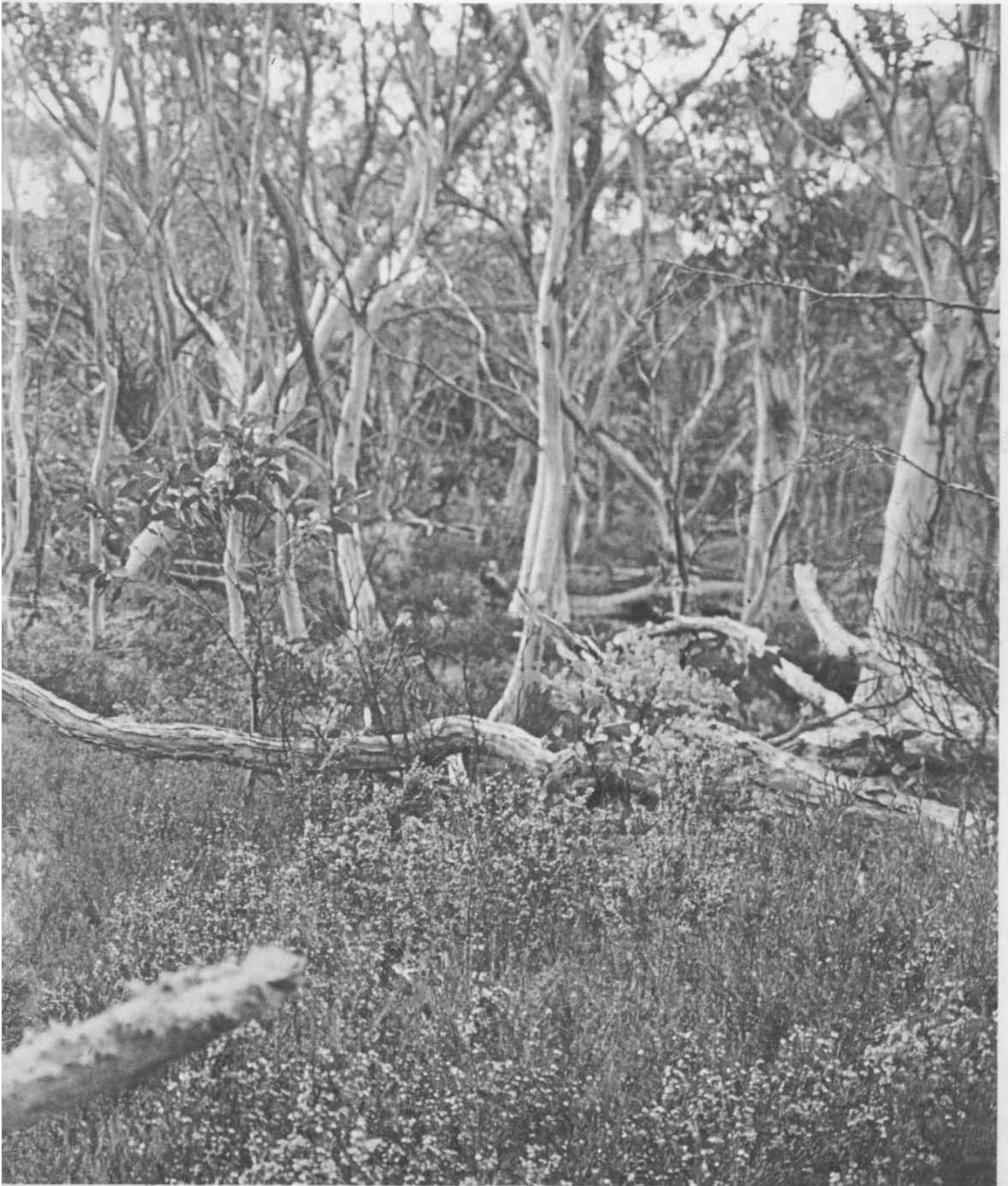


# *Voice of the Mountains*

**JOURNAL OF THE MOUNTAIN DISTRICT CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA  
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**SPECIAL BOGONG FEATURE**

# Voice of the Mountains

Journal of the Mountain District Cattlemen's  
Association of Victoria

Compiled by J. Commins, H. Stephenson and G. Stoney.

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# REPORT FROM OUR PRESIDENT

The past year has been an eventful one for the members of our Association. After years of costly study and release of the final recommendations of the Land Conservation Council, the Government announced that it intended to adopt the recommendation by Legislation almost to the letter as it was presented. In doing this I believe a mistake has been made that will prove to be of huge expense and give little real satisfaction to the general public.

When the L.C.C. was formed it was thought in political circles to be a rewarding move to create more National Parks so while the L.C.C. of Victoria may not have been expressly directed to find a greater area for National Parks this recommendation was undoubtedly expected of it.

The average citizen if he wants to venture into the bush would much prefer not to be guided and regimented by uniformed rangers of various departmental agencies as it now appears will come to be the case.

I am sure they would be happier to see the occasional four wheeled drive Police patrol passing through on the look out for lawbreakers such as vandals, noise polluters, etc. I should remind members that our association was instrumental in having Police Stations in the more remote areas of our Eastern ranges being equipped with four wheeled drive vehicles so that these duties could be carried out.

I feel that the only real necessary addition to this would have been educational material from the Ministers of Forests and Conservation which could have been distributed through the media and from their departmental offices in perfect harmony for relatively minor cost.

I believe there is more merit in building a more effective Vermin and Noxious Weed Destruction Board than increased wild life and National Parks services and certainly so until there are vastly more people populating this continent than at present.

However, the die appears to be cast and as a result, and in spite of our long and costly endeavours to prevent it, a number of our

members will be forced to quit their runs. In the case of the contentious Bogong High Plains area, we are assured that it is not because the cattle are considered to be harmful but because it is considered necessary (i.e. politically expedient) to have an area where the public can drive through and see the land as it might have been before its recorded history. Utter nonsense. If more thought had been given to the fire and erosion hazard and to protective burning and less to the mere sight of cattle then a better service would have resulted.

Others of our members have been given notice to quit in terms as short as three years after a verbal suggestion from the Department concerned of a minimum of nine years by the proposed decimation of our members.

Our Association must be seen to be taking a real set back but I hasten to add that had not all the time been given by Executive Members and reliable information given (for which we have been repeatedly commended) and membership prepared to pay the cost of much of this, then we may have been very considerably worse off.

However, much remains to be done.

In spite of the long investigations by the L.C.C., the fundamental matters of terms and conditions of tenure that we have been concerned about since the inception of our organization, have not been satisfactorily dealt with.

In some of the areas of Crown Lands studied by the L.C.C., the need for extended terms of tenure were recognised but in the alpine study area this was neglected.

Since more people have been encouraged to visit remote places, runholders have a need for greater security in the occupation of their huts and stockyards. Also, the definition of boundaries has not been satisfactorily resolved in many places.

Many erroneous ideas have been formed from personal notions and inconclusive research, and there is a continuing need for independent and unbiased study to evaluate the practical effects of a great many factors that influence



the ecology and benefits derived from our grazing and forest areas.

Until our points of view get the backing of this sort of research, we are at great risk of losing further ground.

In the immediate future, a case should be prepared to claim adequate financial compensation for cattlemen already denied the use of their runs.

To achieve continued bush grazing on a sound and sensible basis, we will need the continued strong support of every member and the many associate members we have.

I would like to thank the many people who contributed to our effort during the past year.

This would include the folk who prepared and organised the very successful get-together at Holmes Plain, many Associate Members, and those who regularly attended and contributed to Branch Meetings. A special mention of appreciation should be made for our capable secretary, Mrs. Coral Aston, also Mr. Lyle McCready and other members of our Executive Committee who have devoted valuable time and effort to our cause.

In closing, I urge all members to continue active support for our efforts to have sensible rules and regulations developed in relation to our continued grazing activities.

Jim Commins  
Ensay.

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## STATEMENT BY THE MOUNTAIN CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF VIC.

Recently, the Victorian Government announced that the final recommendations of the L.C.C. would be accepted as presented to Government.

These final recommendations include the fact that approximately 10% of cattlemen will lose all or part of their runs in the study area.

The Victorian Mountain Cattlemen's Association understands that certain sections of the Alpine Study area were designated by the L.C.C. to be free of cattle grazing, not because of any alleged damage done by cattle, but because a compromise had to be reached among various factions in the community for the future use of the Victorian Alps.

Our Association believes that individual Cattlemen who have suffered by the complete or partial loss of their livelihood, through no fault of their own, so the community as a whole can have these areas free of cattle, are due for a type of resettlement scheme from the Victorian Government, pro rata to the loss they have suffered.

The Association believes that very long term, low interest loans to these people to enable them to buy equivalent land to that lost, may be just compensation.

In some cases, this may not be acceptable to affected cattlemen, and in this case, some other help should be offered. Obviously,

each case should be considered on its merits.

As the number of cattlemen affected is small, our Association believes that the Government should take the initiative with the situation and instigate a resettlement scheme that would suit the unique situation of Mountain cattlemen.

If the Government did this, some of the emotion and heat would be taken out of the issue and much credit would be achieved by them.

It is obvious to those involved that the cattlemen affected will suffer serious hardship because of the Government decision. Besides this fact a serious precedent has been set by the proposed eviction of these cattlemen from their runs.

Even those cattlemen who will lose part of their run have been put in a difficult situation because the loss of part of a run makes their enterprise a doubtful economic proposition.

Our Association is at present working towards a just settlement of this issue for the affected families. We believe that the precedent we set in this issue one day may be applicable to cattlemen who are displaced in the future.

J. A. Commins  
President M.D.C.A.V.

Graeme Stoney  
Vice President M.D.C.A.V.



# ENSAY STATION AND THE BOGONG HIGH PLAINS

By David Hamilton

The first mention of High Plains in the existing records of Ensay Station is in December 1868 when George Smythe, an Ensay stockman, was advanced five pounds as expenses in relation to a visit to Bogong High Plains. Whether this was a visit to inspect Ensay stock grazing there or a spying mission on behalf of Ensay to inspect and report on the grazing capabilities of the High Plains is not very clear. It is more likely that this visit was for the latter reason as it is quite clear from the pre 1883 records of Ensay still in existence (refer separate list) that Ensay had been considering alpine grazing for sometime as is indicated by the presence among the records of a **Plan Showing the Boundaries of Unoccupied Runs near Omeo** published by the Lands and Survey Department 13th July 1866. This map indicates nine mountain stations which had formerly been licenced by the Crown were, by July 1866, abandoned for one reason or another. The stations indicated on this map are as follows:—

Bogong High Plain	92,000 acres
Mount Martin	114,000 acres
Mitta Mitta West	52,000 acres
Burregun	28,000 acres
Pheasant Park	50,000 acres
Dargo High Plain	121,000 acres
Beecher's Hill	160,000 acres
Wonnangatta	163,000 acres
Glencairne	24,000 acres

From the time that John MacLeod squatted on Ensay with 900 lambing ewes in 1843 when overlanding to Gippsland with his father, Archibald and brother, Norman, John C. MacLeod had a continuous if chequered association with Ensay through to December 1872. Although Angus McMillan first took up Ensay for Lachlan Macalister in September 1839, it was abandoned by 1843 when it was licensed to Archibald, father of John MacLeod. Apparently the station was sold to Campbell & Co. (of

Campbell's Wharf, Sydney) in 1847 and it was about this period that the Pre-emptive Right of 640 acres embracing the existing house and wool shed was exercised. As far as can be ascertained John C. MacLeod was always in possession and manager during this period but it was the partnership of Bendon Sharwell Hassell, Robert Monckton together with John MacLeod about 1864 that finally brought Ensay Station back into the MacLeod family fold.

John Sutcliffe Horsfall, then Manager and later Chairman and Managing Director of Richard Goldsborough & Co., purchased the station outright in May 1872 and John MacLeod resigned as manager and broke all ties to the property at the end of that year.

For a period J. S. Horsfall personally managed the property with his son, also John, as jackeroo; however his business headquarters were in Melbourne and he relied on managers for the day to day operations at Ensay. First, Fred M. Grant, who was later to become a stock and station agent in Bairnsdale, for nine months from January to September 1873; followed by Alex McKenzie from February 1874 through to April 1877. It was during this period that Malcolm Kenneth (Ken) McKenzie, a brother of Alex and Colin, brought the 90,000 acre Bogong High Plains licence under the control of Ensay Station and there is some indication from the Ensay Records that the Mt. Wills run of about 20,000 acres and adjoining Bogong to the east was also held by one of the McKenzie brothers and may have been included also by agreement with Ensay. However it is more than likely that Colin and Ken McKenzie ran cattle independently on Mt. Wills as they were never regularly employed by Ensay but Ensay occasionally purchased horses and saddles from them. Following the resignation of Alex McKenzie in April 1877, George Smythe, the same one who inspected

Bogong for Ensay in 1868, was appointed manager by Horsfall. Brothers Henry and John Campbell from 1878 to March 1883 were the next owner/occupiers of Ensay Station 146,000 acres, and Bogong High Plains run of 90,000 acres. Thomas Mac-knight Hamilton and James Hamilton Irvine in March 1883 paid H. & J. Campbell 16,000 pounds walk-in-walk-out for, as T. M. Hamilton writing to David Aitken of Hopkins Hill on 11th April 1883 described as follows:—

“I have purchased a Station in North Gippsland containing a few hundred thousand acres of crown land some purchased land (about 3,000 acres) 18,000 merino sheep 2,000 head of cattle, horses, etc. there is plenty of country to work on and I think I have got a good bargain.”

T. M. Hamilton entered the management of these properties enthusiastically and energetically in 1885 he extended by purchasing the Tongeomungie and Cassilis Stations walk-in-walk-out including all stock, exchanging some of the freehold lands for selected land at Ensay (e.g. the Johnstone family at Tongeomungie). The story of T. M. Hamilton's battles with adversity in the form of the 1884 Land Act, and the rabbits which started with a trickle in 1890 to a plague by 1900, some day will be told. The peak was reached about 1896 when Ensay was shearing 50,000 sheep and grazing 5,000 head of cattle. For some years, before the railway was extended to Bairnsdale 5,000 acres of Mewburn Park, Maffra was leased for fattening stock prior to sale in the Maffra saleyards.

Unfortunately, his partner J. H. Irvine died when things were at their peak in 1896

and Mr Hamilton was forced to purchase his half share from Mr Irvine's estate right at the peak of valuations. By 1902, due to drought and rabbits, the Ensay sheep tallies dropped to 25,000 and the cattle to under 2,000 which figures they never exceeded before the sale of the property to Messrs Foster Bros. and McCulloch in 1914.

There is no record of Ensay ever sending sheep to the Bogong High Plains though an examination of the correspondence reveals that the temptation was ever present. During the 1901-2 drought Mr Hamilton was approached by Mr J. S. McCulloch of the Riverina to purchase the Bogong High Plains run. T. M. Hamilton quoted a price that he thought Mr McCulloch would consider ridiculous; Mr Hamilton must have underestimated the drought in the Riverina as Mr McCulloch promptly accepted and so began an era of sheep on the Bogong High Plains. T. M. Hamilton died on Boxing Day 1907 leaving the management of Ensay to his son, James (Jim) Hamilton on behalf of the family.

Ensay became a very successful settlement for returned soldiers from the 1914-18 war and Thomas I. Hamilton, (a brother of James) received the homestead block and he, in partnership with James Commins, obtained a licence for the grazing of cattle on the Nunnyong run. Thos. I. Hamilton died about 1935, following which his widow retained the Ensay Homestead until about 1950 when it finally passed out of the Hamilton family. James L. Commins carried on the Nunnyong licence from 1935 until his death about 1951, after which his two sons, James A. and Charles A. Commins have been grazing the Nunnyong run in partnership to the present day.

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## Acknowledgement

The Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria wish to publicly thank Mr Harry Stephenson for his generous assistance with this issue of Voice of the Mountains.

Mr Stephenson has donated a major part of the typesetting and paste up of this issue and his contribution runs into many

hundreds of dollars.

His professional presentation of the pasted up pages has made a straightforward job of the setting, final checking and printing, which has been done at the Mansfield Courier.

Graeme Stoney,  
on behalf of the M.D.C.A.V.

## “OMEEO”

There's a wild charm in the mountains that is not met with elsewhere,  
Free as the vagrant winds, and pure as snow,  
There are songs in crystal fountains, bubbling in the hills up there,  
That echo in the name of 'Omeo'.  
There's a lure in snow fed waters, rippling by sweet Inisfail,  
With Cobungra River singing on it's way;  
While Fitzgeralds sons and daughters, in the groves of Shannon Vale,  
Bring memories thronging of a bygone day.

There's the melodies of Ireland, there's minstrelsy up there,  
Like the blackbirds singing in the "Braes o Marr",  
From the mountains and the mineland from Limerick to Kildare,  
In the lilting Celtic names – and here they are,  
MacNamara, Pender, Cusac, Neddy Gray, and Mick McGrath,  
Kelly, Shelley, Carney, Condon, and Minogue,  
They are filled with Irish music while the lilt in Paddy Maher,  
Is dancing to the blarney and the brogues.

There are voices ever calling, in the bushbirds carefree trills,  
And I'm going back up there for old times sake,  
Just to watch the snow flakes falling, on the grand Benambra Hills,  
And to see the wildfowl swimming in the Lake.  
I want to see the cattle stringing, from the topmost height,  
Their white horns gleaming in the morning sun;  
I want to hear the hoofbeats ringing, through the bush at night,  
From brumby mobs on some lone mountain run.

Tis good to live life over, as we near the journeys end,  
When we have roamed the world by many ways;  
When a welcome greets the rover, in the handclasp of a friend,  
The friend we knew, back in the golden days,  
To recall the years long vanished, with the mingled joys and pain,  
To revel in the old tales newly told;  
With the prodigals long banished, who wander back again,  
To live in dreams the halcyon days of old.

Wm. Jas. Wye.



# SHANNON VALE AND THE BOGONGS

By Bren Fitzgerald

Shannon Vale is the venue of the 1981 Mountain Cattlemen's "Get Together". To assist visitors familiarise themselves with this historical area I have been asked to compile a short history of the property and its historical connection with the Bogong High Plains.

Up to the year 1885 this area was known as Middle Creek Run. William Jack, I understand, was the first lessee, he being publican of the Golden Age Hotel, a gold buyer and a horse breeder. On his death the lease passed to the Braithwaite family who lived here for a number of years, finally moving on. My Grandfather then took over the lease, this I think would be around 1875. Application was made for selection and it was 8 to 10 years before the area was surveyed. In 1885 title was granted.

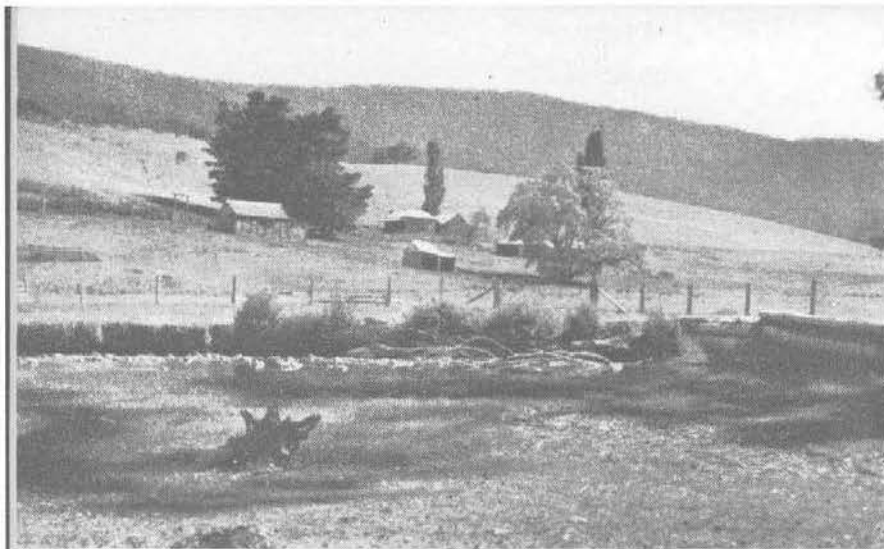
My Grandfather, Edward D'Arcy Fitzgerald, was born in Clarksburg, Kentucky, U.S.A. in the year 1828, his family being farming people. Gold was found in Sacramento, California so Grandfather set out for the gold fields, known as the "Golden State" and became a forty niner. After trying his luck at Sacramento and Pasadena he didn't make a fortune but at least learnt all there was to know about Hydraulic Sluicing. Gold was being discovered in Australia, so, GrandPa packed his swag, boarded the sailing ship "Edward" in San Francisco and headed for Australia, landing in Sydney in 1853. He came as far as Two Fold Bay and worked for a time for Ben Boyd, finally making his way to Omeo across the Manaroo (Monara) in April 1854.

Prospecting around the area now known as Dry Hill, he found the prospects to his liking and staked a claim. He was later joined by two others, McRae and Hamilton. Together they worked the Oriental Claim for a period of 25 years, finally selling their claim and interest to a company. Edward D'Arcy Fitzgerald then selected land in the Dry Hill area and combined

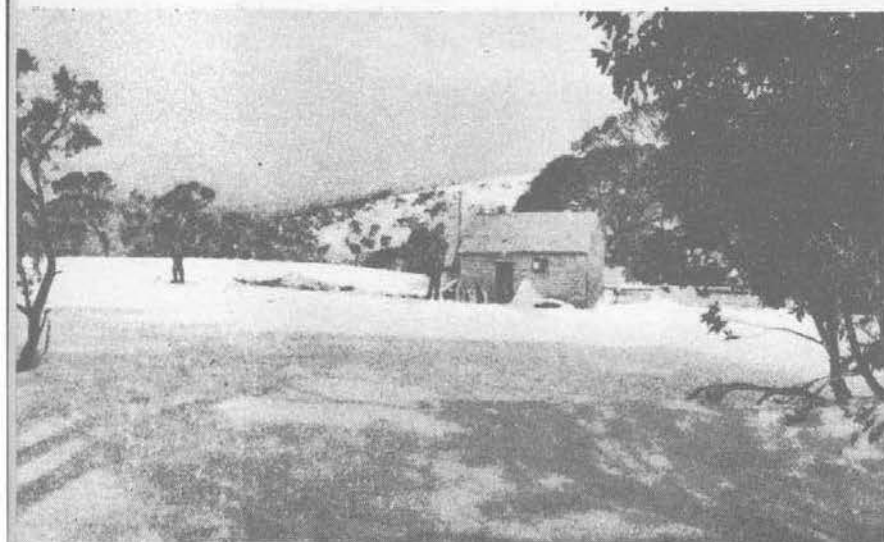


*George Silas Fitzgerald  
"Fitzy" of "Shannon Vale"*

farming with mining. He was married in Melbourne in 1865 and brought his bride home to "Cherry Banks", Dry Hill and there they reared a family of 5 sons and 2 daughters. In the years 1888 to 1890 gold was found at Sunnyside and Glen Wills. The population increased rapidly and horse feed was in great demand. With this in mind Grandfather and sons George and Jack had started land clearing on the property at Middle Creek. They had packed a plough and a set of harrows in on pack horses from Omeo, also their first lot of seed oats. Shortly after they drove a bullock wagon in making a track as they went along.



*"Shannon Vale"*



*Fitzgeralds' Hut on snow-covered  
Bogong High Plains*



*Looking towards the Bogongs from  
"Shannon Vale"*

The first to do so, the route was through Grassy Flat, Anglers Rest and up Middle Creek. The first ploughing was done with a single furrow plough and eight bullocks. Things progressed steadily, a water race was cut and a water wheel built. Most of the wheel was made of bush timber squared up with axe and adze, the latter implement Grandfather could use to perfection. A chaff cutter was purchased and the men were in business. The camp at this stage was a log hut.

In 1900 my Father built a house and in the following year married Margaret Shannahan and brought his bride to "Shannon Vale" as he named the property. Their family comprised 3 sons and 2 daughters and in 1920 Margaret Fitzgerald passed away. During their married life they had the usual ups and downs of the early settlers — plenty of hard work and not a great return for the effort. Like most at that time they were self supporting in a great many things. Meat, butter and such commodities were eagerly sought by the miners. Cattle were still the main source of income, run on the Bogong High Plains and lower bush runs. A thorough bred stallion was kept and some horses bred. My Father always seemed to have a race horse going but none ever made the big time.

In 1924 a new breed of people made their appearance. People who wanted to go in to the snow for pleasure, 'skiers'. My Father was approached by the late R.W. Wilkinson of the Ski Club of Victoria as to whether he would be able and agreeable to take skiers to the Bogong High Plains. Ski-ing was relatively new then and a few hardy skiers including Wilkinson had made the trip from Hotham across the Bogongs and the only shelters were the cattlemen's huts. About 1925 Cope Hut was built by the Public Works Department at the head of Middle Creek. The best part about Cope Hut was that it had 8 bunks and water laid on. The handy wood was soon exhausted and it received the full blast of the winter gales. Skiers using the various huts would have my Father pack their supplies up in Autumn. Foodstuffs would be packed in kerosene tins and then soldered up with 2 tins per case. In the next

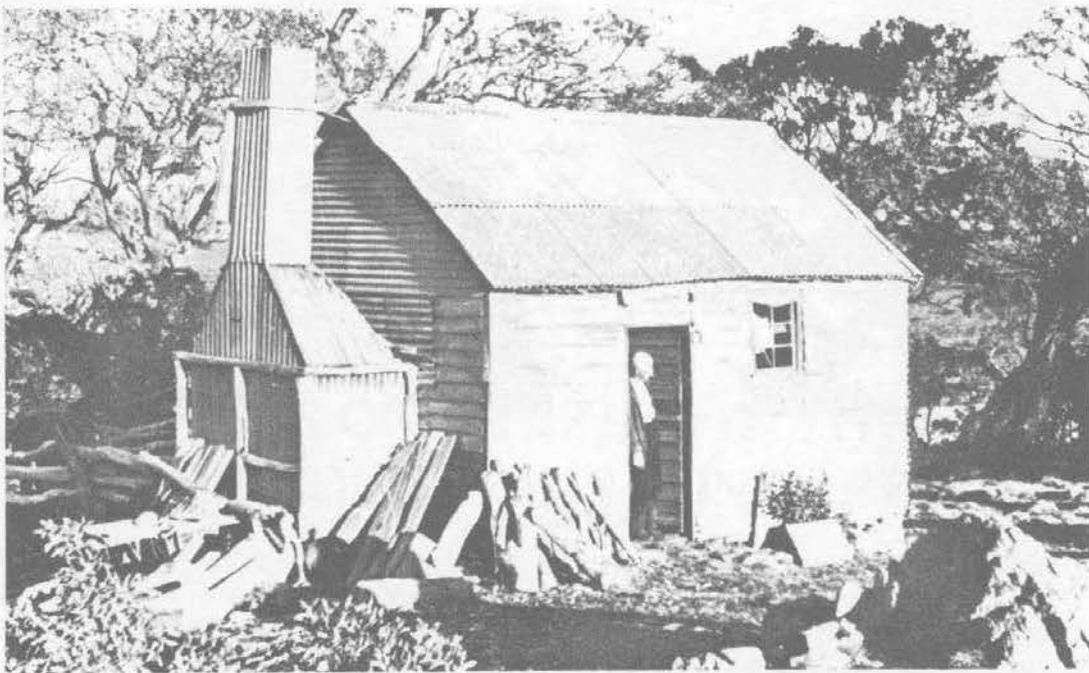
## “SHANNON VALE”



*Packed by George Fitzgerald, the first Skyline Tour, in 1928-29 rests outside Fitzgeralds' Hut with original shingle roof*

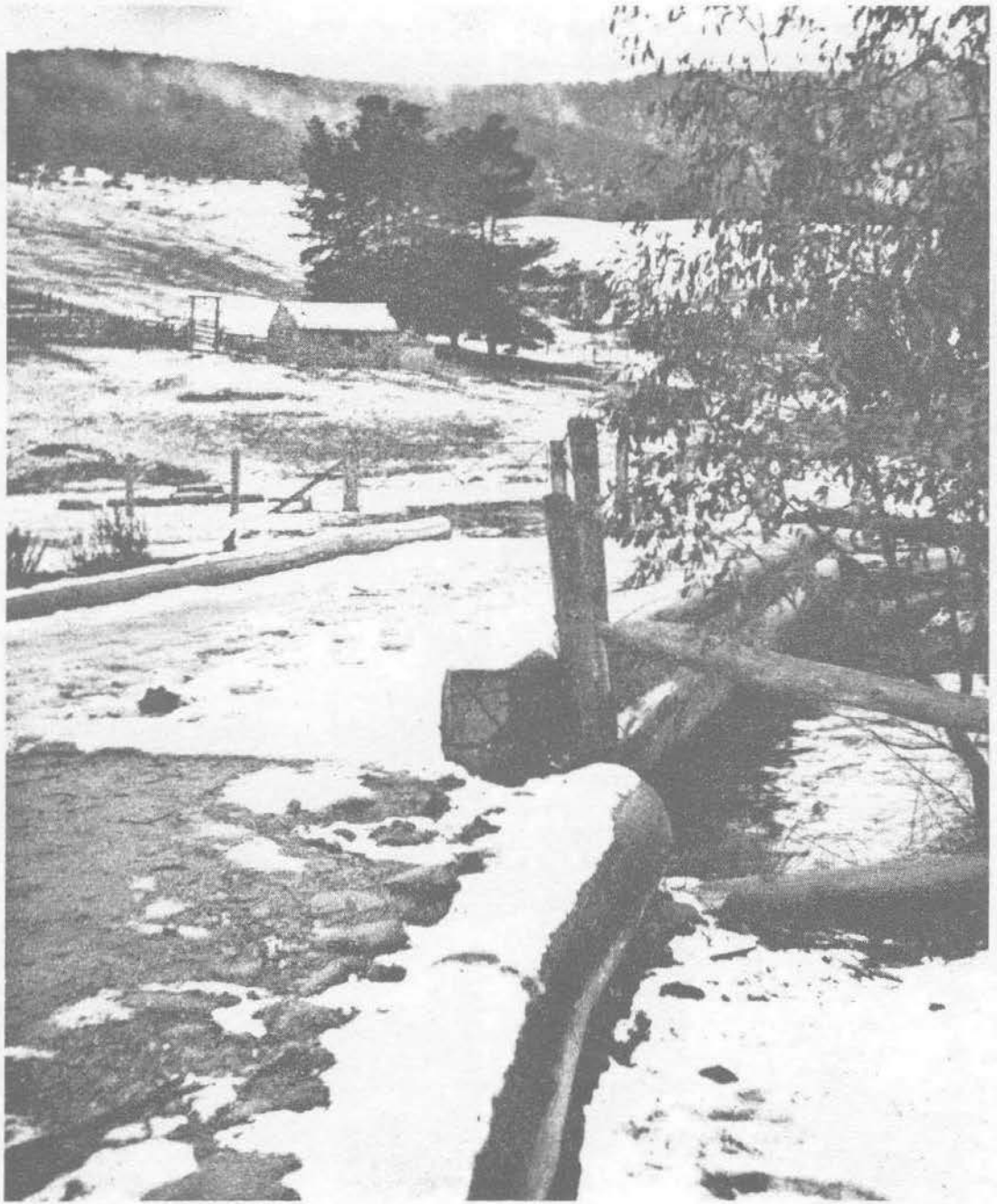
few years skiing became more popular and more and more people were heading for the snow. Nearly every week-end people would arrive seeking transport to the High Plains. I would not care to guess how many people came through “Shannon Vale” and my Father became a well known identity. The door was always open to skiers, stockmen and bush walkers and firm friendships were made.

In 1929-30 and 31 the Victorian Government Tourist Bureau started ‘Trail Rides’ of a week to 10 days duration, starting at Shannon Vale and finishing at Harrietteville. My Father was asked to supply the riding and pack horses for the venture. This was quite an order but with the help of the late Pat McNamara the horses and gear were rounded up. 29 riders took part in the first epic. There were staff as well, a supervisor and his assistant, official photographer, 1st and 2nd Chef and last but not least George Fitzgerald, Paddy MacNamara and Jack O’Connell, officially “Guides and horse. transport contractors”. Included in the party were a Major General and a Lieut. Colonel.



*George Fitzgerald, veteran High Plains cattleman of “Shannon Vale” at the doorway of his hut. Built in 1903, the shingles were replaced with an iron roof in 1929, and an exterior chimney was added.*





*Snow at "Shannon Vale"*

This venture was quite popular. The 2nd ride was bigger still with 38 riders and staff, 53 all told. Including pack horses 72 horses were used on the trip. For the 1931 trip I have no actual record but it was not as big as the previous trip. My Father and his 'staff' may not have made much on the deal, but a good time was had by all.

In 1932 the S.E.C. started collecting data for their Kiewa Hydro Electric scheme and so a cottage was built on the Bogong High Plains for the resident engineer. The material for the cottage was packed and snigged across the plains from Hotham. This task was undertaken by George Hobbs and Wally Ryder of Tawonga. Wally Ryder has the distinction of being the only man to snig a tin bath across the plains on a forked stick. The Cottage was finished before the winter and the engineer in residence. The next job was to find a way to get weekly supplies to him and a track was cut up Middle Creek for the purpose. My Father was approached and said he would do it for a price but the S.E.C. considered the price too high. Eventually my brother Tom undertook the packing with one trip a week winter and summer. The track up Middle Creek opened up a new approach to the High Plains for the skiers. A direct route to Cope Hut and so the services of 'Tom Fitz the packer' were in great demand. Tom kept this service going for 12 or so years. I did the packing for several years prior to the War. The last S.E.C. man in the Cottage was Martin Romuld. I joined the

Army and a little later Martin joined the Air Force. The late Stan Trimble took Romuld's place and my Father, well in to his 60s did the packing for the duration of the war.

I ended my Army service in March '45, met the late Bill Waters, Rover Scout Commissioner and he asked me about packing for the Rover Scouts. Tom and I had done quite a lot of packing for the Rovers when they built their Hostel in 1939. We had packed all the materials to the site from Shannon Vale, it took some time but we did the job. I started packing again for the S.E.C., the Rover Scouts and any one else that came along. The Ski Villages were yet to come and ski tours were some thing they had in Europe. With the advent of Falls Creek and Buller, skiers wanted more comfort and the mod. cons they were used to and it was much easier to drive to the ski resort than slog up the Middle Creek bush track. It dwindled down to only the Rover scouts and so in 1965 I hung up my pack saddles.

In May 1958 my Father passed away at the age of 91. Shannon Vale passed to me. We have now reached the 5th generation of Fitzgeralds and it remains to be seen whether they will inherit the High Country runs and the bush or the National Parks.

In summing up I would add, little would have been achieved in any of the projects had there not been a cattleman with his "know how", gear and the ability to improvise.

---

## THESIS ON GRAZING IN THE HIGH COUNTRY IS COMPLETE

Many of you will no doubt have met Peter Cabena on his travels around the Mountains collecting accurate material for his Thesis.

You will be pleased to know that he has completed his work and has obtained his

Master of Arts Degree at Melbourne University.

A copy of the thesis can be viewed at the University. Peter lives at 94 Lewisham Road, Prahran.

Congratulations Peter, from the  
M.D.C.A.V.

# Dahlsens

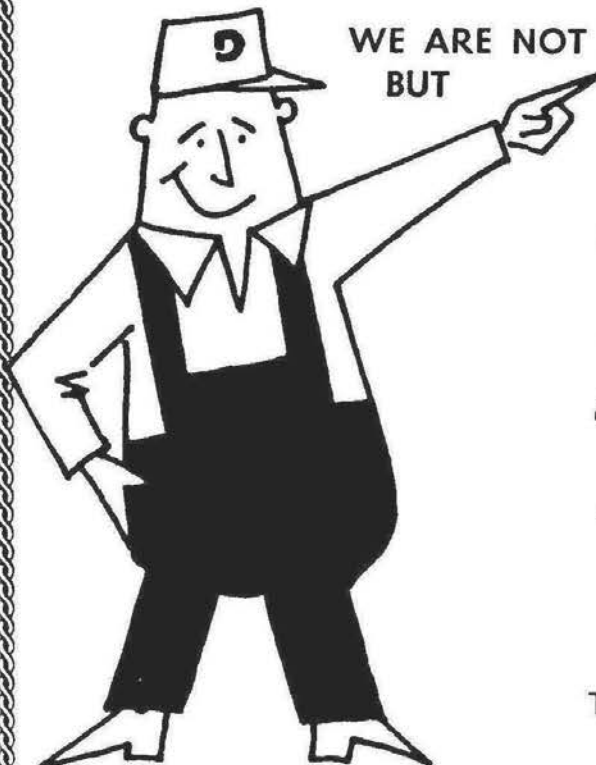
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## IN THE BEGINNING. . . .

What is the story behind the plough?

In the wildest spot in Gippsland, fifty miles from Benambra, eighty miles from Jindabyne, high in the mountains where the dotted line on the map divides Victoria from New South Wales there is a one hundred acre clearing known as Cowombat Flat.

In the centre of the clearing is a very ancient single furrow mouldboard plough, a relic of the past. Though pitted deep with rust through exposure to winter snows, summer fires and prevailing weather conditions for perhaps over a hundred years, the plough still remains intact, and still bears its maker's name — just legible — hand forged in Sydney.

A hundred yards away on the northern side of a little creek that runs through the clearing, there stands an old stone chimney built by the hands of someone who knew so well the art of stone masonry; built in a manner to stand the test of time for another hundred years at least.

Cowombat Flat, between the 6000 ft. high rock bound Cobberas Mountains to the south (Victoria) and Mt. Pilot (N.S.W.) is located on what was the oldest pioneering track from the Monaro to Gippsland.

Long before Angus McMillan or Strzelecki passed here to write in the pages of history their explorations and hardships, other people were using this route, even as early as 1834. They were the true pioneers of Gippsland.

It was these people who carved the track, long since overgrown by wilderness and lost to history. The pioneers came, and they have gone, leaving little in writing behind them for those who follow on.

East of the Cobberas is a long, rugged, rock-strewn spur, leading down from the mountains to the Pinch River, a branch of the Snowy. Here is evidence of the old track following the spur and descending some 4000 feet in about six miles.

This track, where thousands of head of stock were once driven, was the life-line of those early settlers who spread outwards across the mountain chains to carve a living from the land.

Around the sides of the Pilot and Cobberas they came, and often on the steep sidlings had to remove the wheel from the top side of the dray in order to keep it reasonably level as it half-rolled and half-skidded around the steep slopes.

Cowombat Flat would have been the centre and stopping place along the way, where weary horse and bullock teams would rest and feed; teamsters would meet and stories told.

Now, all is quiet on Cowombat.

Old furrow marks can still be seen across the flat where the plough turned the last sod, while long ago the last wisp of smoke trailed away from the old stone chimney.

*"If all could tell their stories,  
what strange things we would hear."*

But still, what fascinating country to walk through; to start from the beautiful Snowy River, follow a short distance up the Pinch River, pick up the old stock track leading up the main spur towards the Ingeegoodbee; perhaps pick out and re-blaze it to Cowombat and beyond, though bulldozed tracks laid in by the Forests Commission have covered over much of it.

Wild bush horses, of which there are hundreds throughout the area, have beaten their own tracks to watering and feeding places. These pads can be very misleading to inexperienced walkers, while the very rugged terrain of the Cobberas could quickly lead to disaster.

Where could be found a more peaceful and scenic spot than that of the Native Dog at the very head of the Buchan River? A beautiful little stream meandering between grassy flats some 4000 feet above sea level, almost under the shade of the towering Buchan Rock just south-west of the Cobberas. Peaceful it may seem until followed downstream along its southern course for a mile or more where suddenly it leaves the high country to plunge 1000 feet in a series of waterfalls into one of the roughest gorges in Gippsland.

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## THE UNDERGROUND ENEMY

In this present age when widespread interest is expressed in our natural environment, the major factor causing damage has been very much overlooked, in fact ignored, by many people.

No other single influence since European settlement has had anything like the ecological side effects as the rabbit population has had.

Unfortunately, while many people in the fields of research and writing must have been aware of this during this twentieth century, there seems to be little recording of it and we now have an adult generation and another on the way that must find it difficult to comprehend the enormous damage and consequent changes that occurred during the rabbits' peak population period for about fifty years up to 1950. In spite of their capacity to breed very rapidly, it took many years for rabbits to spread over this vast continent and, contrary to common belief that they originated from some introduced in 1860 in Western Victoria for sport, it seems likely that many early pioneers brought them with them to supplement rations.

An interesting diary entry of James Hunter of Watson and Hunter's stations in the Mansfield district written on June 10th, 1843, records that "Our rabbits are beginning to go into the garden and so we are going to take them all away up the river as soon as we can catch them, but that is not easy as the brutes have got burrows and hollow logs in every direction and are breeding very fast. If we do not get them away soon, they will destroy the garden."

This passage clearly indicates the shape of things to come, but there is no subsequent record of efforts to catch them.

It is reasonable supposition that those early days pioneers, after having overlanded their valuable livestock from the settled area of the Sydney district or shipped them from Tasmania, would have been reluctant to slaughter them for rations, so rabbits would

appear to be an economical food supplement. Probably rabbits were introduced to many places in this way, but how little their owners could foresee the future!

Gippsland was extremely difficult to get to from other places of Victoria as the journals of explorers and pioneers such as the Hunter brothers, P.C.Buckley and others indicate.

The first land holders of this region followed the tracks of Angus McMillan from the Monaro in N.S.W., down the sweet dry slopes into the Snowy River, out and across the sub-alpine open snowgum country to the Omeo Plains, then down the Tambo Valley and westward to the plains of Gippsland.

It is interesting to note from the recollections of now very elderly citizens that rabbits also eventually colonised Gippsland by extending westward from the southern tablelands of N.S.W. as no doubt they found it easier to do this and it was more quickly accomplished than crossing the Great Dividing Range.

An example of the effects of the increase in the rabbit numbers which supports the foregoing note is that of James Ah Yee who took up land at Ensay. When rabbits arrived and rapidly multiplied, he sold his selection and bought a farm by the Gippsland Lakes near Bairnsdale and erected a boundary fence of rabbit proof netting in defence against the plague that had not then arrived there.

Eventually, a vast area of the nation was devastated and the great majority of pioneering families were either financially ruined or, by sheer hard work and perseverance, managed to survive under the most frugal conditions.

It is true that subsequently many people made a living from trapping rabbits for their skins, but these people generally did not finance the land clearing to promote pastures upon which the pests lived.

Mr. A.J.Treasure wrote a very clear and detailed explanation of the situation when the rabbit population took effect and this was



published in the Bairnsdale Advertiser (9/6/80).

As time passes, it is evident that while the rabbits have been greatly reduced during the past thirty years, they are now becoming more resistant to the virus infection which caused the reduction.

Now it clearly emerges that two things should be given close attention.

One is that effort should continue to be made to minimise the loss and damage that has been steadily increasing. The potential is about us for further extensive damage, particularly in semi-developed pastoral land and the bushland environment.

The second matter is to correct the record for the benefit of an environment-conscious world and by doing so do much to absolve our energetic and enterprising forefathers from the blame that is so readily attached to them for environmental damage by alleged misuse.

Pioneer families in Victoria strove from the 1870s to improve and stock the land they had selected, then after years of endeavour and the near prospect of raised living standards, the rabbits moved in to compete with their sheep and cattle for the grass. Several generations of people came and went while this state of affairs continued and settlers had the alternative of abandoning their farms or struggling to produce livestock to meet their commitments in the face of overwhelming adversity.

Of course land was overstocked, but not by design of the settlers. Tremendous erosion followed in the well-recognised gully, sheet and tunnel forms and untold thousands of tons of rich alluvial soil collapsed and disappeared when flood waters rose and penetrated the river banks through rabbit burrows and denuded soil.

This pressure on the environment caused long lasting and permanent changes to it and some plant varieties and native animals virtually disappeared.

The position of rabbits as they relate to the past history of development should be put into true perspective by people who have the time and facilities to do it before much knowledge of the past fades into oblivion.

James A. Commins. 1980.

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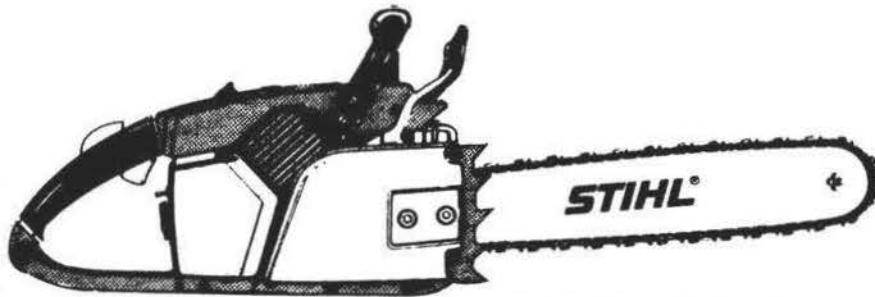
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## DARGO HIGH PLAINS PREPARE FOR WINTER

This is the 16th May, 1980. I am taking time off to write these lines before the snows of winter set in to cover this land with white and cold.

Outside a north wind is gathering strength, driving low clouds – snow clouds.

This is the Dargo High Plains, 4,770 feet above sea level. I was born here on 13th June, 1913. A foot of snow had blocked the way for miles around. I have lived and observed weather patterns for near 67 years. Its time to get out.

Before leaving for the lowlands later today, I must drain all taps and water pipes that would otherwise burst and split when winter temperatures drop far below freezing. See that any food stuffs are stowed from marauding mice that would nest and breed.

All paddocks have been thoroughly mustered and cleared of cattle, checked and re-checked. The stock have been moved to the low country to winter pasture; a practice that has been carried out by the mountain cattlemen for over 120 years. One cranky cow with a ten month old calf was found in the last check. She defied being driven out, “treed” the man and fought the dogs. The gates are left open for her. The falling snow shall be her drover.

Now, I must rely on simple phrases to convey my messages, for education here – of the more modern trend – was a thing apart. But necessity was my teacher in the field of survival. And in the academy of the soil and grass roots a philosophy and way of life based perhaps nearer to the fundamentals of ecology was my school. To those who would pander to the paper kings of Authority I would dip my humble sails and wish them “aurevoir” across their stormy seas of controversy.

The time will come when the human disease of our population – sprawling in unproductive urban waste – will increase beyond the supply of cake that feeds it. Like the mice that would ravage to the last grain of sustenance, leaving

their storehouse of food gutted and in stinking poverty. And like the cow that defies the hand that would guide her.

Everything takes place by change.

There is nothing static.

There are two types of conservation. On the one hand we have conservation in a changing world where productivity and aesthetic beauty are linked together: “Our aim is that the National Park shall afford to those who live in it a chance to make a living in it in a competitive world, and to those who visit it the solace of natural beauty”. (Kenneth Dobel).

And in particular this should be applied to areas of productivity in our high mountain ranges where high rainfall is over fertile soils. Here the potential for the harvesting of replaceable (?) commodities is a most important asset for the Nation’s wellbeing. Nothing adds more beauty to a wilderness area than to see highly productive hamlets dispersed throughout, husbanded and cared for by the dedicated hand of the farmer.

On the other hand there are those who are led by an extremist minority who believe that huge areas of our mountain bushlands should be locked away in unproductive, Bureaucratic controlled, National Parks.

Sufficient to point out here the great “National Disaster” of the Kosciusko dilemma where 100,000 head of cattle have been phased out and replaced with a dead and decaying wilderness ungrazed and unproductive, ever becoming more infested with noxious weeds and vermin, and awaiting holocaust disaster:

“ . . . all her husbandry doth lie in heaps,  
. . . all uncorrected, rank,

Conceives by idleness, and nothings teems  
But hateful docks, rough thistles, keckies,  
burs,

Loosing both beauty and utility . . . ”

Shakespeare.

There is always a percentage who fail in



specialized education. Perhaps to their parents or to those who financed their opportunities for learning there has been disappointment. To offset this — along with a developed instinct of “a great Australian Grudge”, there is a relatively easy way out: A “Scapegoat is found: Some botany, ecology and conservation is studied, Then along with other sympathetic “dropouts” arises the imagined need of an extreme type of applied conservation.

This type of conservation appeals to “the bleeding hearts”. It is mainly based on butterflies, lizzards, frogs, lovely little googly eyed mice and cuddly marsupials.

Proof of the power of this trend is found in the recommendations of the Land Conservation Council where so much priority has been placed on such things while little has been mentioned on the combination of productivity conservation and good husbandry of dedicated farming enterprise.

There is political mileage for city politicians who support these people of extremist views. They must have their votes regardless.

#### “The Arising Tide of Bureaucracy and the Revolt Against Civilization.”

A scorched earth policy, like a malignant disease, is spreading over highly productive Crown Lands from Queensland to the mountain bushlands of south eastern Victoria.

True conservation, productivity and good husbandry of our land is being ousted by a false concept of management. It is a regimented, metallic, un-natural bureacracy that knows no bosses and shuns the toil that would soil the gloved hand. They drive with authority in vehicles subsidised by government funds. Their only incentive is to preserve their jobs and rise higher in eminence. They want our land.

That land would become like a neglected country cemetery, fenced off from the beautiful surrounding, park-like, grazed lands where re-cycling fertilizer of “The Sacred Cow” gives new life to an otherwise impoverished soil.

The high mountains of Australia should be grazed. They should be grazed in the same manner as they are grazed in Europe even to far higher altitudes where such grazing is highly subsidised.

Grazing of cattle and sheep in our high mountains does not cause soil erosion. Indeed the effect is opposite. It stimulates growth and regrowth and promotes a luxuriant growth of wild flowers.

People must be made aware of the importance and need for grazing in our high country, and the great benefits in subsidising enterprising people to open up unproductive hamlets dispersed throughout the ranges where high rainfall falls on fertile soils. Not to lock it up in unproductive wastelands.

The bureaucrats must be phased out.

They are neither useful nor needed.

Notes:

In the centre of the high mountain National Park of Kosciusko a large section (say 5,000 acres) should be fenced in where grazing should again be introduced as a comparison and study against the surrounding un-grazed areas.

Fire:

High mountain villages should be fenced in and stocked with sheep to check the accumulation of dead and decaying grass. Such villages are extremely vulnerable to holocaust fire.

High mountain, rolling plain country should be chisel ploughed on the contour and high mountain grasses of European origin should be introduced, fertilized and grazed to check run-off and promote infiltration for water storage; and not to harbour long, dead and decaying, matted grass where summer showers and mountain mist are absorbed near the surface only to evaporate again in hot summer sun.

Tourism is over rated and leads to national waste.

The snow is about to fall and I must go.

S. Jack Treasure.

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*The first Tawonga Hut was built in 1888, but had an extremely short life. Hut No. 2 (illustrated) was built in 1888. Construction was vertical snowgum logs for walls and chimney with paling gables and roof. The hut served Tawonga cattlemen until 1923 (a life of 35 years) when it was replaced by Tawonga Hut No. 3*

## BOGONG HUTS

The hut illustrations on the following pages are from Harry Stephenson's collection and are reproduced from his book "CATTLEMEN AND HUTS OF THE HIGH PLAINS".

**C**ATTLEMEN have grazed their stock on the Bogong High Plains since the mid-1850s, following the discovery of the extensive lush summer pastures by Gray's stockmen, Jim Brown and Jack Wells, in 1851. Their first access route was from Cobungra via the Bucketty Plain and along the spur which joins the High Plains at Mt Cope (originally Mt Jack, after Jack Wells).

In the years 1852-53, Brown and Wells observed from Mt Nelse the Fainter Spur which led down from Mt Fainter to Tawonga, and they also discovered the route from Harrierville (then Growler's Creek) around Mt Hotham (then Baldy) and along the Cobungra Top between the Cobungra and Victoria Rivers to Cobungra Station.

Their discoveries opened up the Bogongs to the cattlemen of Tawonga, Bright (Morse's Creek), Harrierville and Omeo, and by the 1860s the High Plains were being grazed legally or illegally, by most of the families in the Kiewa Valley as well as others from the Omeo side. Ensay (Numla Munjie) Station through Malcolm McKenzie (1875-78) and Henry Campbell (1878-83) held the lease for the entire Bogong Plains (90,000 acres) which had originally been held (1866-68) but never used by speculators Pierce, Jones and Williams.

In 1887 the Lands Department divided the area into 20 grazing blocks varying in size from 640 acres to 8,800 acres and amongst the original leaseholders were the prominent names of Thomas McNamara, William Hollonds, Marcus Hobbs, T.M.Hamilton (for Ensay), William Wallace, Osborne Young and Patrick Duane. In addition, the Lands Department suggests that the following also grazed their cattle without the formality of a license – P.J.Kelly, F. Roper, J. Higginson, George Maddison and Peter Howman. Before the turn of the century, these cattlemen were joined by Arthur Dibbins, John Ryder, the Lawlers and soon after, the Fitzgeralds.

In their earlier years of occupancy, the cattlemen camped out on their visits to the High Plains and it was not until 1888 that there is evidence that the first hut was built. This was the Tawonga No 1, built by a co-operative of Tawonga cattlemen. It was situated at the head of Tawonga Creek, a tributary of the East Kiewa River, at a height of 5,380 feet and was 18 miles from Tawonga.

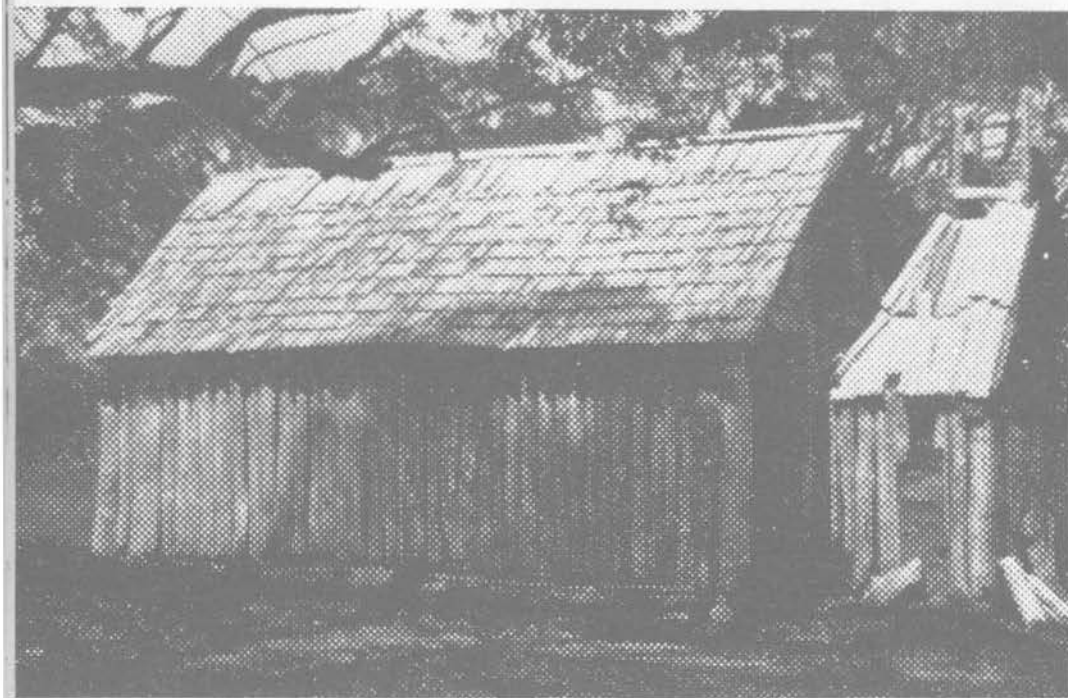
Wallaces' Hut, one mile north of Mt Cope was built in 1889, and then followed Osborne Young's on the southern edge of the Plains, Kelly's at the eastern end and nearby Fitzgerald's Hut, which was built in 1903. Regrettably none of these early huts has survived in its original form and the accompanying photographs may give some indication of their structure and appearance.



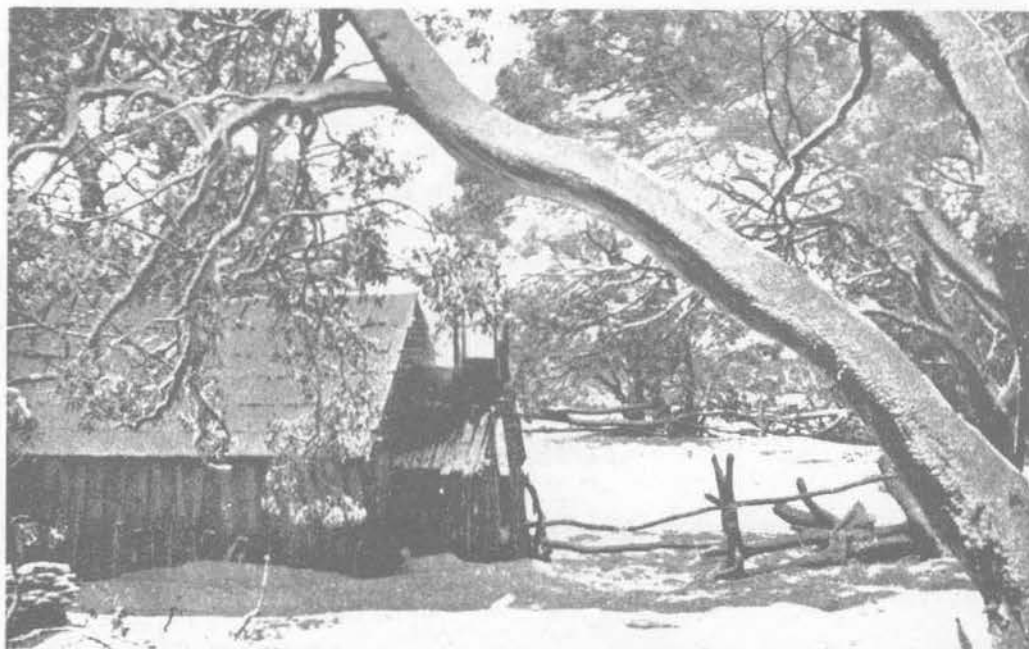
*Tawonga Hut No. 3, built in 1923 was constructed of horizontal palings on a log frame, with an iron roof. It measured 14 ft 6 in x 16 ft 6 in and had a shelf bunk to accommodate up to 8 people.*



*Wallaces' Hut was built in 1889 by Arthur, William and Stewart Wallace. Constructed of vertical split snow-gum logs with a roof of woolly-butt shingles which were cut and packed in from a quarter mile distant gully on the head of the Big River. The steep roof was designed to shed snow (which it did not!). The hut survived in its original form until about the mid 1930s when it was modified and sheathed in iron. In its reconstructed form, it was then classified by the National Trust!*



*Kelly's Hut replaced an earlier one built in 1891 by Kyran Marum and Jack Platt. At the head of Wild Horse Creek, at a height of 5300 feet the construction was split vertical snowgum logs with shingle roof. The Kellys have now been grazing the High Plains for 90 years, from the Omeo side.*





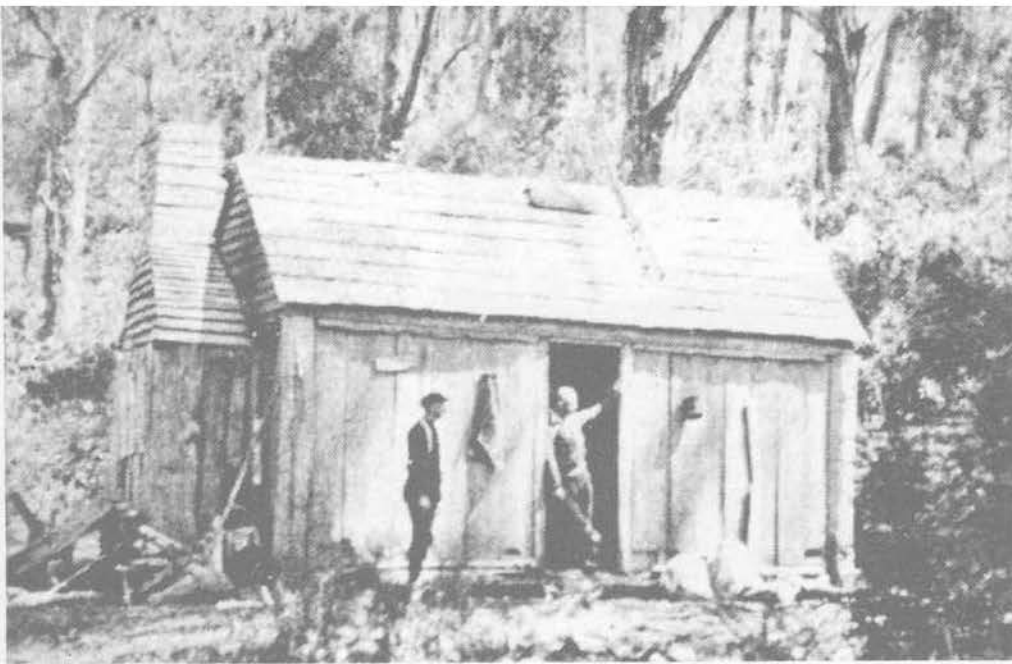
The Lawlers grazed the High Plains from Freeburgh, their access being along Dungey's Track which followed the West Kiewa River to its head. They had three huts, the one illustrated being 19 miles from Bright on the West Kiewa. Of horizontal log construction, with an iron skillion roof, it measured 18 ft x 12 ft and had two bunks to accommodate 5 people. It had the luxury of a window!

George Maddison sub-leased the Mt Bogong (Camp Valley) run from Ensay Station in 1883 and shared it with Peter Howman from the Mitta Mitta. Maddison's access was from Mountain Creek and up the Staircase Spur. The hut of snowgum logs laid horizontally skillion iron roof and internal fireplace was no palace, but as well as cattlemen, pioneer ski-tourers accepted its shelter gratefully. At 5,800 feet, it was the highest cattlemen's hut in Victoria.



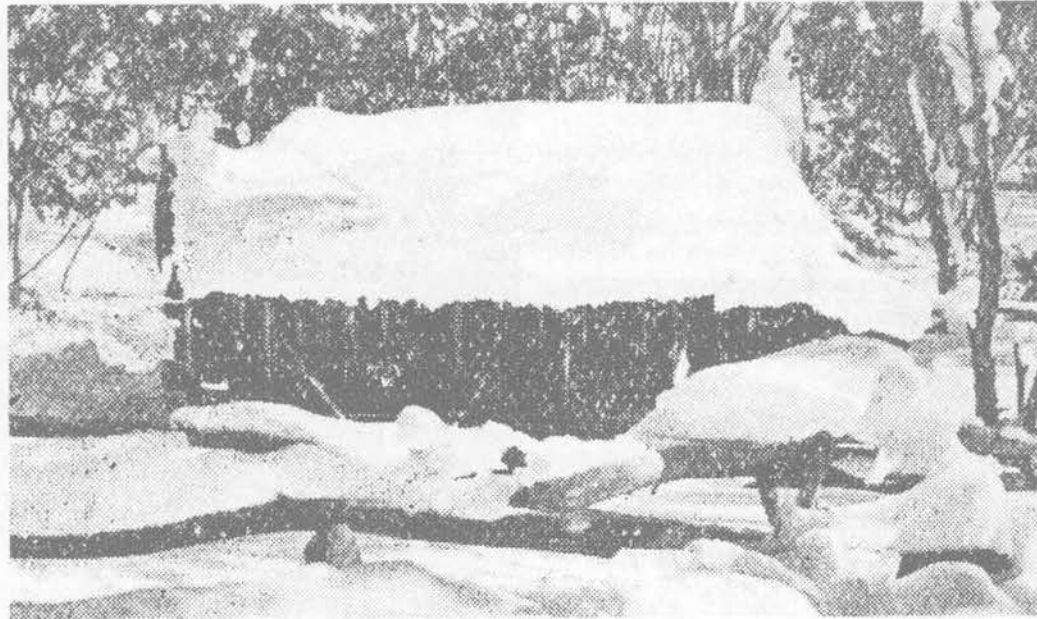
Illustrated is one of several huts that the Howmans of Granite Flat built between their home property and their High Plain runs. Their license extended from a sub-lease in 1883 to 1924. The hut at left was of conventional horizontal log construction with corrugated iron gables and roof.





*Ropers' Hut on Falls Creek in 1936. It was burnt in the 1939 fires and was replaced by a new hut at the head of Duane Spur, the site of an earlier Duane Hut. The Falls Creek construction was of vertical split woolly-butt sides, paling gables and woolly-butt shingle roof. It was on the 'Roper Track' which was surveyed for Ropers by John Crossthwaite of Dederang.*

*The Blairs have now run cattle on the Plains for 80 years. Frank sub-leased from Hollonds in 1900 and the family have continued the tradition. Blairs Hut is 22 miles from Freeburg along the famous Dungey's Track on the West Kiewa River. The first Blair's Hut was built by Tom and Frank in 1922 and was destroyed by fire in 1931. It served as a base in 1925 for the first skiing party to visit the Bogong High Plains.*

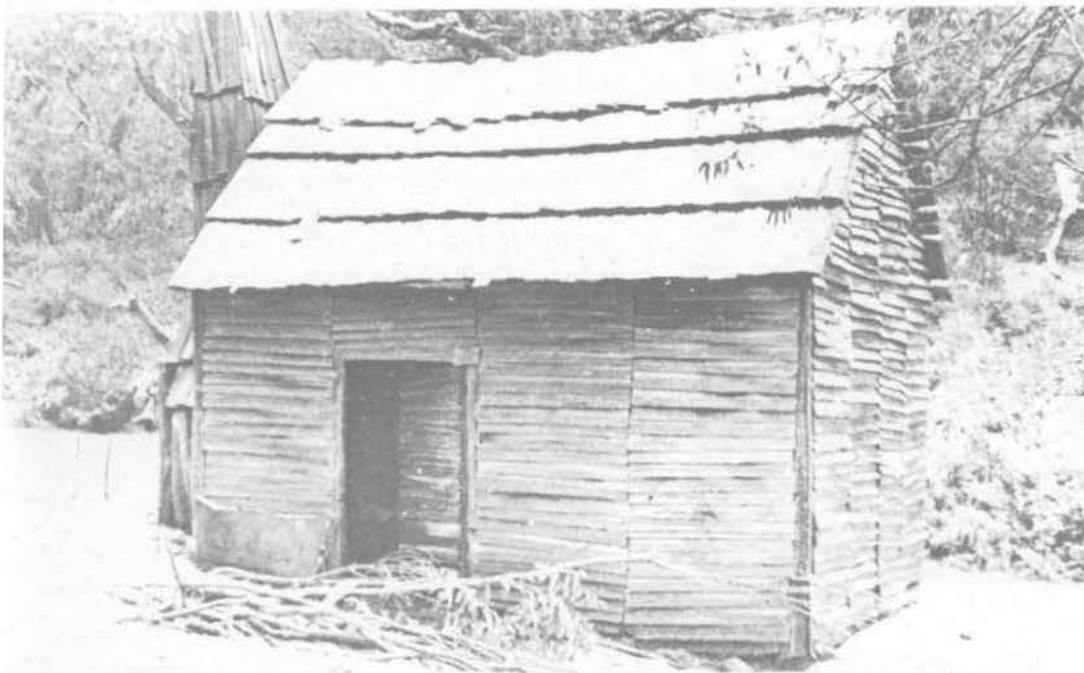


*Blair's second hut, built in 1931 to replace No. 1 was of part horizontal log and part vertical bark construction with a bark roof, anchored by two substantial logs. There was no exterior chimney, but it featured an interior fireplace.*

One of the best known huts on the Plains, *Dibbin's Hut* was of horizontal log construction with bark roof. A low door opening earned it the title of "Creep Inn". Situated at the head of the Cobungra River, it is passed by all who travel from Mt Hotham to the High Plains. Like Blair's, it has an internal fireplace and no chimney. An earlier hut occupied a site close by. It is now showing signs of old age!



Tradition has it that the cattle duffer 'Bogong Jack' used a hut on this site - some 12 miles from Tawonga on the Fainter Spur - when engaged in his nefarious activities in the late 1850s and early 1860s. If so, it would have preceded Tawonga and Wallaces' Huts by some 30 years! Syd Ryder, who assisted in building the Bogong Jack's Hut (illustrated) in 1920, declares that no other hut previously occupied the site! The Hut no longer exists. It collapsed in ruins in 1962. But the mystery of Bogong Jack lives on.

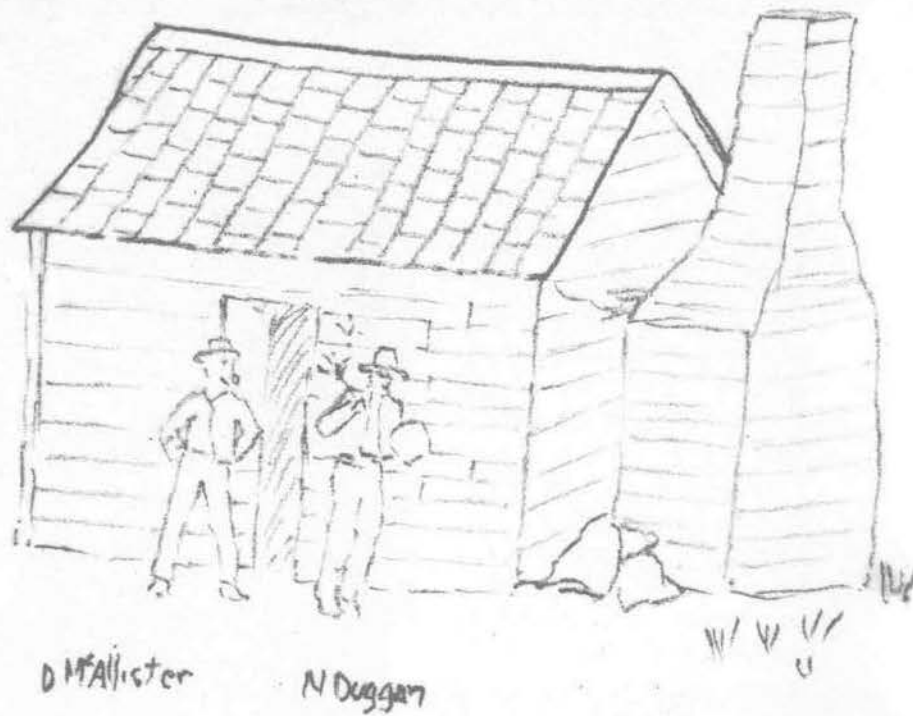


⑦  
*Weston's Hut* was located on the western end of the Bogong High Plains about 2 miles from Blair's Hut. It sported the luxury of a verandah and was constructed of palings. The roof was later clad with corrugated iron.



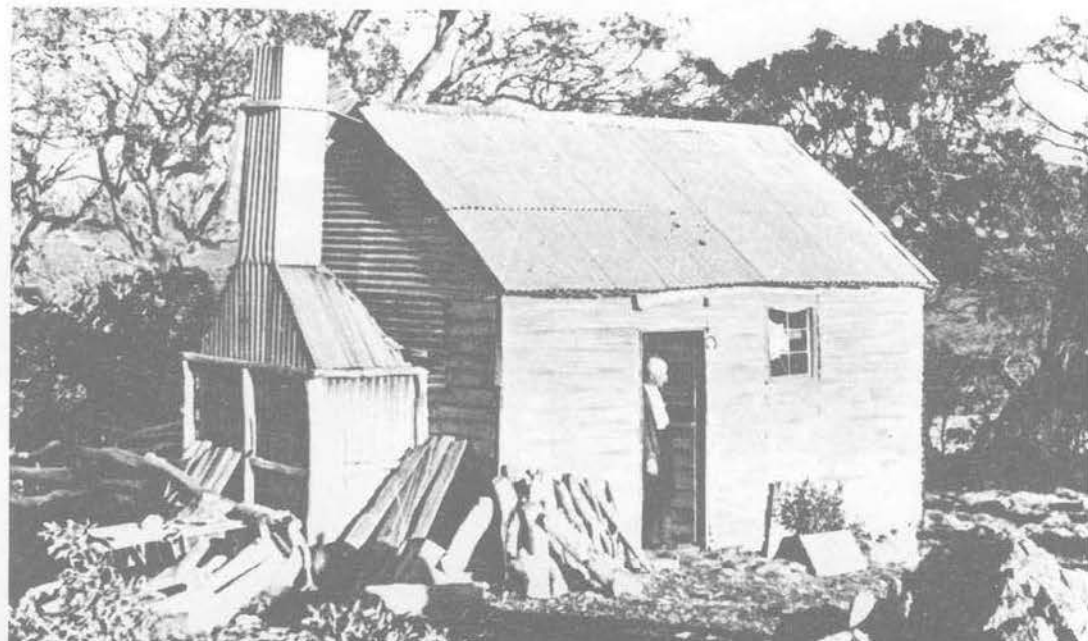


*A sketch entitled 'Bogong Hut 1895' from the Ensay Station archives, was drawn by T. McK Hamilton. The Ensay Run, at that time was in the Pretty Valley area, but the origin and location of the hut is unknown*



*Fitzgeralds' Hut, built in 1903 is located close to Kelly's Hut on the eastern fringe of the High Plains. The photo at left shows the Hut in 1928, with a shingle roof and paling sides. A year later, a similar photo showed that the roof had been replaced with iron - so the shingles had a life of 25 years.*

*Fitzgeralds' Hut by 1937 is shown here with a reconstructed chimney, a form it has retained to the present day. The figure in the doorway is George Silas Fitzgerald, a veteran cattleman of 70 annual musters on the High Plains, and father of Brendan Fitzgerald, host to the 1981 Mountain Cattlemen's Get Together at "Shannonvale".*

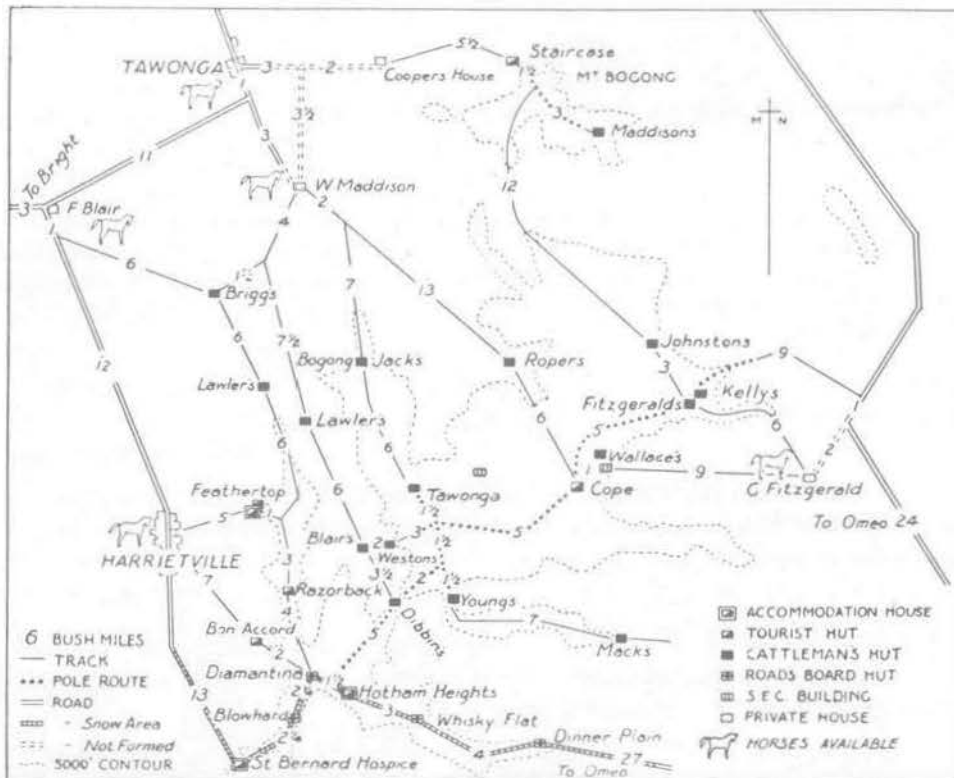




Interior of McNamara's Hut

The McNamaras have an unbroken link of 130 years grazing on the Bogong High Plains far surpassing any other cattle family. George Gray, with his stockmen, first brought cattle to Cobungra in 1851. Michael Francis McNamara, born in Melbourne in 1839 selected land at Cobungra and married Neddy Gray's daughter Hannah. He was joined by his brother Tom and together they grazed their cattle on Bucketty Plain and Dinner Plain to the head of the Cobungra. Michael's sons followed and today, Charlie, grandson of Michael and Hannah and great-grandson of George Gray, runs the same area, with huts at Osborne Young's old hut-site, on Bucketty Plain and on Dinner Plain. The McNamara link with mountain grazing, is surpassed by only one other family - the Pendergasts of Omeo.

The diagram below was prepared by Cleve Cole, in the early 1930s, and shows the location of the huts on the Bogongs at that time. Only a couple now remain in their original form.



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Ray Whitford

# THE HUNTERS' JOURNEYS INTO GIPPSLAND

In 1840, as Angus McMillan was pioneering a stock route into Gippsland from the drought-stricken Monaro region of New South Wales, Alick McLean Hunter, Edward Bell and Watson arrived at the Broken River from Tumut with stock. Parties led by Alick Hunter were soon to discover an alternate route into Gippsland, which although never used, left the legacy of the name "Hunter's Country" on what we now call Licola.

Hearing of the new pastures just over the ranges in Gippsland, Alick Hunter, then in his early 20s, became determined to find a route whereby he could take in his stock to take up new runs. In May 1841 he left Devil's River with a party of Archibald Jamieson, Andrew Ewing, Edward Bell and an aboriginal called Pigeon. Despite an accident to Bell's horse which forced him and Pigeon to wait near Mount Skene, the party reached the area around Glenmaggie, which they from then on claimed to have named. They did not go far enough to reach settlement, returning to the Devil's River to collect stock for a return journey into Gippsland. They were frustrated however, by bad weather, and unable to make the trip.

In October 1843 Crown Lands Commissioner Charles Tyers visited the run in an attempt to enter Gippsland via the same route so as to take up his duties in Gippsland. On 26th October James Hunter noted shortly "the Government mob are on their way into Gippsland". He was more detailed on the 5th November - "Met Mr Tyers looking very miserable. He and his people have had nothing to eat for 4 days except one scone each, two of their horses have died, another one was lost, and all the rest were knocked up and left in the ranges. Some of the men were so much done that they wanted to be left to die where they were. Their boots were all cut to pieces by the sharp stones and rocks." Tyers official explanation placed all the blame on the horses "arising from their want of rest after previous hard work." He returned to Melbourne and finally reached Port Albert by sea, leaving behind a rumour

that the route into Gippsland did not exist. This incensed Alick Hunter and his party, who then became determined to retrace their steps.

On 28th October 1844, Alick, James and Campbell Hunter and Jourdan set out on the route.

The party had no packhorses, each man carried flour, sugar, tea and sun-dried meat rolled in a blanket on his saddle. By 1st November they had reached Mount Sunday, and camped that night at the Plum Pudding Rocks near Mt Skene. Alick Hunter amused himself that night over the campfire by frightening Jourdan, "a very timid fellow", hoaxing him into believing that the nearby aboriginals, "a very fierce wild set", were all around the camp. They camped the next night on the junction of the two Barkleys, crossing Grimme's Hill next morning and reaching Glencairn Creek. Here they saw aboriginal camps about every half a mile. Also if now appears this would have been the party which carved initials including "A Mc" for Alick McLean Hunter on a tree at Glencairn. This tree has for many years been attributed to Angus McMillan, despite a lack of any other evidence that he was ever in that area. They continued on down the Glencairn Creek to the Barkley, and from there to the Macalister, which they followed to Glenmaggie which they reached on the 5th November. Here Alick wrote "we were congratulating ourselves on finding a beautiful run when we came upon the tracks of some infernal sheep!" Glenmaggie was by then an outlying part of McFarlane's Heyfield run. Many years later one of the Buntines, a child at the time recalled their arrival - "there was great excitement at the outstation as we all thought they were bushrangers, they carried pistols and rifles and were armed to the teeth. They were all rough and unshaven with their clothes in rags from fighting through the scrub on the mountains." This time the Hunters had proven there was a route through, even though it never became a practical stock route into Gippsland.

Linda Barraclough.

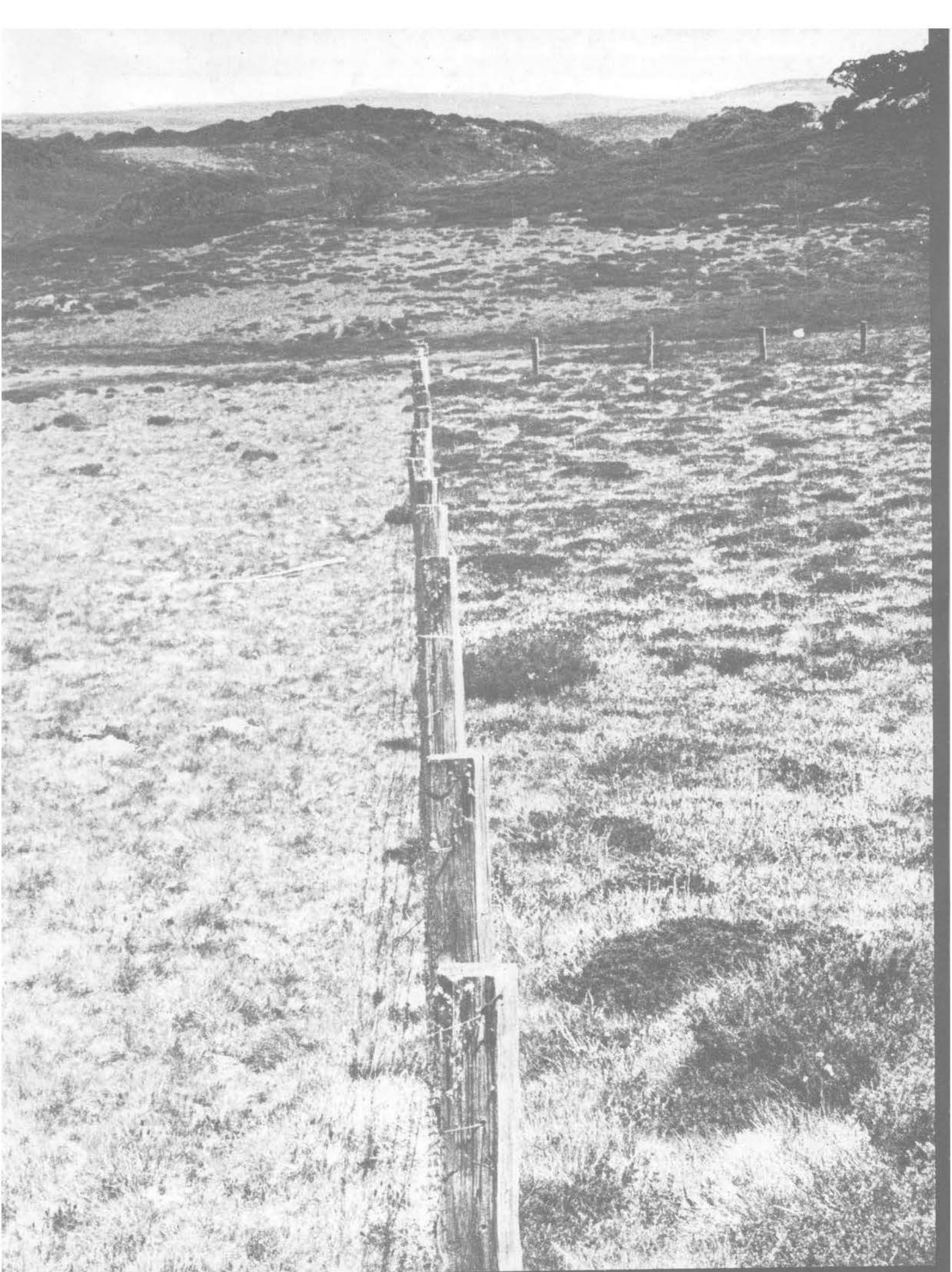




### TRIAL PLOTS ON BOGONG

(Opposite) Trial plot on the Bogong High Plains (near the Cope Hut turn-off) which was established over twenty years ago, but the fence has been maintained as stock-proof for only about the past five or six years.

With the absence of grazing and no protective burning programme, it shows every indication of becoming the fire and erosion risk that the hilltops in the middle distance of the photograph are.





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**UP AND OVER — 1900 STYLE**

*The Misses Hamilton of Ensay Station, taken about 1900.  
Interesting snapshots of a riding style of the past.*



*“ . . . course there’s bloody dingoes  
in the mountains!”*

Charlie McNamara

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of Gippsland**



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No one can say they are frightened to say what they think and the family is respected for its forthright approach to issues that worry us all.

*(Above) Jack Treasure shows his form of some years ago, at Harrietville.*

*(Left) Past Secretary of the Victorian Mountaineers' Association, Christie Mitchell (nee Treasure) with her father, Jim Treasure, mustering their run on the Dargo High Plains.*

---

## Victorian Mountain District Cattlemen's Association ANNUAL GET-TOGETHER

This year's gathering will be held at "Shannon Vale", Brendon Fitzgerald's property some 30 miles north of Omeo on Saturday, 14th and Sunday, 15th of February.

The turn off into the property is about one mile past the Bogong High Plains road. Good camping facilities, with ample running water are available.

A barbecue meal will be provided on Saturday evening, but visitors should provide for all other food requirements. A booth will be operating to cater for all liquid refreshments.

**Caution:** No petrol is available within 30 miles of the site so carry supplies for the return trip.

### Time Table

#### Saturday 14:

2 p.m. Assemble at "Shannon Vale".

6 p.m. Barbecue Dinner.

8 p.m. Camp Fire Gathering with speakers and entertainment.

#### Sunday 15

A conducted tour of the Bogong High Plains in the Mt Nelse area will be arranged for those desirous of participating.



## BENAMBRA

# 31st Annual Special Cattle Sale

Monday, 16th March, 1981

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# **Peneplain Herefords**

## 13th Annual Sale

Tuesday, 5th May, 1981

On account R.E. & The E.L. Hug Estates,

Offering:- 25 Stud Bulls 2yrs.

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HEYFIELD, Victoria, 3858.  
Visitors Always Welcome.



*At Tom Groggin Hut (Upper Murray) 1905  
on the way to Mt. Kosciusko.*

## THE GROGGIN RIVER RIDERS

*The Groggin River riders on the mountains make for home,  
They travel through the bushland, where the brumbies love to roam.  
They run them in and brand them, break them in as well.  
The Groggin River riders, as horsemen, they are swell.*

*They take their cattle up to Davies' before the summer time,  
And graze them on the pastures above the cold snow line.  
They bring them back in autumn to the grassy river flats  
And truck them to Wodonga, when they are sleek and fat.*

*For the Groggin River riders, they are horsemen through and through.  
They've pioneered the mountains for the hikers too.  
They've opened up new pastures upon the mountain high.  
The Groggin River riders, the breed we hope will never die.*

*Yes, these mighty horsemen have opened many tracks.  
With their faithful cattle dogs and their sturdy mountain hacks.  
And now they've made the mountains just what they are today,  
The conservationista want to keep them all away.*

*Oh, the Groggin River riders, may they ride for years to come,  
Along the mountain ranges where the brumbies love to roam.  
One can sit and listen to the stories that they tell,  
For the Groggin River riders are our heritage as well.*

*Alan Brewer,  
Wodonga.*



## NEW BOOKS ON CATTLE COUNTRY

*Two books have been released recently dealing with the colourful history of the Victorian Mountain Cattlemen and the huts they built and used to operate their cattle runs in the Alps. Both books are a 'must' for people connected with or interested in the Alpine area.*

### CATTELMEN OF THE HIGH COUNTRY

The story of the mountain cattlemen of the Bogongs, 224 pages with 34 colour and more than 50 black and white photographs.

The book you first heard about in 1975 is complete. In October 1975, Tor Holth went to Omeo with Jane Barnaby and Tony Hewett to start the fieldwork of recording the cattlemen's huts of the Bogongs. During the spring and summer the trio visited, measured and photographed each hut. Tor rode one of his thoroughbreds and packed another and Jane and Tony rode stockhorses lent by Percy Huggins from Swifts Creek and Jo Turner from Omeo. During those months they also explored the domain of the mountain cattlemen so that they would have a greater understanding of the cattlemen's lifestyle.

Gradually Tor and Jane began to talk to the cattlemen who knew the Bogongs and record their conversations on cassettes. By the end of 1976 they had tracked down and talked with more than 200 locals and elderly cattlemen, some retired all over the northeast and as far as Melbourne. In the process they transcribed the tapes verbatim, compiling about 15 thick foolscap textbooks of information from about 400 hours of cassettes.

Tor and Jane divided the book into five parts — cattlemen who went to Mt Bogong, cattlemen from the Ovens valley, from the Kiewa valley and from Omeo. The fifth section was about the 1939 fire. Working from the transcriptions, Tor and Jane let the cattlemen tell their own story, merely providing links where necessary.

Each section includes background on the area and the history of each family. There are also yarns from Mick Walsh of Wodonga, poems from Don Kneebone of Milawa, dog stories from the late Sam Hodgkin of

Gundowring, buckriding yarns from Artie Dibbin of Freeburgh, remount memories from Bella Young of Bairnsdale, packing stories from Brenny Fitzgerald of Omeo, to mention just samples of the contents, plus an appendix on the origin and change of names in the area.

Tor and Jane went back to the cattlemen to read them the finished text on their area. Several of their contacts have since died but Tor and Jane are glad that at least these men heard the text. In the meantime Tor and Jane mustered with the Blairs, Charlie McNamara and the Kellys and took up cattle with the Faithfulls and Wally Ryder. Photographs in the book include a full colour print of Charlie McNamara mustering and Wally Ryder salting his stock. The jacket of the book features Richard Faithfull and the late Maurie Faithfull in colour moving cattle up to the High Plains.

The publisher has suffered unavoidable delays but the book is now available in the same form as many cattlemen had read to them some three years ago.

Further information can be obtained from Tor Holth, Upper Beaconsfield. 3808.

### CATTELMEN AND HUTS OF THE HIGH PLAINS

*by Harry Stephenson*

In his introduction to this book, the author expresses the desire to record in picture and story, the mountain huts of the Victorian alpine region and to acknowledge the pioneer cattle families, whose herds grazed the many tens of thousands of acres of snow-plains and grassy forested slopes below the snow-line.

The basis was derived from the diaries and photographs from albums preserved by the author and his companions during their bush-

walking days which extended from the late 1920s to beyond the 1940s.

Almost every cattlemen's hut known to bushwalkers is illustrated, generally in its original form – log or slab sides, with shingle or bark roofs, and these alone form a valuable historical collection.

The families, whose names are almost legendary are documented – O'Rourke's of Black Mountain, Pendergasts of Omeo, Fitzgeralds of 'Shannon Vale', Treasures of Dargo, Guys of Crooked River, Riggalls of Glenfalloch and Cobungra, Bryces and Smiths of Wonnangatta, Lovicks, Hearn and Klingsporns of Merrijig, Keppels of Lake Mountain, Millers of Wellington, and the identities who pioneered the Bogong High Plains – McNamaras, Youngs, Kellys, Ropers, Ryders, Maddisons, Dibbins, Hollonds, Howmans, Lawlers – and the list goes on.

Along the way, the author met the Frys, the Bennies, and all whose presence added to the mountain scene.

"The Man from Snowy River", Bogong Jack, the droving feats of 'Bung' Harris, Harry Smith of Eaglevale and the Wonnangatta Murders. All are included, along with the tragedies that claimed the lives of Laurie

Seaman and Hayes on Kosciusko, Georgine Gadsden and her two companions, and Cleve Cole on Mt Bogong.

A chapter is devoted to the pioneering of the Omeo Plains by those stalwarts who ventured forth from the Monaro in the 1830s, ahead of the explorers.

Another chapter records the discovery of the Bogong High Plains by George Gray and his stockmen, again, ahead of exploring parties!

The illustrations, 334 in number, have been gathered from all available sources, including the treasured family albums held by the descendants of the pioneer settlers.

The book, a hard-bound edition of 372 pages, size 10 x 7½, has been produced in Australia by the author's own firm. Released to book shops on 31st December, after a successful pre-publication offer to bushwalkers and cattle men, the entire edition sold out within ten days.

A second edition is now available.

This is a unique volume, recapturing and recording the history of an era whose history is fast becoming lost. To the bush-walker, the bush lover and the historian, it will become a collector's item.

## PIONEERS OF THE OMEO DISTRICT

Reviewed by Harry Stephenson

This splendid little book, written by Jane Vince Pendergast and published in 1968, is not as well known, outside the Omeo district as it deserves to be.

The author deals with the coming of the white man to the Omeo district and details some of the early runs. Chapters are, very appropriately devoted to the Pendergasts and mention is made of early landholders – Macfarlane, De Graves, Hyland, Buckley and Edmund Crooke.

A section reminds us of the Food Problems and Transport of the early days, and the Pioneering Women are given due recognition.

We are told of the discovery of gold in 1852 and the effect that Mining had on the predominantly cattle and horse breeding holdings.

The selectors began to arrive in 1871 and they

had the effect of reducing many of the large holdings.

Churches, schools, building and commercial activities followed in the wake of the early settlers, and the book closes with a chapter "Reminiscences" which leaves the reader wishing that Jane Vince Pendergast had doubled the size of her very readable and worth while story of an area, of which, she says – "my greatest regret is that so much information has passed into oblivion with the going of the early pioneers."

But, the readers' thanks will go to Jane Vince Pendergast, for recording as much as she did, and encompassing it within the pages of her very valuable little volume.

For copies, contact Mr Vince Pendergast, Omeo

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## **1981 MOUNTAIN CATTLE SALES**

ANNUAL CALF SALES:

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**OMEO, 11th MARCH**

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# THE SEARCH FOR SPAGNUM MOSS

*High up in the mountains  
By quiet little streams  
That take the blue of summer skies,  
And alpine daisies gleam,  
Flanked by melaleucas  
With lichen fairy floss  
And guarded by the bastard bush  
Grow beds of spagnum moss.*

*I am from the city.  
I had heard of spagnum moss,  
I had seen it lining basketry  
In horticultural shops.  
I had heard the mountain hikers  
Saying cattle kill the moss  
So I asked a friendly cattleman  
To guide me to some moss.*

*"You want to see the moss beds?"  
He drew a little map,  
To show me how to find the moss  
And not get off the track.  
"Keep your wits about you,  
Take care you don't get lost  
And follow these directions to  
The beds of spagnum moss."*

*"You'll find they're multiplying,  
North, South, East and West;  
But go and see them for yourself,  
Experience is best.  
Off you go now – quickly  
Find a fence of chock and log,  
And don't you leave that fence until  
You find the spagnum bog."*

*Following that map, I  
Soon found some likely leads,  
But found that all that grew out there  
Was wallabies and Trees. And  
Cattle fat and lazy watched.  
I said, "My God, I'm lost!  
I'm going round in circles and  
I'll never find the moss!"*

*I tried a new direction.  
I walked on little plains.  
I walked through clumps of snow gums  
Then walked through creeks (again)  
I found a flock of emus.  
I climbed through fallen logs  
And I walked and walked for hours and hours  
But couldn't find the bog.*

*I re-perused the map then  
And found – oh hell that I  
Had wrongly read that map of his  
And that was really why  
I'd started off quite wrongly  
And hadn't found the spot  
Where Jack had written on the map  
"Moss. This is the spot."*

*The sky was getting dark when  
That fence of chock and log,  
That Jack had said would lead me to  
That bloody spagnum bog,  
Loomed up big before me, and  
Said "This time you're not lost,  
You found the track and soon you'll find  
At last, the spagnum moss."*

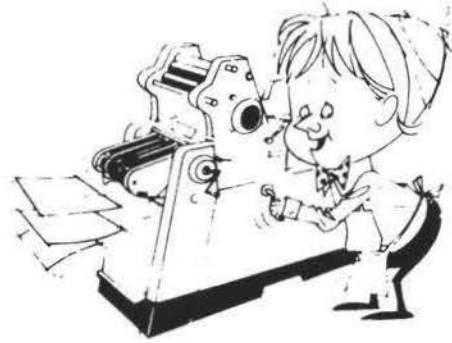
*High up in the mountains  
By peaty little streams  
That dimple brown on wintry days  
Among the lichened trees  
And buttercups gleam golden  
And blue-bells sway and toss  
Among the melaleuca  
You'll find the spagnum moss.*

*But take your map and compass  
And maybe take a guide  
In case, like me, you can't read maps  
And are not very wise.  
Make sure you take your spectacles  
And big St Bernard dogs  
To help you when you lose your way  
In search of spagnum bogs.*

## APPENDIX

*Gem of gold worth finding,  
Lying gleaming in the sun;  
Springing back alive beneath  
Your foot beats when you come.  
You'll hardly find a footprint  
Of cattle in the moss  
For they like to drink and eat where they  
Don't sink in a morass.*

*Perhaps in droughty weather  
They'll trample it to drink –  
It soaks the water like a sponge,  
And leaches it – I think  
Down into a basin –  
So keep the moss beds small  
And let the water drain a bit  
And you may find that all  
Your disappearing moss has not  
Disappeared at all.*



# The Mansfield Courier

We are pleased to be associated with the production of this issue of Voice of the Mountains.

We have recently installed a Sakurai Offset Press and are fully equipped to handle all types of commercial printing.

Small publications and posters are our specialty.

**CONTACT: The Manager, Louise Jacob (057) 75 2115; 75 2888  
A.H. Graeme Stoney (057) 75 2212**

## A MOUNTAIN RIDE

*We rode across the Great Divide from the hut at Howitt Springs  
Where the snow-gums twist on level plains and the snow-grass softly clings.  
We were fleeing a fire on the Gippsland side and our horses fled from the smoke  
While we prayed for rain we controlled the trot but neither one of us spoke.*

*The inferno passed but its threat remained in the lap of God and the wind  
And I knew my partner's thoughts were mine as he turned in his saddle and grinned  
For we'd reached Magdala's peak and broke from the smoke and the ash to see  
The awe-inspiring sight of a storm building up like an angry sea.*

*There were layers of grey and layers of white rushing to us before our eyes  
Then all darkened and blackened as only can be in the heart of the mountain skies.  
With Old Black getting edgy I slackened the rein and he settled with quickening gait  
And the mount of my partner fell into its stride 'neat that grin on the face of my mate.*

*Then the force of the elements let loose its roar and the ground seemed to grumble below  
And excitement rushed through my body as I felt the thrill of the mountain storm grow.  
All became dark, then with one mighty crack, the lightning turned everything white  
And I breathed deep the smell of the storm and the Hell which is nature displaying her might.*

*We were into the woolly-buit country by now, riding deep through those giants of earth  
And the tops of these alpine-ash bent overhead while not moving an inch at their girth.  
Then a deafening thud hit the roof of the trees hurling tonnage, besplintered to ground  
But the horses, though startled, plugged on nonetheless through this frightening, wonderful sound.*

*We broke into a clearing and cloud swirled around as we rode through its beautiful dance  
And looked into the grandiose valleys below – deep and turbulent, wondrous expanse.  
On we went through the clamour, the crackles, the groans, the hoof-beats and hissing of leaves  
And the hairs on my back stood as those of a dog and the undergrowth ripped at our sleeves.*

*The rain belted down and we tugged on our hats, watching trickles turn sudden to streams  
And the hut on King Billy loomed into our sight as in ends of our favourite dreams.  
With the saddles and bridles removed from our mounts they're allowed to roam free and to feed  
Then we strip by the fire and boil up a brew – two bushmen now found without need.*

*Al Simmons,  
Merrijig*

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### NEW FILM

## THE MAN FROM SNOWY RIVER

This film is to be made shortly using an international cast of actors.

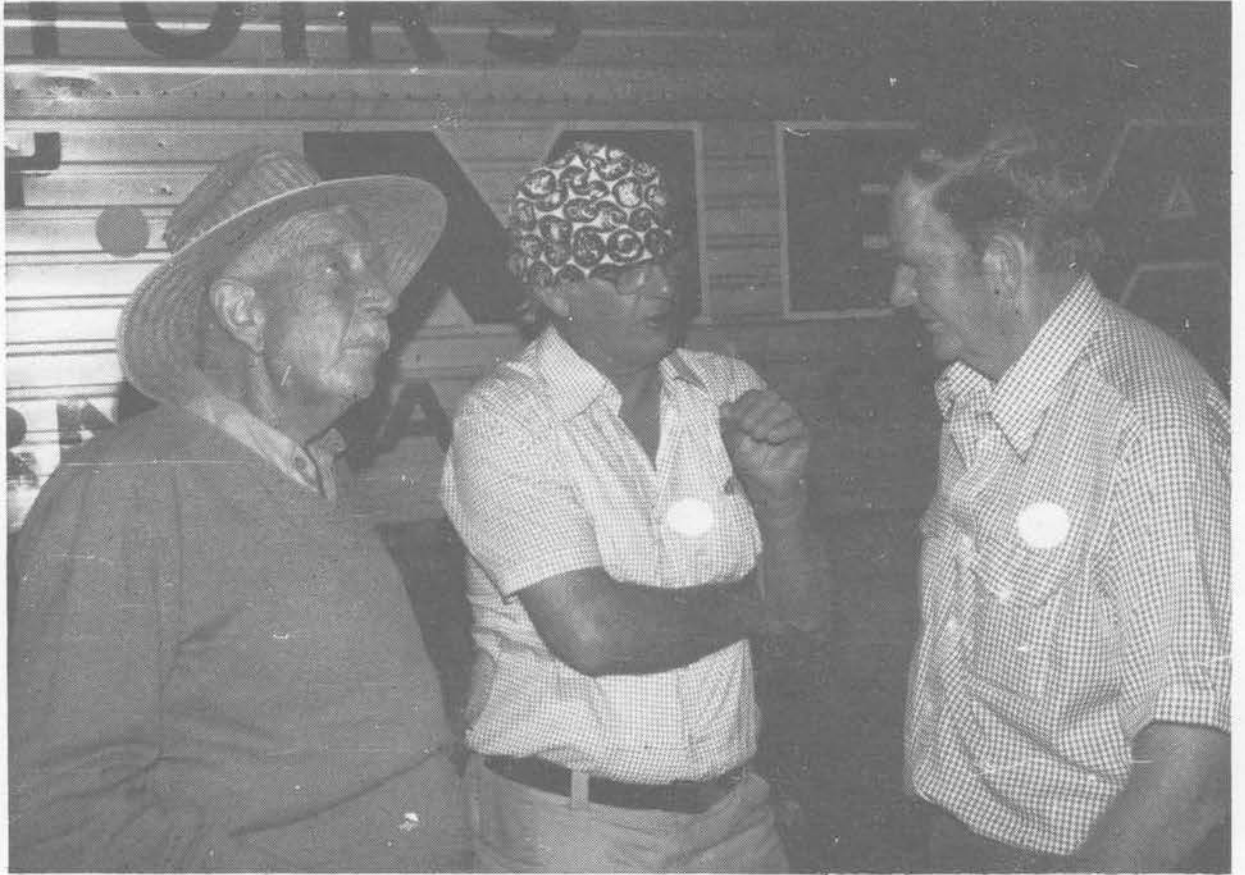
A major part of the production will be filmed at Mansfield early in 1981. It is likely that the location will be the homestead and

outbuildings belonging to a Mountain cattleman, whose family have a long connection with the high country.

At the time of going to press, details are still confidential, so more next issue.



## — AND ANOTHER THING



*Our Association relies heavily on a few of our members to represent us and get our message across. Over the past few years, two of our most respected leaders, Lyle McCready and Jim Commins have presented our point of view clearly and firmly to Government and their representatives in various Government Departments.*

*Our Association pays tribute to the work they are doing and we are firmly behind the action they are taking on our behalf.*

*Pictured above is Mr Lyle McCready and Mr Jim Commins discussing a point with well-known Soil Conservation Authority member, Mr Jack Gilmore.*

---

## MT STIRLING

A major ski resort is to be established on Mt Stirling.

Mansfield cattlemen are concerned because no mention has been made of the future of grazing in the area.

An inspection of Mt Stirling and the Bluff (which is now under notice to be withdrawn from grazing), was made in early February, 1981.

Local cattlemen, Parliamentarians and representatives of government departments attended the two day trip.

**— Are the cattlemen going to be the ones to pay once again?**

All indications point to the fact that they are.

**If the people of Victoria wish to take these areas at the expense of a few individual families, why shouldn't those families be justly compensated in one form or another for the sacrifice of part of their living and loss of their enjoyment and way of life that is a tradition.**

Their loss is shared by many hundreds of people who benefit in one way or another by cattlemen's presence in the Alps.

# THE HUNT CLUB HOTEL

77 5508



**“Meet the Cattlemen  
at the gateway  
to the Mansfield  
High Country”**

**Counter teas nightly 6 p.m. — 8 p.m.  
Counter lunches 12.30 p.m. — 2 p.m.**

## **Merrijig**



**Cover photo:**  
An Alpine meadow  
on the High plains  
— a beauty all on  
its own.