but it is something of that scale. If that mountain ash is not killed by fire in that time then it dries up and is replaced by another species; it is replaced by a rain forest species, a mixture of species that grow in the total absence of fire.

If a mountain ash stand grows for, say 50 or 100 years or so and has seeds on it and it is burnt and killed, with a little bit of luck (because there are a few exceptions here) it will recycle itself, because the fire produces the conditions that are necessary for germination and survival of the young seedlings. So, a fire frequency of, say, once every 30 years to once every 50 years will recycle mountain ash.

Now, what happens if you burn it once every 15 years? Fifteen year old mountain ash does not have any seeds on it. You burn it and you kill it, and that is the end of it (give or take a bit of a white lie here because other things can happen). What I am saying is that very frequent burning, or at intervals which are too soon to allow the species to produce seeds, will change the vegetation type from mountain ash to something else. Burning at intervals of, say, four, ten to fifteen or twenty years will change a mountain ash forest to a wattle forest.

Take acacia. There is a whole lot of them and I will generalise for simplicity. They first produce seed at two, three or four years (some of the little ones anyway) and they live, say, 15 to 25 years before they become decadent and die. So, if they grow from a seed they will die out at about 25 years and if there is no fire at all over this area in that time the acacia will disappear. But the seed will still be dormant in the ground, as I have told you before, and if you burn the area after, say, 70 years the acacia germinate from the seed in the ground. If you burn every year or every second year you will kill the species before it has time to produce a seed supply. So you can eliminate acacia from an area by burning at very frequent intervals.

Over near Wodonga there is an area which in a period of 20 years has had seven fires in it, something of the order of every two or three years. The eucalypts and grass are still there but the shrubby species which you normally find in this type of area have been eliminated.

Summing up what I have been saying; the frequency between the successive occurrences of fire on a particular area determines the species that are present. There are other things involved, too, but fire frequency is probably the predominant thing that determines just what species you have in an area.

What determines frequency? What determines whether an area is burnt every three years, every five years, or every 300 years? Climate, for one thing. If you go to Queensland rain forests where there are moist conditions all the year round, in some of the forests you get prolific growth of vegetation. A lot of it decomposes because there is a great deal of decomposition in this moist warm area and at no time of the year is there any possibility of a fire occurring because it is too wet. We get remnants of it down the east coast. We have remnants of this in Victoria - the wet gullies of East Gippsland that Jack Treasure referred to, exist because the climate and perhaps the topography in those gullies in East Gippsland is such that fire has not

been present for a very very long time - at least, for three or four hundred years. Hence the eucalypts are not there. Climate is one of the things that determines fire frequency; topography is another. Just as you get rain shadows due to topography, you can also get fire shadows. It is quite possible to see these, where a fire will run up one slope but does not burn with the same frequency or the same intensity on the other slope.

The character of the fuel that is available for burning is another thing that determines how often a forest burns. If you take the Karri forests of Western Australia and perhaps the stringybark forests of Victoria, these grow in an area with a good winter and spring rainfall on reasonably fertile soil. They produce a great deal of vegetable material some of which is shed on to the ground. But these areas are subject to drought every year for six weeks to ten weeks when the fuel dries out. The chance of a fire occurring in those areas due to lightning, aborigines, or, in these days, white man, is pretty high. And these forests burn fairly frequently. I will not say how frequently because the whole picture is complicated by modern fire fighting techniques. But they are subject to fairly frequent fires.

The third thing that determines the effect of fire on the ecology of an area is the time of the year at which the fire occurs. We have heard a lot in the last two days about autumn fires in the mountains. Autumn is the "natural" time that fire would occur in the high country because this was the time when it was dry enough to burn and this was the time when lightning starts fires. In other parts of the State spring fires were undoubtedly common and still are, and possibly summer fires as well. Some species will respond differently to a fire which burns at different times of the year; we have to recognise this if we are going to use fire for particular purposes.

Why do we worry about fire if it does all this and it is a natural thing? Why don't we let it burn? Why don't we do more burning? Why don't we let the lightning caused fires burn naturally until they go out when it rains? It is a good argument and there is a fair bit of sense in it. But you have got to remember that the forests as they exist today are not natural. For one thing they are less extensive than they were before white man arrived and *much of the habitat for vegetation and animals* is now severely restricted. A half-million acre fire in the year 1650 might not have done a great deal of damage to something that could have escaped its effects. A half-million acre fire today would burn a higher proportion of the habitat and consequently have greater effect than in past ages.

We have to recognise also that there are values in the forest that exist today that did not exist before white man came. We want straight poles for carrying electricity wires; solid timber so that you can have furniture. The aborigines did not care about these things. They preferred a tree that had a bend in it and particularly if it had a hole in it where the birds could nest and the goannas could go in after the eggs and the aborigines could climb that tree to get the goanna. They did not want the same things as we want. We have altered the values of the forest and fire may not be compatible with some of the values we want. We have to recognise this.

We also want clear water. We have fences in and near forests. We have stock, houses, motor cars, women and children in the

forest. It is a different forest today to what it was before white man came. Fire today has to be managed, just like a lot of other things that have to be managed. It is a pity, I suppose, but it is a fact of life. In my opinion we have to use it where its known effects are good, and we have to be fairly bold in all of this. I do not think Jack Treasure would disagree with this - I think all he is saying is that we were pretty damn slow in waking up to it. And there might be a bit of truth in that, too.

Let me just conclude by saying something about the fuel - the litter - that exists in our forests. Eucalypts are quite peculiar by world standards in that they shed their bark. Not many other trees do this. A lot of overseas trees shed their leaves, but ours are crazy; they shed their bark, and bark contributes a great deal to the amount of litter and available energy on the ground of the forest for a fire to feed on. In some of your forests this fuel accumulates year after year. There are theories that say this does not happen, that the additions to the floor of the forest are eaten away and that there is a sort of a balance reached. This might be so, too, after many many years, but in our mixed species forest there is no evidence that this balance between decomposition and additions is reached at least for 20 or 30 years. The fuel keeps building up on the floor of the forest for quite a number of years. I have some theories about why this happens and why the amount of fuel would vary from one forest to another, but I will not talk about them now. Fire feeds on this fuel and the more fuel the higher the intensity of fire that is possible.

In terms of fire control, fires burning in heavy fuels are a problem that no one in the world yet has solved and, I believe, no one can solve. The best we can hope to do when this occurs is not to panic but to re-assemble our thoughts and forces to take advantage of the first available lull in the fire behaviour and try and get control then. A fairly simple calculation will show you that man just cannot pit the same amount of energy against a high intensity fire to do anything about it. When the problem is complicated by the fact that our forest fires throw spot fires many miles ahead of the main fire, you get a logistics problem that easily outstrips man and his efforts against it.

So we have to wake up and realise that in a heavy fuel concentration man is not able to stop a fire in full flight when the weather conditions are severe. This does not mean it is a tragedy, of course, because to be quite honest that sort of fire does have some good effect on some things, but I think, on balance, the overall effect is bad and we should not allow it to happen if we can prevent it.

There was an instance near Mt. Wellington in Gippsland some years ago where an area had been burnt a few years previously by a fire and had recovered. A wildfire raced into this area which had been fuel reduced on one hot afternoon and by all the laws of physics and fire behaviour it should have stripped the vegetation on that mountain. It did not. Not because of man's action, but because it ran out of energy.

What can we learn from this? How can we capitalise on it? I do not have to tell the cattlemen how to capitalise on it because many of them are skilled at this sort of thing - I do not say that in any derogatory manner at all. I pay tribute to Charlie Pendergast, the Rogers and the others who know all about this. Foresters have learnt something about fire behaviour; they have learned to understand what makes the fire burn the way it does and how to predict what is going to happen. And I

suppose this is where you have to be a bit tolerant of a government department. Generally speaking, the employees of a government department do not have this single skill given by years of experience in one particular facet of, say mountain ecology, so you have to go back to the drawing board and teach them, and you have to teach them properly. So they learn about fire behaviour and then try to put it into effect by using fire in the best way possible. Because we are dealing with the large areas of mountain country where access is difficult, and because we are using fires that will spread slowly and therefore in any given day each fire burns only a very small area, we have had to take to the air and develop a technique of lighting up fires, not from horseback, but from helicopters and fixed wing aircraft.



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ESTATES

'NED KELLY'

(By W. J. Wye)

It happened in the days of old, in Wangaratta town,
The townsmen gave a purse of gold to horsemen of renown,
And riders rode from near and far, by valley, plain and hill,
And mountains where the brumbies are, to try their stockmen skill.

And one rode there a stripling tall, a bushman born and bred,
The grandest horseman of them all, the people hailed as Ned,
A youth scarce eighteen years of age, though doomed to
prospects drear,
For fate had written on the page, his strange and wild career;
His rivals vowed such a riding treat they had not seen for years,
So sportsmanlike in their defeat, they greeted him with cheers.

But little did they dream that they would some day live to see,
The youth who rode the outlaw grey, an outlaw doomed to be,
For prison's records could unfold his life and death of shame,
Since he who won the purse of gold - Ned Kelly was his name.

POETRY COMPETITION

This publication is open to contributions in rhyming verse, with a bush subject or setting. Entries must be accompanied by the name and full address of the entrant. The winning entry will be published in a later edition of this booklet.

Omeo Standard, July 4, 1899.

Mr A.H. Ryan, the popular mining manager of Dargo High Plains, had a rather exciting experience on Sunday when on a trip to Omeo. Starting somewhat late in the day, Mr Ryan arrived at the Dargo River shortly after 6 p.m., it being then pitch dark. Being well acquainted with the crossing, although the river was considerably swollen by the late rains, he steered his horse along the accustomed track through the water.

When he reached the opposite bank, however, the rider discovered by the movements of his horse that an easy gradient had been washed away. In the twinkling of an eye the animal attempted to ascend the precipitous bank, and so desperate were its efforts that it assumed a perfectly perpendicular position, and then, much to the dismay of the rider, fell back upon Mr Ryan, both disappearing under the surface of the water.

Thoroughly soaked, Mr Ryan had to wade back through the water again, the horse having started riderless on the return journey to Dargo High Plains.

Reaching land safely on the bank he had just previously traversed, Mr Ryan used every endeavor to catch the horse, but the animal made off up the ranges in the direction whence it came. Hours passed away and the chilled rider, wet to the very skin, still heard the horse just ahead of him scrambling up the bridge track.

Eventually the animal left the track and began nibbling at the grass.

This was Mr Ryan's opportunity, and in an instant he grabbed the reins and was again mounted. After another couple of hours' travelling, during which time every garment on the horseman had become frozen hard, Mr Ryan reached the residence of Mr Treasure.

Here the inmates were roused from their slumbers, and they did all in their power to make the drenched and frozen traveller comfortable for the night.

Mr Ryan made another start from Omeo on Monday, and reached his destination without further mishap at about nightfall, not very much worse for his thrilling experience.

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Associate membership in the Association is open to all interested in its objectives.

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Published by the Mountain District Cattlemen's Association of Victoria.



Mansfield Cattlemen Jock Lovichi and Graeme Stoney bringing out a skier who had been lost in the mountains behind Mt. Buller for four days in 1970.