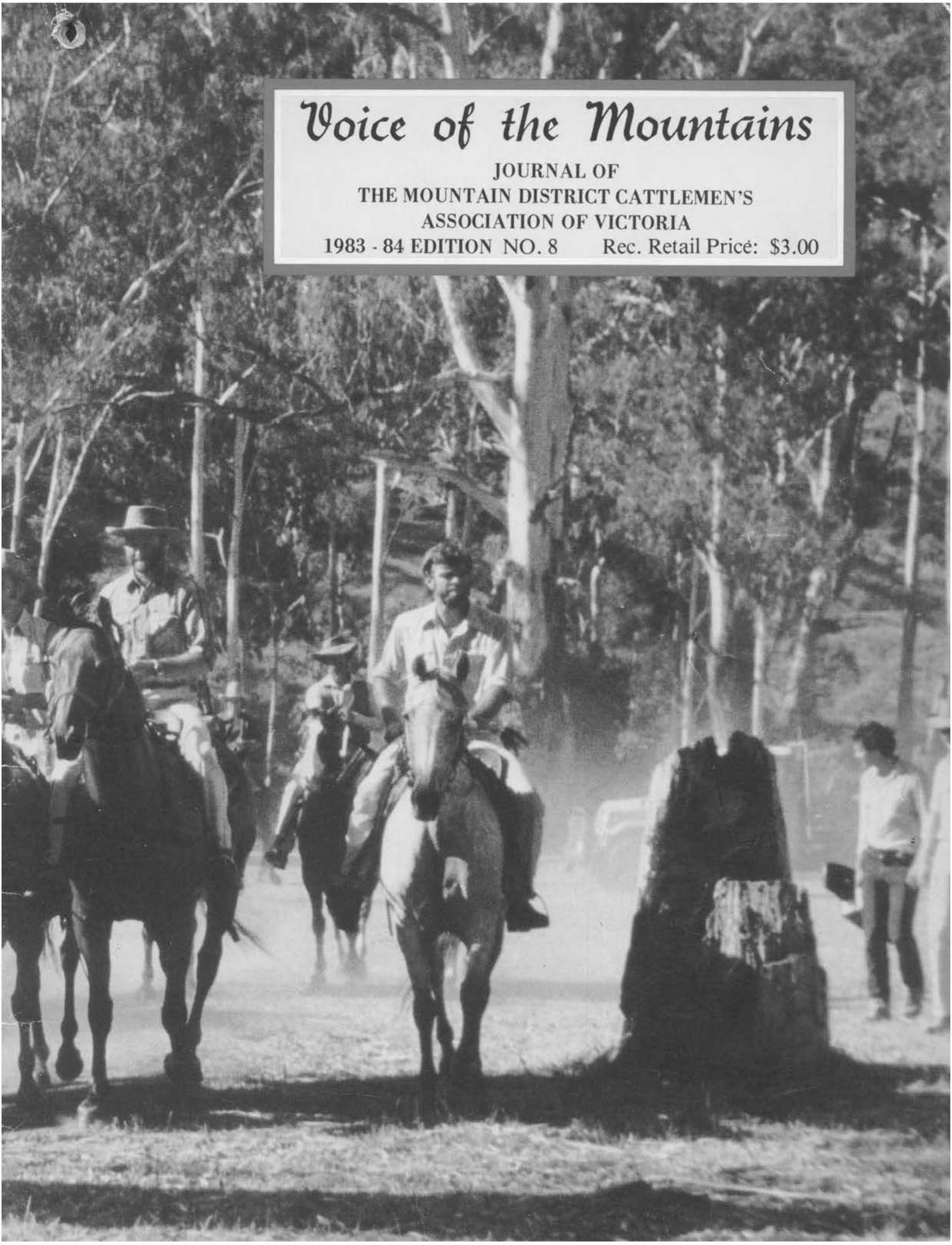

Voice of the Mountains

JOURNAL OF
THE MOUNTAIN DISTRICT CATTLEMEN'S
ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA

1983 - 84 EDITION NO. 8 Rec. Retail Price: $3.00

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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Printed by the Mansfield Courier, 11 High St, Mansfield (057) 75 2115, 75 2888.
Typesetting courtesy Harry Stephenson, 14 Railway Avenue, Armadale (03) 509 0051.

Front cover photo: Mountain Cattlemen are pictured before the start of the 1st Annual Cattleman's Cup last February. The winner, Ken Connley is pictured centre rear on the front.
Photo courtesy Stock & Land

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Another year has passed and the future for alpine grazing remains unclear. We are exposed to two real dangers — the first and perhaps least likely is that a total prohibition of cattle grazing will be gradually implemented. The second, and very much more likely, that the same result may be achieved more rapidly by very substantial rises in grazing fees.

Grazing cattle on the high plains already costs our members as much or more than good pasture in private secure paddocks, taking into account all costs involved.

In last summer's drought mountain cattlemen did not have to call for subsidised assistance and had their summer grazing runs not been available the cost to the State under the drought assistance scheme would have been well in excess of one million dollars.

For example, if 20,000 cattle at, say, $2.50 per head per week Government contribution (a subsidy of 75% cost of transport and fodder purchased was available) were paid for sixteen weeks then the cost to the State would have been $1,000,000.

Submissions in respect of fees have been made to Government but no discussion on fine details have as yet followed with the M.D.C.A.V., but figures bandied about from official circles indicate that savage rises in Government charges that could force runholders of long standing out of business, are likely, and perhaps imminent.

This would be welcomed by our ill informed and subversive opponents alike but it would be a very backward move, not only for pastoral interests but also for water catchment values, for sight seeing, for intensive local knowledge and so on.

Much time and travelling has been donated to our cause by members of our association, and many associate members have made generous offers of help. Much interest in the mountains and in the people who live and work there was inspired by the presentation of the film, "The Man From Snowy River", and following that there have been other helpful television and news media releases in which our members have participated. What is most urgently needed is thorough and unbiased studies of matters relating to mountain grazing.

If time can be gained for that it will be shown that grazing has far more benefits to offer than just those gained by the owners of the cattle and many false and distorted accusations will be laid to rest. A good example in recent research on cattle grazing on the Bogong High Plains.

In February last we enjoyed another most successful get together and the Mansfield branch members who are few in number and whose turn it was to be the organisers are to be congratulated on a wonderful achievement. There were many most valued helpers but one I must make special mention of was Miss Suzie Howie for her generous help and expertise in the field of press relations. The publicity gained from the function and the race has been invaluable and ongoing.

For the production of this issue of VOM many thanks are due to all those who provided articles, photos etc. and a special thanks is extended to Harry Stephenson for his most valued donation of time, equipment and professional know-how to do the type setting and his part in preparing the magazine's contents.

It weighs rather heavily upon me that I have been unable to write personal notes of appreciation to all the people who have been so helpful in writing letters of encouragement as well as supporting submissions to Government and offers of assistance in other ways during the past year.

The numerically small (in relation to the population) group of activists who oppose us, who also are financially supported by large annual grants from public funds and are organised to even international level make our

contest seem something like a David and Goliath event. However, I am confident that if only a complete cross section of community opinion can be heard on the matter we will find that the majority of people can see no harm and only benefits to be gained from our traditional contributions to food production under the most natural traditional and uncomplicated conditions.

Members should actively seek public expressions of support and associate members can be most helpful in the same way. Since it is possible and indeed likely that firm decisions will soon be made at Government level before many areas of interest are checked by objective research it is vitally important that people act without delay.

If they have already written to their Members of Parliament or other members of Government or perhaps made representations to any public organisations they may be involved in then, they might now try and persuade their neighbours to do the same.

If you haven't written to your local member and other politicians, please do so. Any such message, no matter how brief, must help and any sympathiser who does not make a personal representation might at least add his or her signature to a supporting submission if the opportunity arises.

There is an urgent need to have impact at political level **NOW.**

James Commins, Ensay

HOLMES PLAIN GET TOGETHER 1984

The second annual Cattlemen's Cup will be run on Holmes Plain, at the 1984 Mountain Cattlemen's Get Together to be held on February 4 and 5, 1984.

Ken Connley from Benambra won the first cup last year at Sheepyard Flat and the competition will be hot and strong to take the cup to another section of the Alps in 1984.

Holmes Plain is 60 miles north of Heyfield up in the High Country and a delightful setting for a weekend get together.

The Gippsland branch of the Mountain Cattlemen's Association is hosting the event and a great program is planned.

For the Saturday night a barbecue and booth will operate with short speeches and long entertainment to the early hours.

On Sunday please have your camp organised by 10 a.m. when the Cattleman's Cup is to be held.

An inspection of surrounding High Country grazing leases will complete the weekend.

For further information please ring Bill Cumming (051) 48 0223.

MR ERIC CUMMING

We regretfully record the passing, in August 1982, of one of the pioneers of the Glenmaggie area, Mr Eric Cumming.

Mr Cumming was widely respected in Mountain Cattlemen circles and played an active role for many years in M.D.C.A.V. activities.

The Cumming family now carry on the example set by Mr Cumming and his son, Bill, and his family are very active within the association.

A SAD LOSS AND A MESSAGE FOR THE FUTURE

Ian Stapleton,
'Mittagundi'.

The sudden passing of Brennie Fitzgerald was a great shock to all who knew him. We at "Mittagundi" had only the opportunity of knowing Brennie and his family for a few years, when he was taken away, but we all feel strongly the loss of a fine and valued friend, and a quiet but strong supporter. As a next door neighbour, he was always there, never 'pushy' but ready to help out at any time. It was Brennie who gave us our first pack saddle and showed us how to use it. The letter box from time to time revealed an unmarked envelope containing a cheque with a note saying "A small boost to the funds from Brennie and Betty". There was never a fuss, never a show, but strong and highly valued support was always there.

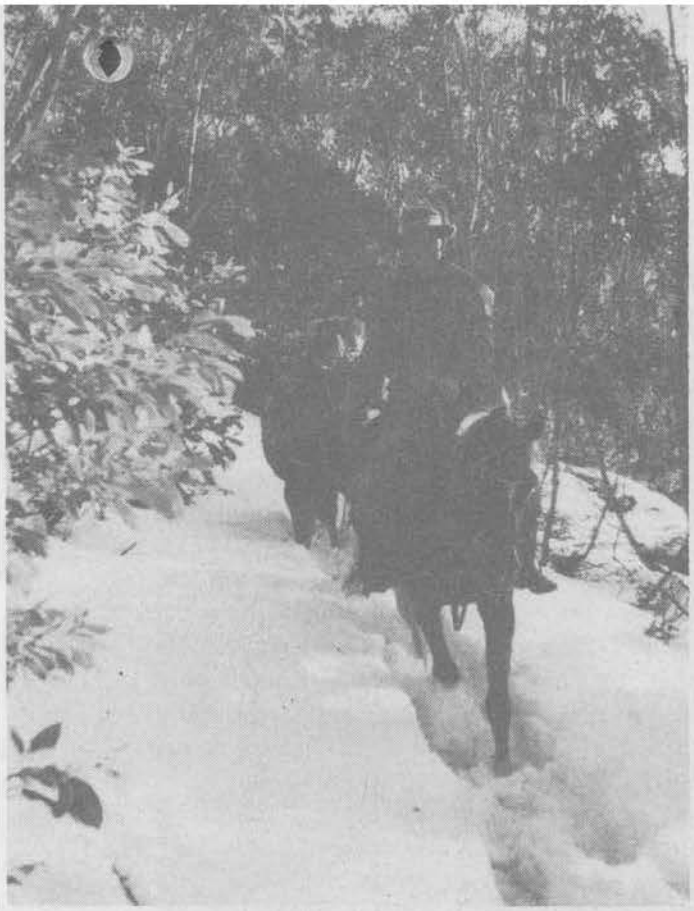
So the loss of Brennie to so many of you cattlemen, who have known and worked with him for so much longer than us, must be a great one. Not only have you lost a fine friend, but the High Country has lost yet one more of the rapidly decreasing number of men who have spent a lifetime in the mountains and seen them in the days before roads or development of any sort. I am convinced that no one can know the mountains as well as the men of Brennie's generation did. There is simply no substitute for a lifetime of experience. Greater and far easier access today does mean that we can visit the country more often and travel through it more quickly but there is surely no substitute for the old life style which demanded weeks and months at a time in the mountains with no easy way out, no communication with the outside world at all and no Four Wheel Drive parked outside the hut 'just in case'. Not only did they know the country well but they respected it

Bren. Fitzgerald, 2nd A.I.F., 1944.

and felt for it in a way that I doubt, we of the present generation ever can.

It seems to me that this is a very appropriate time to reflect a bit on the past and also think of the future. Because as the Brennie Fitzs of the mountains are becoming less and less, the contact between the old and the new is also disappearing. The present situation in the mountains seems to me to be getting dangerously close to an all-out battle between the cattlemen and the conservationists. I think that this is very dangerous for the cattlemen's future.

We at Mittagundi would be very sad to see the mountain cattlemen go from the High Country. I have personally be involved in full-time work, taking young people into the mountains of Victoria for almost 15 years, the last 5 of which have involved the building of Mittagundi. Wherever I have been, the support that the cattlemen have given so willingly has been enormous. Many, like Brennie, have been



Bren. packing in Rover Scout supplies.

personal friends. Names like Klingsporn, Roper, Batty, McNamara, Stoney, Ryder, Purcell, Lovick, Murphy, and of course, Fitzgerald, have all been important in the battle to get Mittagundi going. Many have given enormously of their time and effort and have become firm friends. Every time I have found them anxious to share their mountains with those prepared to look after them, and willing to put up with all sorts of interuptions and inconvenience to assist anyone in the mountains needing help.

To me it seems so unfair that cattlemen are facing certain phasing out policies and possible extinction, while at the same time the go ahead is being given for the ski industry to annihilate Mt Stirling and expand constantly it's activities all over the Alps. Surely when we look at all the activities now going on in the High Country none go anywhere near the Ski Village promoters, for the ability and apparent willingness to totally ruin a mountain environment, all seemingly for the sake of making money – nothing else. It always amazes me to see the number of 'conservationists' who decry the grazing of cattle in the alps and then rush off to spend a week each winter at Falls Creek or Buller, directly supporting that part of the community who are happy to dessimate the pick of the mountains, in order to make large sums of money for themselves. The number of people I know, who regularly put down mountain grazing, but who own flats at Ski villages and rush to tell me how ski villages do their best to look after the environment is quite depressing. It seems we are all 'conservationists' until it doesn't suit us. How anyone can honestly say that a tennis court or a sewerage tratment plant or a refuse depot or a ski-tow or a multi-storey concrete building is going to be built in such a way as to blend in with the mountain environment, is quite beyond me. The original pioneers of the snowfields would probably turn in their braves if they could see the destruction it has led to. Thousands of people are brought to the snow each year, seemingly at any cost environmentally. Many of them would probably perish in 24 hours or less if roads, the heating, snack bars, the hotels, sewerage and countless other comforts were not there. Many of them have about as much in common with the mountains as a colour TV set. They don't respect them or feel greatly for them and can't possibly know or understand them. Yet we are still willing to carve the mountains to bits in order to make it possible for more of them to come.

The draught horse team, now rarely used.

And what does all this have to do with Brennie Fitz? Well, a couple of nights after Brennie's death, I was camped on my own in the remote Wild Horse Creek area of the Bogong High Plains. Cattle have been run there for over 100 years. The tumbledown remains of a small log cabin of years gone by, is still there if you look for it. Yet it is still a beautiful, quiet, untouched place. The cattle had only just left for the season and there was cow dung about, which many would decry, but that was the only sign - a few lumps of cow dung! The sun went down and the little valley turned red and my thoughts turned to Brennie and the cattlemen.

Especially to Brennie. It would be hard to find a person who has shared his knowledge and love of the mountains more willingly than he has. His name is inextricably linked with the early bushwalking clubs, the old Tourist Bureau Skyline Tours, the Rover Scout movement and the skiing pioneers. Shannon Vale sees a constant stream of people returning to relive old times and share the mountains a little longer with the family that made it all possible years ago. Like his father and brothers before him, Brennie made it his business to help, share and befriend any mountain visitor and his friendship to us was perhaps one of his last opportunities to do so.

"I'm not going to camp in a cow paddock - flies and cow dung everywhere!" It's often heard, yet we tend to forget what a pest bushwalkers must have been to the cattlemen so often over the years. Using the huts and the wood, frequently needing help and support, always depending to a certain extent on the cattlemen, their huts, their tracks and their friendship - it was always willingly given. You'll never see a cattleman's hut locked but how many of those owned by bushwalking clubs are! Count them up. It's quite a few. Yet, it seems, that the very people introduced to the place by the cattlemen, and now itching to put the cattlemen out. It's not the Ski Villages that have to go - they are being boosted. No - it's the cattlemen. But, through all this Brennie rather amazed me. He still had time for the bush walkers, skiers and visitors. He could still see their point of view. He knew the mountains fifty times better than all of us put together but he still found time to talk with anyone and try to look at the situation sensibly. Because he genuinely loved the mountains and wanted the best for them in a changing world. Many in his situation would not have tolerated the 'weekenders' and Melbourne based visitors to the High Country, with all their ideas on how things should be done. But Brennie had nothing to hide. He had seen cattle on mountain runs that he was entrusted with for close on 50 years and he knew what they did and did not do, what they ate, where they went and how the place had changed or had not changed. He listened to everyone's ideas, often based only on a three or four day visit, and then quietly explained his own. I think that this is something that the future generations of cattlemen should tahe from Brennie. It seems that High Country grazing, at its present rate, can be very properly justified. Many scientific suudies are coming out in favour of High Plains grazing, and the next few years in this field could well be very interesting. You all have a very strong case indeed when compared to ski villages, logging and many forms of recreation (including bushwalking and 4-wheel driving, when the numbers involved are large), but you have a battle ahead to prove it. But the issue must not be allowed to degenerate into a 'cattlemen versus greenies battle'. Partly because it's just not sensible - all parties involved have one thing in common, hopefully - a desire to see the mountains managed in the most sensible way and mud slinging won't achieve anything. And partly because if it comes to a battle like that, the cattlemen will lose. There aren't enough of you and you aren't in the appropriate places, you will inevitably lose. Conservation is a big issue now and if you put yourselves forward as being against it, then you haven't a hope. But it seems to me that you aren't against it at all. No matter how annoying the criticisms of ill informed Melbourne based visitors of all types may be, you must be prepared to listen, explain and persevere. If the present generation of cattlemen can perform in the same way that Brennie did, then I believe that not many argu-

Bren. Fitzgerald, Bogong High Plains, Feb. 1981.

ments can really be held against you. But you must be careful. You aren't the same as your fathers. You go up there in four-wheel-drives, even if only to stock up the huts. You have far easier access to many parts of the country. You must be, and should be, always concerned meticulously with rubbish, erosion or affecting the country in any way your predecessors did not. You know the country far better than any of the visitors but that won't stop them jumping in to criticise at the slightest thing. And the visitors will increase, the National Park is here to stay and conservation monements will continue to have a big say in the High Country decisions. The conservation movement has plenty of extremists we all know, but many are well informed, sensible people. Most of them lack your experience but many can see your point of view and all share your love of the mountains.

Mittagundi will always support the cattlemen - they stuck by us and we value that enormously. We would hate to see you go as would many others, but I firmly believe that the only way for you to stay is to take a leaf out of Brennie's book. Forget car stickers saying something like 'light a fire - burn a greenie'. It won't get you anywhere but backwards. If all the visitors in the next fifty years are treated by the cattlemen, as we and many others have been, then you are well on the way to holding your country, and you will deserve to. A real desire to treat the country properly and share it with others is what you need to show not a desire to battle with every conservationist on earth.

I may be wrong but that's the way I see it. Don't disregard the example set by Brennie and there may well be generations of 'Brennie's' yet to come.

STUDY OF CATTLE ON THE HIGH PLAINS

Harm van REES,
Animal Protection Section,
Agriculture & Forestry School,
University of Melbourne.

Since I wrote about my study on the behaviour and diet of cattle on the Bogong High Plains in the last issue of "Voice of the Mountains", I have spent another two grazing seasons on the High Plains. At the moment I am in the final stages of analysing the data and writing up the results.

To determine the diet of cattle on a quantitive basis, I used five oesophageal fistulated steers on the High Plains. An oesophageal fistula is a small surgically prepared hole (named the fistula) in an animal's oesophagus about halfway between the jaw and the brisket. When the animals are grazing normally, a plastic plug is used to close the fistula, so that the ingested material bypasses the opening and ends up in the rumen. When samples of the diet were required the plastic plug was removed, a collection bag was placed around the animal's neck, and as the animal grazed the material passed through the fistula into the bag.

The grazed material was analysed for its botanical and chemical composition. Luckily cattle do not chew their feed well when they are grazing and with the aid of a microscope it was relatively straightforward to determine which plant species had been grazed.

The diet anaylses showed that the diet was largely comprised of snowgrass during December and early January, then the diet changed to a shrub (alpine star-bush and alpine grevillea) dominated diet, which was followed towards the end of the season by a diet which contained a high proportion of forbs (mainly the leaves of the silver snow daisy.

The large component of shrubs in the diet of cattle was an interesting result as it indicates that cattle may be playing a regulatory role in controlling the rate of shrub growth on the High Plains.

The chemical anaylses of the diet included measurements on the digestibility, protein and major element content. I found that the digestibility of the feed was sufficient for lactating, pregnant beef cows only during December and January. The feed declined in quality during February and by March the feed was unable to provide cattle with sufficient energy. Many of you have probably noticed that towards the end of March many cows start to lose condition and this is related to the poor quality of the feed during March. Protein content of the feed was sufficient for the cattle throughout the season. The low mineral content of the alpine vegetation does present a problem for beef cattle. The alpine plants contain very little sodium (salt), and it is therefore not surprising that the cattle are salt hungry. Phosphorus, magnesium and calcium levels are also very low, and well below the recommended levels for lactating, pregnant livestock. Low levels of magnesium and calcium may lead to diseases such as grass tetany and milk fever. It may well be worthwhile to supplement stock in the alpine areas with mineral salt rather than just plain salt.

My work during the last season was greatly helped by Jim Commins and Kevin Kelly whom I would like to thank. Without the use of their horses, Rick, Willie and I would have done a lot of running around after our steers. During the three summers I have worked on the High Plains I have been able to meet many cattlemen and in particular, I appreciate the opportunity I had to know Bren Fitzgerald. I came to respect Bren's knowledge and love of the alpine area and always looked forward to seeing him either at 'Shannonvale' or when he was salting his cattle.

Rick Stadler on one of Kevin Kelly's horses, with five test cattle on Bogong High Plains.

The Old Bush Forge - at Cowa's Hut.

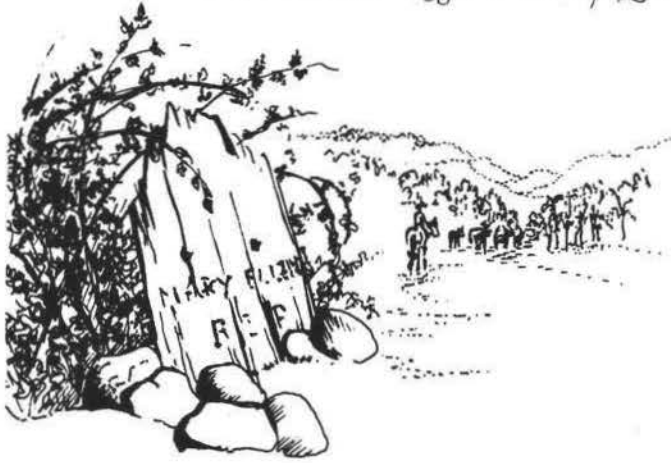
DARGO HIGH PLAINS.

A fallen heap of stones
some tin and bits of iron, where the
anvil rang so clear through the trees
By a hut now crumbled in the past,
By an old stockyard, long gone;
Remnants of a bygone day,
Whose builders have moved on..

I stand in silent witness, to see it all again,
And hear the rhythmic beating of the forge
Where sparks flew round the heated iron
where tongs and ash lay warm;
Horse shoes, pincers, farrier knife
and a bending human form.

I hear the anvil ringing, and see the spurting flame,
and see the sparks go twisting through the breeze.
Now all is silent in refrain;
No billy on the hob,
No yard to hold the milling herd;
Only phantoms turn the mob.

And now I turn to see,
that last mob move away..
Across the plain from that old bush hut,
far from the anvil's song.
Away from those halycon days,
To leave for the wombats keep,
where the lizzard basking lays.



And so they built this nation's worth,
With humble yet dauntless strain,
Then moved into eternal time,
Ne'er to return again.

D. J. Treasure

SHOULD HIGH COUNTRY CATTLE GRAZING CEASE?

It will, if the radicals in the "conservation" movement have their way.

Before forming **your** opinion, please consider the following points:

1. Contrary to the "conservationist" line, grazing of the High Country is highly beneficial to water catchment values and the natural environment. Grazing is for only a short time each year and the beneficial trimming dramatically reduces the chance of devastating wild fires which create a dangerous soil erosion situation.

2. The phasing out of Alpine grazing will have adverse effects on the beef cattle industry throughout South Eastern Australia. The social and economic impact on small communities around the mountains will be considerable. Any reduction of the National Herd will mean dearer meat and further unemployment of skilled and productive country people.

3. Phasing out of High Country cattle will mean the end of the living heritage of the Mountain Cattlemen. The help and advice visitors to the mountains receive from these men will be no longer there. The sight of mobs of cattle grazing the High Plains is aesthetically pleasing to many people and the passing of this very old custom would see one of the last links with Australia's pioneering past broken.

   Mountain grazing should be preserved as an ongoing and irreplacable connection with our early Australian heritage.

4. Rugged gullies, rolling grasslands, towering cliffs and majestic stands of timber, all combine into an irregular mosaic in the High Country and surrounding public land. It is a magnificent natural and renewable resource. The cattle grazing, timber and Alpine recreational industries should be allowed to continue in harmony with people wishing to escape the pressures of everyday living and visit these remote areas. Because of the large expanse of the Victorian Alps, there exists very large areas where no trace of man can be found. Many pockets of absolute natural wilderness can even be found only a short walking distance from any road that penetrates the Great Divide.

THERE IS ROOM FOR ALL IN THE HIGH COUNTRY.

The charges that commercial users of the Alps cause serious damage cannot be sustained, and present moves to curtail their valuable contribution to the Nation's economy must be stopped.

THE PRESENT POSITION

The Land Conservation Council will shortly present its final recommendations to the State Government. We believe that the result will be large additions to the National Park Network. As it is Government Policy to phase out grazing in National Parks, we fear the future for Mountain Cattlemen is grave.

THE CATTLEMEN NEED YOUR HELP

If you feel motivated to help the cattlemen, please write to the Minister for Conservation and Forests, Mr R. Mackenzie, or Minister for Planning, Mr E. Walker, with a copy to your own State Member of Parliament.

In your letter please state what you believe about the issue, and ask them not to phase out cattle grazing in any more of the High Country regardless of the other decisions the Government may make for the area, such as increasing the Park network. We believe that if enough people do this, the Government will be prepared to modify its policy to phase out grazing.

BELIEVE US WE NEED YOUR HELP.

If you would like to be an associate member of our Association, please contact our Secretary, Coral Aston, Ensay, 3895.

Mountain cattlemen care for the high country

PLEASE HELP THEM

THE BEVERIDGE BROTHERS

Rory Lumsden,
Buckland Valley.

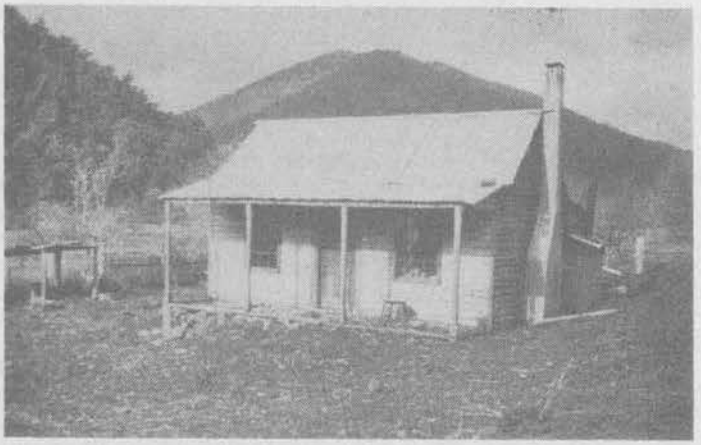
No history of the cattlemen of Victoria would be complete without reference being made to the Beveridge brothers, Jack and Sid, who possibly were amongst the best known cattlemen of their time in an era when the cattle industry reigned supreme throughout all the high country and associated lowlands of North East Victoria and Gippsland.

During their lifetime they built a vast empire made up of cattle runs on Mt Selwyn, Mt Murray, The Twins and Mt St Bernard and they controlled huge areas of freehold land in the Buckland, Buffalo and Ovens River Valleys, extending as far afield as the Everton District.

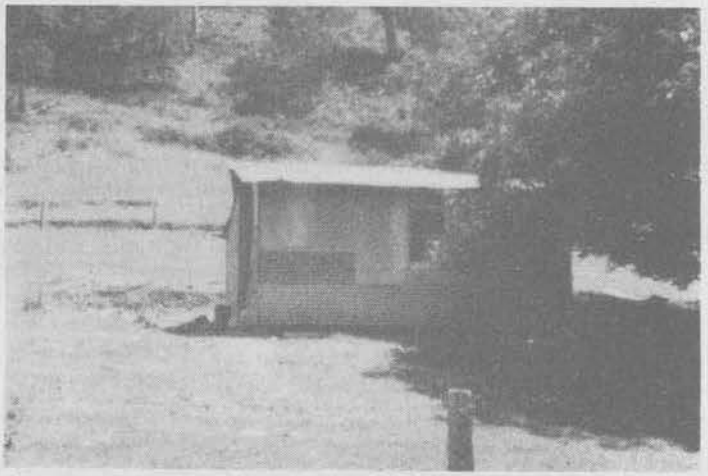
They were born before the turn of the century in Harrietville when it was a thriving frontier town of the gold mining days. They were both educated at the local school, but left at an early age to take jobs wherever they were offering. Jack worked at McKinnon's Hotel for a while and Sid was employed by a butcher called Jack Conley. During those early days they worked at a variety of jobs including reefing the roads clear of snow and fallen trees.

However, they were destined for greater things. As young men they had tireless energy, coupled with resourcefulness, a keen eye for business and they recognised the tremendous opportunities that lay ahead of them in the cattle industry and rather than follow the fickle gold fields, they became involved with their father Bob Beveridge, who already ran quite a few cattle as a sideline in the bush country around "The Big Guns" mine where he worked. He also had a small freehold block at the "Bon Accord" and his stockyards were situated across the river where it was easy to yard the cattle as they came drifting down with the oncome of winter. From this small beginning they built their empire.

Beveridge brothers, picnicing with friends on upper Buckland River, 1920.



Original Beveridge home on Morgan's Cattle Station, at head of Buckland valley.



Beveridge hut - replacement of the original home burnt in January 1939 bushfires.

Just before World War I, maybe 1913, they took over Morgans Cattle Station ("up top"), at the head of the Buckland Valley where they lived and carried out a complete farming enterprise. The property at that time was well fenced, had good sheds and stoutly built stockyards, capable of handling the wildest of mountain bred cattle. Also there was quite a nice home in a picturesque setting tucked in against the hill on a grassy flat overlooking the river. All about, many fruit trees had been planted, but few remain today. This house was destroyed by fire only a few years after the Beveridges took over the property and they had another one built on the same site which in turn was burnt to the ground on January 13th, 1939, in possibly one of the worst bushfires in the history of Victoria, but more about that later on.

About 1920, they bought a property at Brookside, situated on the northern side of the Devil's Creek junction with the Buckland River and after building quite a nice home, they moved down there to live in 1923, the same year that my father bought Joe Howell's property and the Lumsden family migrated from Scotland to the Buckland Valley.

It was from this property that they practically controlled their entire land and cattle business until their retirement about 55 years later.

In the years to follow, they acquired more land in the Valley, as mostly family men in desperation sold part or all of their properties in a vain attempt to survive the great world depression of the late '20s and early '30s. During that time they moved into the Buffalo River Valley, first purchasing a property from old Billy Weston, which Tom Bibby and Jack Burton fenced in 1935-36. Later on they owned, or certainly had controlling interests in Abbey Yards and Catherine Station, the latter place originally being owned by Evans.

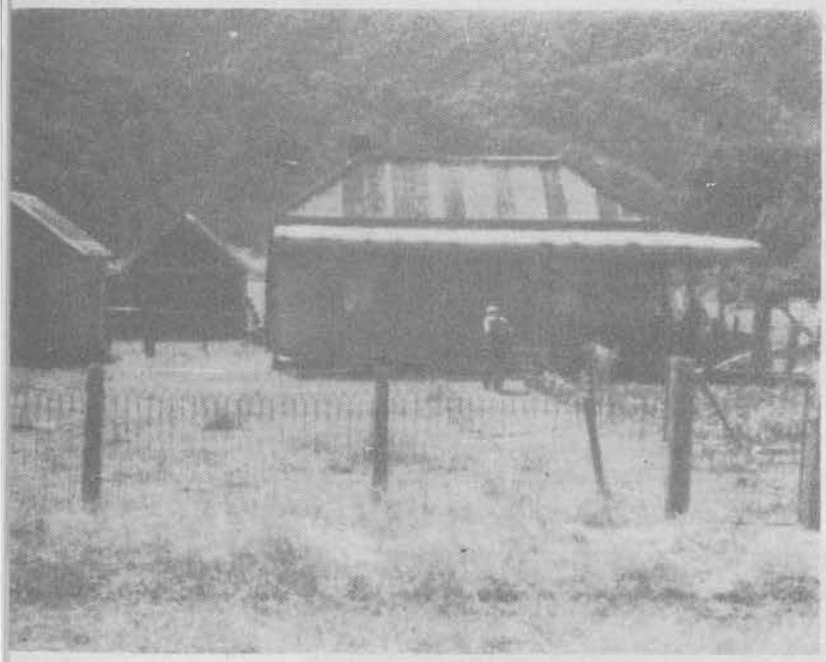
"Young Jack" as he was known, their nephew lived with his wife in the Catherine Station home and ran the property until his untimely death in 1966. It was easy to run cattle into Buffalo River from Selwyn down Gentle Annie below Catherine and with such a link up

Feeding cattle out 'on top' about 1920.

Beveridge home at Harrietville, 1928 where Sid's and Jack's father Bob lived.

Jack Beveridge.

Rory Lumsden, left, with wife and family with Sid Beveridge (right) 'up top', 1973.



Sid on path of Beveridge home at Devil's Creek, Broadside.

Beveridge cattle 'up top', in recent times.

between runs and freehold land, they had access to excellent grazing land for their ever increasing cattle numbers.

When I was a boy it was a wonderful sight to see them drive a big mob of cattle up top at the beginning of the Summer. You always knew when they were on the move long before they appeared because the normal quietness of the Valley was filled with the noise of bellowing cattle, barking dogs and cracking whips. There seemed to be no end of bobbying heads and swaying backs as they went by, the little calves clinging to their mothers' sides, looking for security in the uncertain new world they had suddenly become part of.

And so they went on as other mobs before them, to graze along the rich upper reaches of the Buckland River and away beyond out onto the tops. Everything went well until the Summer of 1939, when on Friday 13th January bushfires swept across all the high country, destroying everything in their path, leaving a trail of death and destruction behind.

Jack and Sid lost practically all their cattle that day, the only ones to survive being those in the "safe" areas along water ways or back at the home paddocks. Sid was caught in that fire, with a young man Tom Corrigan, somewhere between Buffalo River and the Buckland and it was only his great skill as a bushman that got them out alive. They managed to race ahead of the fire until they reached a recently burnt area where they gained enough protection to survive. However, all the dogs were burnt to death.

Good seasons followed on top of this disaster and with the outbreak of war in September of that same year, cattle prices boomed and their way of life was assured. After the war they moved most of their cattle by trucks instead of horses and the Beveridge brand was known far and wide. How many cattle they had would only be a guess. I don't think Jack and Sid really knew but certainly they were the biggest and most successful breeders for many miles around.

Neither of them married and with the passing of the years, the whole enterprise became too big for them to manage, and after Jack died at the age of 81 in 1968, it was only a matter of

time before Sid sold everything and retired when he was well over 80.

During his retirement he travelled quite extensively overseas, making a final trip to New Zealand in the Summer of 1981. With the approach of Winter in that same year, his health deteriorated and after a short spell in the Bright Bush Nursing Hospital, he died on the 25th August at the age of 89.

Jack and Sid have gone, their cattle, horses and dogs have gone also, and with them a long and interesting chapter in the history of Harrietville and the Buckland Valley has closed for ever. No more will we see the big mobs of cattle going up top in the Summer and coming down with the first fall of snow, heralding the approach of Winter. No longer will the hills and gullies echo to the salt call and the answering bellow of the cattle. Their saddles and bridles have been put away for the last time and the stable door is shut.

With their passing, all of us who have known them will be left with our thoughts and memories, differing according to our association with them. However, I think most of us will agree that they belonged to a breed of men who had all the characteristics that were necessary to cope with the hardships and loneliness that was so much a part of the cattlemen's way of life in those early days.

THE VALLEY

Deep in the vale of coolness
Runs a singing waterfall,
That sparkles in the sunshine
Peeping through the gum-trees tall.

In the green and dim-lit caverns
Where softly-feathered ferns
Cling to damp, mossy ledges,
Their curling fronds upturned.

Tree-tops climb up higher,
Reach there to touch the sun,
Striving for supremacy
Their branches far outflung.

Sounds of a breeze a-sighing
Filling the wooded hollows,
Echoes to the waterfall
And bids the stream to follow.

Cheryl

THE RUMPFFS

The Rumpff family at Seaton:
Back: Lou, George, Arthur, Alfred.
Seated: Carl, Juer, Lena, Ada, Rose, Charlie, Mary.
Front: Maggie Lyons (family friend)
Absent: Fred.

Tucked away in a soak at Spring Hill, north of Licola, is a hut that never appears on any maps. Rumpff's hut, a far from pretty galvanised iron hut, is slowly falling down. No longer used by the cattlemen who built it, it still stands as a memorial to three brothers from a Seaton family.

Carl Rumpff, the father of the family, arrived in Tasmania from England in 1852. He was employed there as a cadet drill sergeant and engaged in commercial enterprise. In 1863 he came to Seaton with his family, buying a property formerly held by Gibson and Knox, where he established an hotel. Seaton was a supply town for the goldfields, and at one time the family also ran stores at Happy, Jordan and Red Jacket. The boys in the family were engaged in packing stores from Seaton, often taking the horse teams through freezing weather. The hotel became a focal point for the town, and Carl ran the Post Office from there for fifty two years until his death in 1920.

Carl and Rose Rumpff had ten children; George Agustus, Marie Louise, Otto Ludwig, Frederick Seaton, Robert Carl, Adelaide Elizabeth, Richard Juer, Arthur Henry Anton, Charlotte Lena and Alfred James. The three youngest boys, Juer (sometimes called Joe), Artie and Alf were to be involved with the high country till the end of their days.

It is difficult to say when the emphasis shifted from commerce to cattle, but it most likely corresponded to the decline in gold mining. By 1920 the Rumpff's cattle were consistently topping the stock market at Heyfield, with three year old steers "of their own breeding" achieving a district record for that year at £18. 17. 6.

In 1921 Artie took over the Spring Hill run where Grimmes from Heyfield had previously grazed, and in 1929 the brothers took on George Hoskin's Skene run when he retired from the bush. The Monds family had previously held freehold at Spring Hill, the three brothers bought the first of the two blocks from the estate of Annie McMichael. They paid off the selection of 299 acres in 1929 and in 1939 they purchased the other block of 192 acres from the Monds family. Today's hut at Spring Hill is on Annie McMichael's block.

When the brothers took over the Skene run they also took over one of Hoskins' huts on the divide below Skene. This small log hut still stands today in an almost identical state to what it would have been then. Being small, it was easy to warm and often provided refuge from the snow. Knowledge as to it's original

Rumpffs' hut at Spring Hill in 1926

builder has been lost, although it was an old hut when Rumpffs took it over.

The next move for the brothers was the purchase from the Lyndon family of a large block just on the Glencairn side of Primrose (Riggall's) Gap. They also took out a selection further up the valley at Glencairn. A hut was built on the Gap block, but this was burnt down in 1938, beginning a fire that saved much of the area from the later 1939 fires. This was replaced with a magnificent, well-proportioned two room hut of galvanised iron on split timber frame. The iron was packed in from Seaton by packhorse, much to the distress of at least one animal that bolted with a full load. It was a hallmark of the brothers that everything they did was done with the care of a craftsman, and this hut was no exception. Today the iron from the hut has gone to make a hayshed at Glencairn, but the frame is still there as a reminder of the work of these bush carpenters.

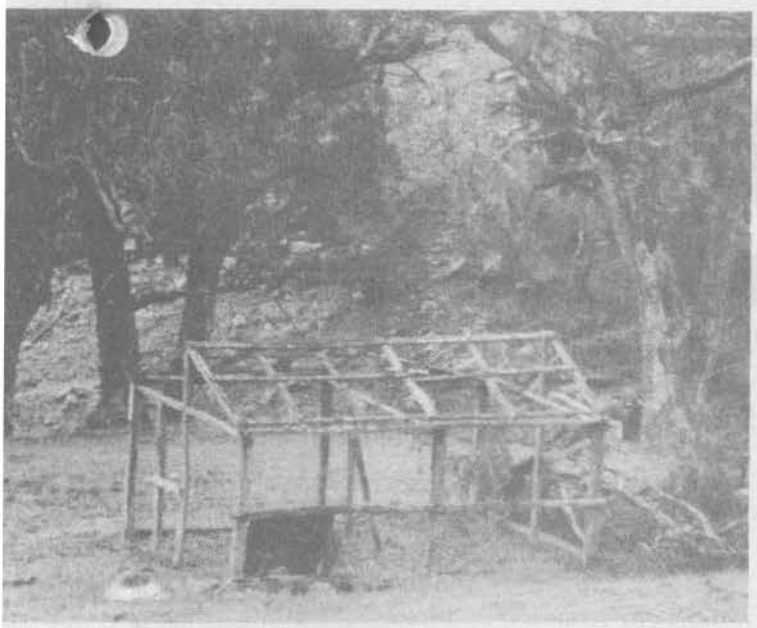
The hut at Spring Hill was built to the same proportions, but smaller for warmth. It shows the same care in construction as the one lower down at the Gap. It boasted a large, rock-filled fireplace beside the door and a split slab sleeping platform at the rear. A table of split slabs near the door disappeared many years ago. It was originally iron roofed, with bark and upright log walls, with a log and split weatherboard chimney. At a later stage, possibly in the late 1930s, the walls and chimney were replaced with iron from another hut nearby.

Most of the bush trips were made by Artie and Juer. They are remembered for their neat and polite manner, as well as their astute bush-manship. When on the road with their cattle they travelled phenomenal distances, usually making the trip from Seaton to the Gap in one day. After spelling them for a day or so there they were pushed on over the Barkly and up the Middle Ridge on to Skene, or went up Violet Spur to Spring Hill. As they came out in the autumn, locals could track their progress from the smoke as they burnt off behind them coming down the Middle Ridge, ensuring there would be fresh pasture for their cattle next season. During the 1939 fires they lost none of their cattle in the bush, and the undergrowth reduction where their cattle had grazed resulted in minimal losses to the Woolybutt stands on their runs.

In June 1933 Artie took part in a successful search for two prospectors lost in an unexpected blizzard on Connors Plains. The two men, Michael Evans Mack aged 33 and Thomas Adams aged 64 were both from Wood's Point and travelled to the area with George Gregory from Glencairn who was returning from one of

Rumpffs' Spring Hill hut, iron-sheathed and part derelict.

Rumpffs' hut near Mt Skene (Frogs' Hollow).



Remains of Rumpffs' hut at Primrose (Riggall's) Gap.

his regular trips over the mountains. Gregory left them at the Spring Hill hut on Wednesday, arranging to return for them on the Friday following. They prospected until late on Friday, when they were suddenly caught in an unexpected blizzard as they were trying to find their way off Connors Plain. They later claimed that at the height of the blizzard two feet of snow fell in five minutes. Gregory, unable to reach them, returned home due to the weather and was unable to report them missing until the following Tuesday. A search party of Constable Hanrahan from Heyfield, Bill Floyd and Artie Rumpff went to Coleman's hut on the Licola side of the Gap that night by car meeting up with Gregory. The next morning they rode up top, and located the two men that afternoon in an abandoned hut on Connors Plains. They were in a bad way, having had no food since the Friday, existing on snow and grass, and were wet through and suffering from frostbite. They were taken the fifteen miles to Coleman's hut across the saddles of Artie and another of the party. This was an incredible ride, with the first ten miles being through knee-deep snow. At the hut Artie, Bill Floyd and George Gregory stayed with the men while Constable Hanrahan drove to the Hill property "Glenlonan" to summon a doctor by phone. They were taken out the next day and hospitalised. It is a tribute to the bushmanship of the party that they were able to locate the men in the first place, and then to be able to carry them out to safety.

The brothers relinquished their runs in the early 1950s. The freehold at Spring Hill was sold to Ernie Hugg for £115, and fenced for the first time. Their yard on the fence line was bulldozed and replaced with a modern one. Hugg ran cattle on the freehold, servicing them and some of his timber operations from a transportable hut that was located across the track from the original hut. This more recent hut was burnt to the ground a year or two ago. After the Rumpffs the area was grazed by Maurice Coleman, George Barraclough and Ron Sweetapple, with their areas also incorporating George Gregory's runs. Today the leases are still Crown, and the freehold from the Gap is owned by the Higgins family who bought it in the early 1950s.

Juer, the only one of the brothers to marry, died in 1951. Artie died in the following year and Alf passed away in 1963.

The hut on Spring Hill is slowly falling down. Every time I visit it more sheets of iron are gone from the chimney and names so labouriously pencilled year after year on the tin above the table can no longer be read. A wombat has made his burrow under one of the corner posts so now that swings in mid air. No doubt next time I am there that part will have started to collapse. It isn't a famous hut, or even one of great architectural significance amongst cattlemen's huts. It certainly isn't the oldest, but it is still sad to see it ending this way. Huts such as this one, that have a long association with cattlemen should not be allowed to fall down forgotten once their useful life is over. In New South Wales there is now an Association dedicated to the care of the Alpine huts around Kosciusko. The question now is – will we see the same recognition here of the historic character of our unused huts in time to ensure that we have more left than just photographs and memories.

Linda Barraclough

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A scene from Lovick's mountain cattle round up where guests participate in this annual event.

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THE PACK HORSE

H. J. Stagg

Sometime about the mid-nineties of last century a prospector named Ned Crimmins started prospecting in East Gippsland from near the mouth of the Bemm River at Sydenham Inlet, then called Bemm Lake. He worked his way up the river, through rough country, just carrying his swag, dish and pick and shovel, trying the various creeks for gold, but apparently he didn't find anything worth while till he eventually arrived at the junction of the Combienbar and Errinundra rivers. The Errinundra came in from the left or western side of the Bemm river or the Combienbar as it was known from that point northwestwards.

Ned Crimmins followed the Errinundra up for several miles along its scrubby and steep sides until he arrived at a saucer shaped flat of some hundred acres or more. There was also a promising looking creek coming into the river at the top end of the flat on the western side. This creek was later known as the Boulder Creek, or Bola on some maps.

The hills came in like a pincer movement at the bottom of the flat and the river went out through a rocky, narrow gorge, which had apparently been blocked with timber and debris at some previous big floods causing the water to dam up, depositing several feet or more of rich silt on the flat ground and killing all the large gum trees. The flat then became covered with ferns and patches of rich native grass and clover, the seed of the latter probably being started by some earlier cattlemen.

Crimmins struck payable alluvial gold in the Boulder Creek, and as it was not a one man job, he went ten or twelve miles across country to the west and got a man named Joe Pike to come and help him work for the gold. After some time they had worked for nearly a mile up the creek, the gold gave out and Joe Pike went back to his farm in the hills and Ned Crimmins went to Western Australia.

Within six months Crimmins was back again, having seen how the mines loamed the soil on the hillsides and found gold reefs in Western Australia. He again got Joe Pike to come with him back to Boulder Creek and in a couple of days they found a very rich gold reef a few hundred yards up the side of the hill. Now the problem was how to work the reef and extract the gold. They were miles from anywhere with no roads and very rough country

Eventually after some preliminary work on the reef, a company was formed, called the Gippsland Boulder Mining Co. after a rich mining company in Western Australia at that time. Mining machinery was ordered from overseas or Ballarat and arrived months later by boat at Lakes Entrance, or Marlo, and a contract was let to two bullock drivers at Orbost, Andy Hewit and George Morgan, known as Red George, as there were several George Morgans then. They must have been super-bushmen and bullock drivers, as they had to haul the heavy machinery on the waggons over fifty miles through the bush as there were no roads at that time, and cross the Bemm River twice. They used block and tackle and doubled up their teams of bullocks in all the bad places and the steep hills.

It was a slow job but eventually the machinery arrived and was erected into place. The mine started working and producing gold. There were some thirty or more men employed there and there was even a boarding house. Once everything was going and no more heavy machinery was necessary, regular supplies of explosives, food, clothes and the etcetras were brought there by a packer with a team of up to twenty or so pack-horses every twn days or so from the nearest town, which was Orbost, a trip of at least two days.

This packer also brought in mail and took out letters and the gold after every crushing, which he took to the bank at Orbost. On one occasion he was returning to Orbost driving the horses with the empty packs ahead of him. The one exception was a reliable pack-horse which was carrying 700 ounces of gold from the last clean-up at the mine.

Several miles out from the mine, he met a man returning to the mine from a spree bender. They stopped, made a smoke and talked, and the pack-horses went on ahead. After a while the packer hurried along to catch up with the horses as they had gone on a fair way. When he caught them up he was alarmed to find the good pack-horse and the gold gone. He quickly tied up the rest of the horses and went to see if the horse had gone on in the lead, but no. He hurriedly looked back along the sides of the track to see if the horse had stopped to feed on the silver tussocks in places on the side of the track, then fearing the horse and gold had been stolen he hurried back to inform the mine manager of the missing horse and gold.

All the men came back with lanterns and bark torches, as by then it was dark, and they thought the horse may have come back to its mates that were tied up. But, no horse. All hands resumed the search at daybreak and one man who had a hunch he had seen the horse before walked along a couple of hundred yards down the hill on the eastern side and parallel with the track and soon found the tracks of one horse going down a ridge in the direction of the Boulder flat. He followed the tracks down to the flat and there was the horse feeding on a patch of clover with the pack and gold intact. It turned out that the horse had been reared on the flat after some earlier cattlemen had left a mare and foal there.

In its working life the mine yielded 36.000 ounces of gold. It had been cut off with a slide or earth movement, just as though it had been sliced off with a knife, and it was never picked up again. A recent mining company working the area said that the Mines Department had no knowledge of a mine ever being worked there.

HOT BILLY TEA

The drover knows all seasons
As he moves his cattle along.
Searching for feed and water
And makes camp by the billabong.

He feeds and stakes his watchdogs out
He turns his horses free,
And settles back upon his roll
With a mug of hot billy tea.

The shearer grabs another ewe
From the pen and pulls the cord
To start his handpiece cutting,
While the 'rousie' sweeps the board.
He anxiously glances to the clock
For 'smoko' is at three.
Then he can ease his aching back
And have a mug of hot billy tea.

The settler's wife is a battler.
She's a 'jack' of every trade.
She can milk, and cook a damper,
Her clothes are all handmade.
Her life is rather lonely
Visitors rarely does she see.
But when they come, she greets them
With a mug of hot billy tea.

The cutter in the timberland
Swings his axe with a keen cut edge,
Then falls a great grey box
Then splits it with a wedge.
He sells the posts to the fencer
For a price they both agree.
No signed contract, but a handshake
Over a mug of hot billy tea.

The swaggie wanders onward
The country is his to roam.
He travels around the stations
He calls nowhere his home.
He doesn't hold a steady job,
Just does odd jobs for a fee.
He'll split a barrow full of wood
For a mug of hot billy tea.

The wealthy squatter sips his wine
From a glass with a slender stem.
Served to him by a maid
With lace showing under her hem.
But I am just a simple bloke,
A bushman as you can see.
The way I like to greet my friends is,
With a mug of hot billy tea.

Val Kirley 19/5/1982

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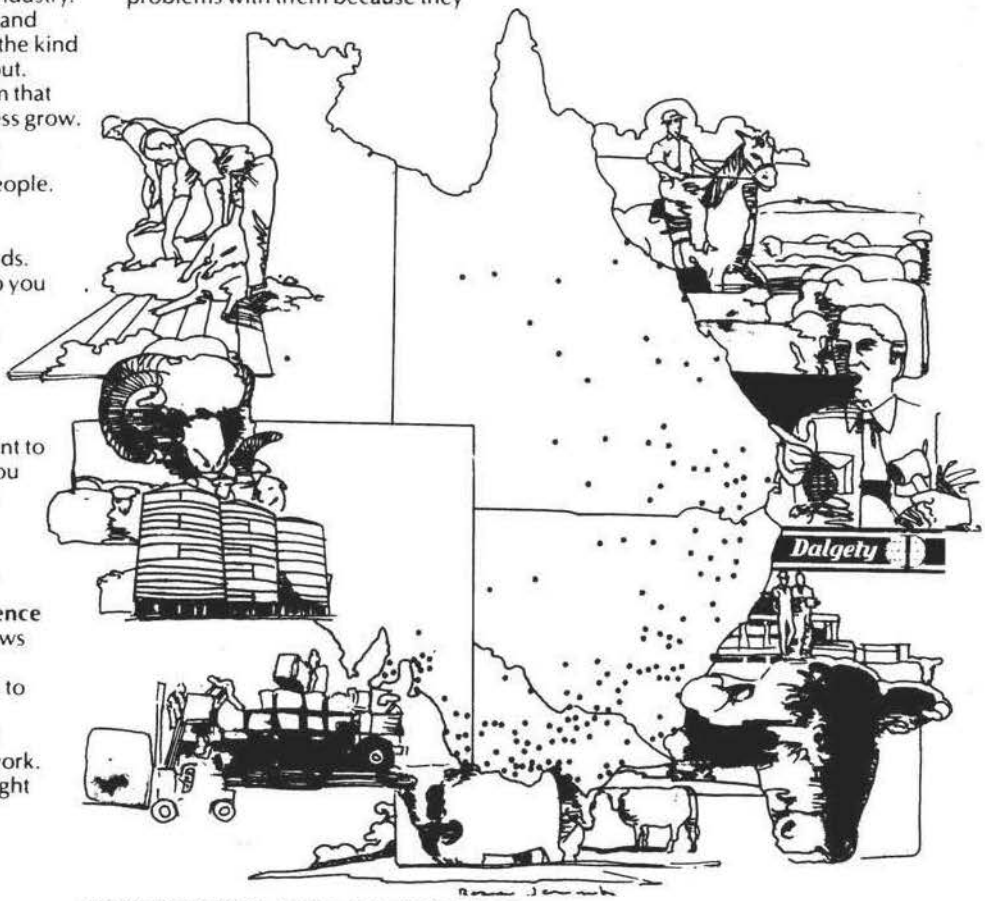

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HUTS AND TRACKS OF THE MOUNTAIN COUNTRY

Bren. Fitzgerald

In an article published recently in the Herald on a walking trip to Mt Bogong, the writer stated "Should a walker be out overnight, be sure to reach a ski hut or a cattleman's hut."

Sound advice – how often does the walker stop to think who built the hut, how long ago and how the materials were got to the site.

The original huts on the Bogong High Plains were built of split palings or slabs with a shingle roof, galvanised iron being too much of a luxury in those days. The palings and shingles would be split in the woolybutt country and the best 'splitters' would grow in an almost inaccessible place. The tree would be fallen and split, the timber loaded on pack horses and the building of the hut would begin.

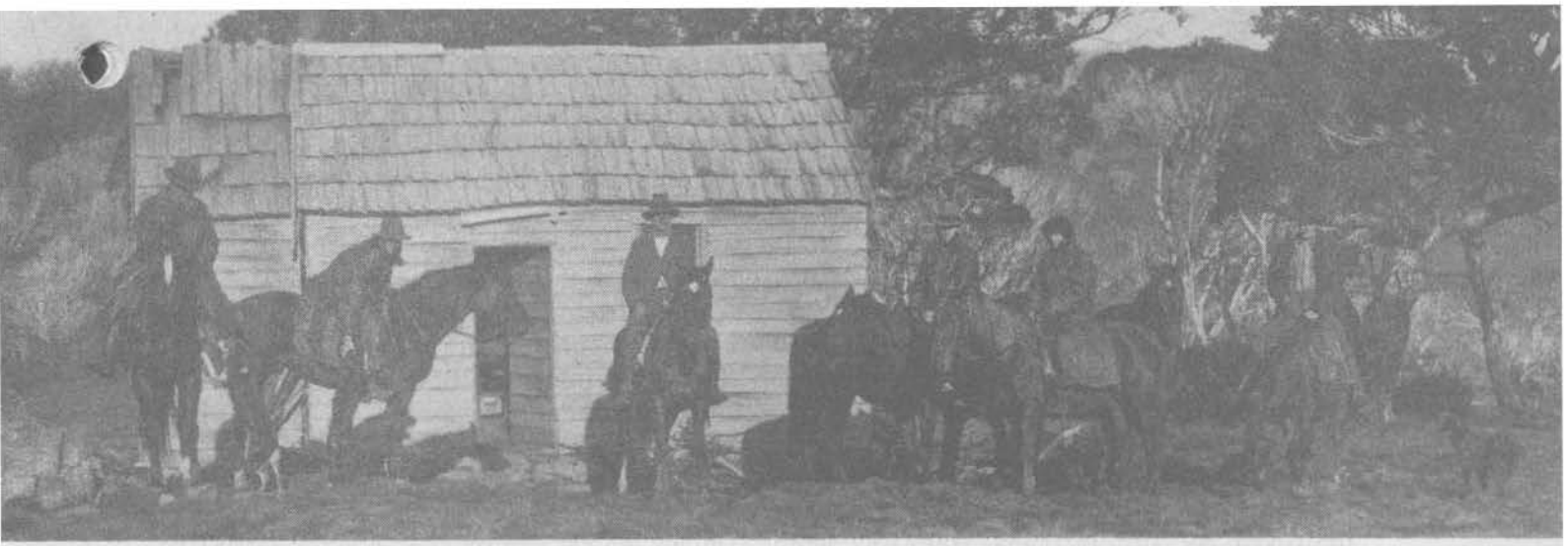
Cattlemen have always been associated with tourism. Once a cattleman had a permanent camp on his lease, other people would soon come along for a trip and so it grew. Walking trips to the high country were popular prior to World War 2 and at that time the only way for walking parties to get themselves and their provisions to the high country was to enlist the help of a cattleman and his pack horses. Cordial relations always existed between them. In the late twenties the Public Works Department built Cope Hut on the Bogong High Plains at the head of Middle Creek. This hut was built for the convenience of walkers and skiers. This was the first hut built other than those belonging to cattlemen, and quite palatial as huts went in those days!

The timber was all split woolybutt and was packed and snigged from Hill 60, a mile or so from the site. The structure was then sheathed with galvanised iron. Bunks were built for eight people but on occasions up to twenty managed to squeeze into the hut. Running water was piped in from a spring nearby - as one person said, "The Menzies of the High Plains".

By this time the skiers had started to make their appearance on the Plains. Cope Hut was a central staging place for skiers coming across from Hotham or coming in via Fitzgerald's track.

In December 1932 the State Electricity Commission built what was known as the S.E.C Cottage. This cottage was built as a permanent residence for their Engineer-cum-Meteorologist. The Kiewa Scheme was in the offing, so data had to be collected for the project. The material for this dwelling was packed by W. Ryder and G. Hobbs of Tawonga. This was quite a feat when you consider the amount of timber and other materials that are needed for a building. The packers ability to be able to put a load together and balance evenly is really tried out. There is always a horse that objects to the load, throws the lot and unsettles the rest of the team, so you start again and hope for the best.

Early in 1933 the Cottage was ready for occupancy. By High Plains standard it was quite palatial with double glazed windows, open fireplace and stove, hot water service and internal septic toilet system The first resident was Mr T.Olsen, his wife and son, Lhasa. In the course of his term of duty he became well known to both skiers and walkers. Three others followed; A. Rufenacht, M. Romuld and finally Mr and Mrs S. Trimble and their two children. The winter of '56 was a big snow year and the cottage was completely covered with only a couple of feet of chimney poking through the snow. The strain was just too much for the building and the timber began to creak. Bill Waters brought a party of Rover Scouts across from their Lodge and they shoveled snow from the roof to ease the strain. The Cottage survived the winter and the following autumn, the Trimble family moved out.



P. J. Kelly, Bill Batty, Geo. S. Fitzgerald, Andy Kelly, Keith Kelly and D'Arcy Fitzgerald (all but Andy Kelly since passed on) outside Fitzgerald's hut (pre 1928 - re-roofed with iron in 1929).

The S.E.C. was well established on Bogong so the job became redundant. The Ski Club of Victoria became the new owners and the Cottage was renamed 'Wilkinson Lodge' after one of the very early skiers. The Lodge is now administered by the Melbourne Bushwalkers Club.

To get back to the S.E.C. Cottage, with a permanent resident they had to have a life line to get food and mail in. A track was cut down Middle Creek to Shannon Vale and a weekly pack service was provided by the Fitzgeralds. The S.E.C. track, as it was called, opened up a new way to Cope Hut and walkers and skiers readily made use of it. The largest parties travelling the route were the Victorian Rover Scouts, all heading for Cope Hut, which by this time was bursting at the seams. In January 1939 building of the Rover Scout Chalet was begun. The dream of the late W. F. Waters, Head Quarters Commissioner of Rover Scouts, was fulfilled. All the materials for the Chalet went up by pack horse from Shannon Vale, packed in by the Fitzgeralds. By this time the S.E.C. had pushed the road through to where Falls Creek now stands. Timber was then brought that far and packed across Rocky Valley to the Chalet site. A carpenter cut the timber to size to facilitate packing. A quantity of 11 ft. lengths were left until last. They too were finally packed across, much to ours and the horses astonishment! The Chalet (Stage 1) was finished just before the autumn of '39 and the Rover Scouts had the use of their home for that winter.

During Martin Romuld's term in the S.E.C. Cottage, he had an assistant, Joe Holsten of Omeo. Joe camped in Wallace's Hut, one of the oldest on the Plains. Over the years the hut had deteriorated and iron was put over the original shingle roof and it was soon made an all year round residence. The floor was of earth, quite good in dry weather, or when it was frozen. When it rained or the floor thawed out, a bog developed. Joe soon put this matter right. He split a number of slabs out of snow-gum, quite a feat on it's own. Having no horse, he packed the slabs on his back and for a man of his years, a remarkable effort. The slabs were then dressed with an adze and fitted it to the floor space. This floor has stood the test of time and heavy boots, and has outlasted the builder.

During the December - January period '28 - '29, the Government Tourist Bureau arranged a Trail Ride over the Bogong High Plains. The actual ride of seven days commenced at Shannon Vale and finished at Mt Feathertop. Thirty four riders took part. Before this ride could get underway, the most essential items were the horses, saddles and bridles, the providing of which was left to G.S.Fitzgerald and Pat McNamara. Even though this was still the horse era, in this country it was still a great number of horses to find, Pack horses and pack saddles were also needed, but George and Pat finally recruited the required number.

The Trail Riders were all business and professional men from Melbourne but were quite at home in the saddle. Some rode with Hunt Clubs and some with the Light Horse. Seven days were spent in the Bogongs with somewhere new to go each day. A base camp was set up at Fitzgerald's Hut for three days, then camp shifted to Tawonga Hut for one day and then on to Dibbin's Hut at the head of the Cobungra. The Bungalow at Mt Feathertop was reached the next day. This building was destroyed by fire in 1939, and was never rebuilt.

The ride was so successful, it was repeated in '29 - '30 with more riders, and so even more horses had to be found. This was a great problem and the party was reduced in size for the '30 - '31 ride. The Trail Rides continued for a number of years, visiting as well, areas other than the Bogong High Plains. New friendships were made and a great time was had by all. The cattlemen who guided these rides have now passed on as, no doubt, quite a few of the riders have also.

In 1937 a hut was built on Mount Bogong, in memory of the late Cleve Cole, whose death resulted from being caught in a blizzard when on that mountain with two companions. The packing of materials for this hut was done by Dudley Walker of Tawonga with a team of 12 pack-horses and an offsider. To load up 12 horses is quite a job on its own but to get them up the Staircase Spur to Bogong was an epic. Dudley Walker lost his life on active service, so it can be said, this hut is a memorial to Dud's packing ability.

In summing up I would say that once the high country had been opened up by cattlemen, tracks blazed and huts built, the tourists followed on. Some respect the cattlemen's camp and are grateful for the use of it, others could not care less - it's just a hut. How it was constructed or by whom is of no interest to them. Their main objective is to write their names in charcoal on the wall.

Kelly's hut (pre-1928) later burnt and replaced.

CLOSE THE DOOR

The snow is deep across the ranges,
Twenty miles at least.
Not a bird to sing a song,
And not a lowing beast.

Silence reigns in wintry blasts,
To sweep the open plain.
Wrapped in mantles white and cold,
The stockmen's huts remain.

No gaiety to change the scene,
No sound or human call.
A loneliness prevails the land,
Where crystal snow flakes fall.

Let's leave all this in nature's care
'Till spring-time waters run
To herald back to life again,
The flowers of the sun.

S. Jack Treasure

HIGH COUNTRY TELEMOVIE

A two hour telemovie based on several fictional mountain cattlemen's families was filmed in the Howqua River-Mt Buller area in October.

Mountain cattlemen, Charlie Lovick and Graeme Stoney were employed by PBL Productions as advisors with some sections of the movie.

The lead role in the film, which is called "High Country" is played by John Waters. John's comments on the value of High Country grazing and the heritage of the Mountain Cattlemen and their families has been reported widely in the press across Australia.

This publicity follows closely on the wide-spread coverage of the Mountain Cattlemen's race and campaign held at Sheepyard Flat in early 1983, and a Channel 10 documentary on the High Country with which Ken Connley and other cattlemen were associated in mid 1983.

The latest movie will be shown on the 9 Network in about March 1984.

Stars of the movie included from left: Tom Oliver, Rod Williams, Tim Hughes and John Waters who are pictured riding through "rain and mist" during one of the scenes.

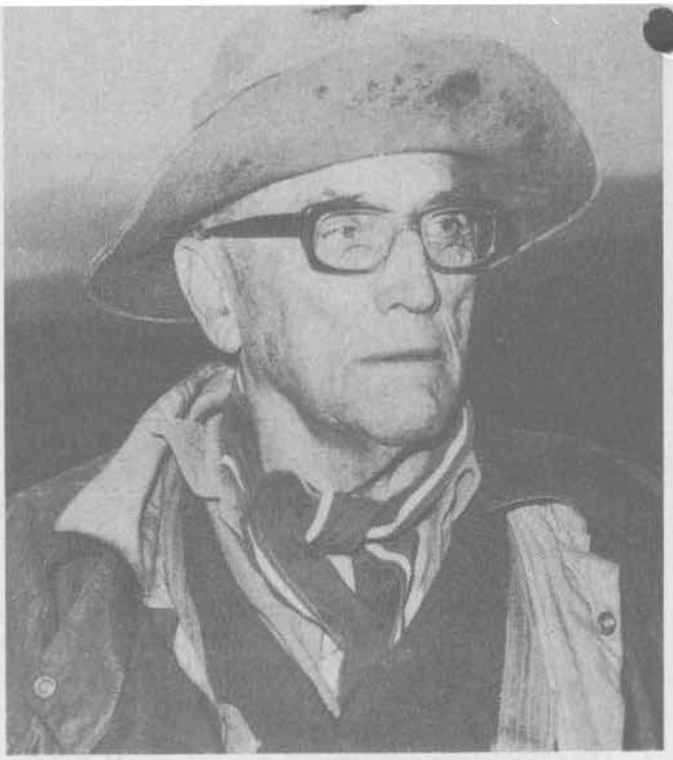
THE UPPER MURRAY SCENE

The Hon. T. W. Mitchell, C.M.G.

In the early days of settlement, the ownership of cattle was vastly more important than the actual ownership of land, and individual prosperity was largely judged by the head of cattle on a property. The person who bought a property usually bought the herd itself and had the land of the station given in free, a custom which still exists in remote parts of Northern Australia.

Cattle, therefore, ruled supreme, many of them great wide-horned brutes as wild as hawks. Book-musters were the order of the day, as an owner rarely knew how many cattle he had, or where they really were in the unfenced hill country and heavily scrubbed river flats. Cattle soon became wild and as with the brumbies and domestic horses, were an eternal nuisance in leading tame domestic cattle away into unknown areas of the mountain system. (The last of these wild cattle, a cow which could crouch like a cat and lie hidden in the ferns, was shot in the upper part of Biggera Station early in the 1900s).

The gradual extension of heavy two and three rail fences, inching slowly out across the virgin land eventually brought the cattle, now also better bred and better fed, under control. While the early beef cattle were mostly Shorthorns – and Sir Charles Cowper of Corryong Station's Shorthorns made a name for themselves – Poll Angus were imported from New Zealand to Bringenbrong Station in the late 1870s. Viewed at first with scorn, these Scottish cattle, by their success at the Melbourne markets, soon attracted considerable attention among the local cattlemen – not always favourable, however. When Charles Blackburn, the cattle boss at Bringengrong, arrived at the Station with the first mob (having driven them from Wodonga), he was asked what he thought of them – and he replied, "Christ God, I'd rather travel behind a mob of bloody black gins!"



The Hon. T. W. Mitchell, C.M.G.

From them also came a successful cross-breed, that of a Shorthorn bull and a Poll Angus cow. This produced, in the main, a slightly larger hornless beast than a pure Poll Angus, while at the same time a more compact type than a pure Shorthorn. This cross was either a blue roan without horns or an entirely black beast with horns, types which, in pre-birth-control Australia, when big families required large joints of meat for three meat meals every day of the week, proved both popular with the consumers and profitable to the cattlemen.

Beef cattle numbers naturally were reduced by the onset of Free Selection and dairying, but the District continued to be one of Melbourne's main suppliers of beef. The extension of the Melbourne-Wodonga broad-gauge railway line to Tallangatta in 1891, to Berringama in 1919, and finally to Cudgewa in 1921, meant a less arduous trip to the metropolitan markets, with beef arriving at the butchers' shops in a far better condition than when cattle had to be driven to Berringama, or Tallangatta, or Wodonga. Originally, of course, they were in the hands of the drovers for every inch of the long weary way from the Upper Murray to Melbourne, using the old main road through Greta.

Mountain cattlemen care for the high country

SPECIAL REPORT

SHEEPYARD GET-TOGETHER 1983

A new phase in the battle to retain Alpine grazing in Victoria.

During the latter part of 1982 the situation was looking bleak for Mountain Cattlemen and they became very despondent.

So soon after the last, a full L.C.C. inquiry was underway into the Alpine area. This followed the original inquiry which heralded the phasing out of many important grazing leases in the High Country.

The unfairness of this second inquiry and the intense political manoeuvering of the conservation movement following the change of Government left cattlemen angry and nonplussed at what action to take.

It became obvious that they had to fight using the same tactics as their opponents. In the past, Mountain Cattlemen as a group have been hesitant to use this type of approach but it became obvious to all it was the only method left.

With the help and sound advice of some good friends, especially Mr Geoff Burrowes, Miss Suzie Howie and other associate members, a strategy was devised and implemented.

The Sheepyard Get-together was the forum and the Mountain Cattlemen Cup, sponsored by Snowy River Productions was the drawcard. The objective was to tell the Mountain Cattlemen's story through the daily media.

The overwhelming success of that weekend is now history and the ongoing effects of that promotion are still being enjoyed by the association. Immediately after the weekend most T.V. stations gave comprehensive and indepth coverage of the event and the issues. The print media around Australia followed likewise.

The keynote address by Graeme Stoney was fully reported in several major newspapers including The Australian which included exerpts from Jim Commins' speech and the reply by Mr Evan Walker, the Minister for Planning.

Follow up has been good with a Channel 10 documentary and the recently completed Telemovie based on fictional Mountain Cattlemen's families made by PBL productions.

Cattlemen should bear Geoff Burrowes' original advice in mind now and sieze any opportunity to keep the ball rolling.

It is vital that this fight is continued in the media and at a political level. Our opponents are doing this and cattlemen must do likewise if they are to survive.

Now let's look at some more facts. The areas we graze consist of 1¼ million hectares. And on this we put only 20,000 head of cattle — all up. That works out at around 90 hectares per adult beast. Compare that to lowland grazing where a farmer normally runs one beast to the hectare. And that's all the year around. We graze the High Country for only 4 months of the year. So much for claims of overgrazing.

Damage and pollution? Show it to us if you can and we'll fix it. Let's face it, of course we'd fix it. Because we want our children and our children's children to enjoy this heritage.

Cattlemen consider themselves responsible and practical conservationists. As I said, this is the worst year on record. Mountain Cattlemen in many areas volunteered a cut of up to 30 per cent in their cattle numbers for this season. This was simply to make sure the country stays in good heart. Isn't this responsible? I think it is. It is part of our tradition to be responsible.

There is another point I want to make crystal clear. Running cattle in the High Country is a way of life and an honest living. There is no fast money to be made in this game. It is not possible to make a quick quid by ripping off the country.

You know the words 'conservation' and 'National Park' have a beautiful ring to them. It's like 'Mother's Milk', 'Apple Pie' and 'Quarter Horse'. People identify with conservation and rightly so. But, no-one does more for conservation of the High Country than the Cattlemen. The only difference is, that we are practical about the issue.

The main reason cattle grazing has met opposition is simply that people are ill-informed. Most people who are opposed to grazing mean well and we understand their concern. They love the High Country the same way as we do. But the trouble is that there is a small bunch of extremists, who are selfish and want to lock the High Country for their own exclusive use. They are a self-appointed elite, who feed out biased and incomplete information.

These people want Victoria to do what New South Wales did to Kosciusko. What a shambles the Kosciusko National Park is. No grazing. Not even horse riding. Imagine that, it would be illegal for the Man from Snowy River to ride in his own country now. Banjo Paterson must be turning in his grave. The noxious weeds and rotting material has got to the stage where large sections of the Kosciusko Park are impassible to people. The whole area is a death trap in a dry summer. It's bureaucracy run wild: Rangers everywhere, signs, brick dunnys, designated camping spots. And so on. A wasted natural resource.

That's what comes of locking up the High Country. Multiple use is what it's all about.

We believe in sharing the High Country. As one of our senior cattlemen, Norm Chester puts it, "There is room for everyone," and ladies and gentlemen, there is room for everyone, including cattlemen, the honorary caretakers.

If grazing is phased out, 140 years of tradition and knowledge will be destroyed. For us it would be devastating. And what about Australia? A unique and living part of its heritage will disappear.

We Mountain Cattlemen today are an endangered species. Tomorrow we may be extinct.

HIGH PLAINS INSPECTION

Mr Evan Walker, Minister for Planning, gave an undertaking, during his address to the Sheepyard Flat Get-together, to visit the High Plains and speak to cattlemen first hand about their problems and fears.

This trip is arranged for early December, 1983, and will be a comprehensive inspection by representatives of all political parties of Alpine grazing areas.

The inspection will coincide with the release of the final recommendations of the L.C.C. which are due to be published in early December.

KEY NOTE ADDRESS

1983 MOUNTAIN CATTLEMEN'S GET TOGETHER

— BY GRAEME STONEY

As most of you know there are about only 120 Mountain Cattlemen families in Victoria.

However, we have a lot of friends, and to see you here tonight makes us, the Mountain Cattlemen, very happy. We value your support because we have big problems and we need all the friends we can muster. Cattlemen are under threat and all of us are as worried as hell.

As you know, the previous Victorian Government gave 12 of our families their marching orders. That's 10 per cent of us. These cattlemen have to leave all or part of their grazing runs in 8 years from now. That's not long by Cattlemen's standards. That move was definitely the thin edge of the wedge.

The new Government has ordered the Land Conservation Council to again review the Alpine area with the objective of implementing Labor policy which is to create massive additions to the National Park network. That sounds great, but what type of National Park? One that's closed to everyone but a tiny minority? Recent experience tells us that whenever someone says National Park — that's the end of people like ourselves.

Why should we be kicked out? Our forefathers opened up this country 140 years ago. Our families have developed a way of life that we are proud of and which is of great value to this environment and to the community. Cattlemen are down to earth practical people and we love the Alps. We consider grazing the High Country is a valuable part of Australia's Heritage. This grazing should be retained as a living reminder of early Australian development. What a useful reminder!

Let me tell you a few major benefits of Alpine grazing. The cattle keep the country in good heart and maintain an attractive healthy alpine meadow. This dramatically reduces the fire hazard to the High Country. As Cattlemen know, and contrary to popular belief, wildflower displays are enhanced and stimulated by an open alpine meadow. We would like to show you areas where experiments have been done that confirms this.

Our scores of huts are maintained in good condition and are left open for all to use. How many visitors' lives have these huts saved?

Our thorough knowledge of the country has helped hundreds of people in trouble over the years.

We believe our presence in the High Country is necessary and vital. We want to share the benefits of this with all Australians.

Look at the value of our industry to Victoria. Lowland cattle breeders and fatteners clamor for our calves at the annual sales. In the worst drought in living memory, these calves look the best of any cattle in Victoria. High Country cattle valued at $3½ million will be sold this autumn. Without our High Country runs, this source of breeding and fattening stock for lowland farmers would be sadly depleted. Ask the lowland breeders the value of mountain grazing. In this year of Government subsidies designed to keep Victorian breeding stock alive, the cost benefit of alpine grazing speaks for itself.

Throughout the world grazing is an accepted use of high country. In fact in Europe, farmers are subsidised to trim the alpine meadows. This grazing is compatible with tourism, water catchment and soil conservation practices in these countries. Why is Australia considering a different approach?

During World War I the beef cattle industry boomed in the Upper Murray. In 1916, T.B. Waters sold 2 fat bullocks at £33 each. In 1920 Towong Hill Station sold 100 cows at the then record average price of £27.10.0. However, high prices for meat towards the end of World War I and into the 1920s made people gradually turn to other foods, especially cereals, for breakfast, and the traditional Australian breakfast of chops and steak lost popularity. (Large families were also less popular, owing to the contraceptive invented by a French Army colonel!). A major crash came in 1921, when store cattle bought for the then incredible price of £18 a head in 1920 only made £10 as fats in 1921.

Until the outbreak of World War II in 1939, the Upper Murray beef industry was in a precarious state. Store cattle bought in northern New South Wales at £5 a head, cost £1.10.0 to land at or near Corryong and cost the same to send to Melbourne and sell, thus leaving a microscopic amount of profit. It took a very astute cattleman, with a first-rate judgement of beef-on-the-hoof, plus luck, to break even.

The economic doldrums of the beef industry virtually ended with the advent of World War II when there was naturally a strong demand for meat to be supplied to the Australian and Allied Forces serving in Australia and overseas.

The years of World War II were exceptionally difficult ones, particularly for those on the land. Everything was in short supply, notably of course, manpower. This was made worse by the devastating 1939 bushfires, which had occurred just before the outbreak of hostilities. Miles of fencing were completely destroyed and the consequent explosion of the rabbit population was just about the last straw, and became a virulent scourge to the already short-handed property owners. Economic survival became a matter of improvise or go without until well after the end of World War II.

Cattle rustling also sprang up again, and some of the cattle thieves' highways and cattle smugglers' trails through the bush lands of the Upper Murray came into use. Meat was rationed and – understandably – to keep faith with their customers, some butchers did not feel obliged to ask awkward questions about some of the cattle they bought.

A big change came in the cattle industry itself in the post-war years. Before World War II cattlemen in the Upper Murray bought large numbers of store cattle in northern New South Wales or Queensland. Sometimes they had to wait some weeks or a month or so before the right type of store beast became available, but it was different after World War II. They could wait a whole buying season and still not get any store cattle at all to fatten for the following year's market. This state of affairs was partly a side effect of the introduction of superphosphate, which brought great changes to the Australian pastoral industry.

The wide-spread use of superphosphate meant that whole areas of land nearer Melbourne, that in former years might have starved even a billy goat, were now fattening cattle; and a new class of cattle fatteners were competing in the store-cattle markets of New England and Queensland. As a result, cattlemen in the Upper Murray turned to breeding their own cattle, as well as buying stores when available.

Photo Elyne Mitchell

Cattle on Towong Hill Station.

Memories of the cattle crisis of 1921 still lingered, and because the increased demand on store cattle markets by the new bracket of cattle fatteners had pushed prices to dangerous heights, no one on the Upper Murray who fattened cattle was over-keen to lay out a solid amount of money for stores one year in the hope of selling them profitably as fats the next year.

A saving factor was a 15-year agreement with England to take a definite amount of Australian meat for that time. It has to be remembered that only 35% of Australian meat is now consumed locally, 65% has to be sold overseas either to the Anglo-European, Japanese, and American beef markets; or to smaller markets such as Mauritius, Malayasia, or Korea.

Another feature of the overseas beef market that had an impact on the Upper Murray was the presence of foot-and-mouth disease in South America, a fact which caused the United States to turn to Australia for certain classes of meat, mainly beef suitable for hamburgers and similar products. This caused a run on old bulls and old cows that made these aged animals more profitable than prime-fat young bullocks, and consequently numbers of Australia's breeding cattle were slaughtered and sent to the United States.

In the 1920s strange cattle with brick-red coats and white faces were seen colourfully dotting the cattle pastures of the district, but few people at that time realised that they were witnessing the spear point of the invasion of a breed that would soon dominate the Upper Murray -- the Herefords, either pure Herefords or a Hereford-Shorthorn cross – and yet another variation of the Hereford was soon to arrive. The malfunctioning of the railway to Cudgewa launched not only a new breed of cattle in the Upper Murray, but also produced an outstanding Upper Murray citizen – Louis Leake (junior).

The railway from Wodonga and Melbourne had reached Cudgewa finally in 1921, after feats of incredible engineering skill. In order to cope with the curves and abnormal gradients, the truck couplings were lengthened to such an extent that when the steam-driven cattle-train, having panted laboriously up a mountain, began its downward run on the other side, these same couplings jerked and crashed in a crazy din of tortured metal, causing a continual stopping and rushing forward of cattle trucks. The same process took place on the initial part of the next climb. Virtually all the cattle in the cage-like trucks were flung violently down. The long-horned Hereford cattle could not always get up because their horns became entangled with the horns of other cattle, and with the iron bars of the trucks. Their meat, of course, suffered considerably and by the time the Melbourne saleyards were reached a proportion had to be sold for dog meat as blemished beasts.

Old Mr Louis Leake took all this with a shrug of his shoulders, but young Mr Louis Leake was anything but satisfied. He was determined that something must be done by way of improvement, and felt that the Poll Hereford breed might hold the answer to the problem. His father was very luke warm, with some justification, because although Poll Herefords had been introduced first from America in 1926, they hung fire badly, so much so that when his son started his Poll Hereford stud ten years later, his was only the fifth in Australia.

Young Louis Leake's faith in this new breed was soon justified by successes with his stud stock at the Royal Shows of Melbourne and Sydney, as well as at local shows such as Corryong, Tumbarumba, Wangaratta and Albury. At the Melbourne and Sydney Royal Shows he won 22 firsts, 8 championships, 8 reserves and 8 cups. His services as a capable judge were required frequently at local shows as well as in Adelaide, Launceston and Brisbane. He was also asked to judge at Sydney and Melbourne, but refused, because he wanted to exhibit his own stock in those centres.

His stock sales are interesting. Like the proverbial prophet he got little support from his own district. The breed just did not take on in and around Corryong, and for every bull he sold in the Upper Murray, he sold at least 25 over two hundred miles and more away from it.

From 1945 to 1950 he sold 25 - 28 bulls

averaging about £175 and 25 - 30 females averaging about £200. Sales continued on the upgrade but he only made three sales of bulls for over £1,000 while the most he ever received for a female was £500. When finally disposing of the stud he sold about 125 females for an average of slightly above £400 per head.

Louis Leake (junior) took an active part in reorganising the whole structure of the breed's administration. He travelled extensively and worked unceasingly for this purpose, and lived to see not only a championship cup named after him at the Sydney Royal Show but the breed's society became the largest beef breed society in Australia.

The highest recognition came in 1975, when Her Majesty, the Queen, personally invested him with the Order of Australia.

The 1950s saw the crystallisation of a change in the Upper Murray cattle industry that had begun at the end of the 1920s. The Herefords had become dominant from a tentative beginning abour 1929, and their numbers gradually increased at the expense of the other breeds. Simultaneously, there was a marked improvement in the overall standard of cattle produced, no matter what breed, and far greater attention was given to culling.

There was still a good deal of what can be termed inferior cattle, but the decrease in the number of dairy farms lessened their numbers. In the old days, many farmers would put any old bull on any cow and as a result the beef industry suffered.

The increased number of cattle studs in the District about this time also improved the quality and quantity of Upper Murray beef, and in the 1950s the Upper Murray was producing 25% of Melbourne's beef requirements.

The general improvement in the industry also owed a great deal to the higher carrying capacity of the land itself, due to the application of superphosphate to the new grasses that had been sown to replace the exhausted and not over-nutritious native grasses. The new grasses included cocksfoot, demeter fescue, clovers, and rye, the long standing pasture grass of older countries, which had been grown in England as far back as the year 1677.

The increase in the number of cattle, and improvement in their quality, has not been without difficulties and drawbacks. Of the consumer dollar, Upper Murray cattlemen only get 37 cents, whereas the American cattlemen get 52 cents. In Australia, trade union greed and the middleman's greed contribute very materially to this highly unsatisfactory state of affairs and costs of production have also risen very substantially. Back in the days of the 1920s, for example, the price of one fat bullock would pay for a station hand's wages for one month, whereas a few years ago the price of one fat bullock would not cover wages for one week.

With regard to pasture improvement, the increase and spread of various noxious weeds has meant more costs in sprays and wages, but myxomatosis has at least partially mitigated the traditional and expensive battle with the rabbit.

The policy of making two blades of grass grow where one blade grew before has meant more cattle on the beef grazing areas. Formerly Khancoban Station had 1000 breeding cattle and 400 steers. Now it runs successfully 2,500 cattle and 4,000 sheep (as well as thoroughbred horses) on a smaller area of land. Towong Hill Station, to give another example, used to handle 700 store cattle, 150 breeding cows, and sundry young cattle. Now it carries sometimes as many as 3,000 cattle of all ages, as well as some sheep. Higher beef production has, however, meant greater expense in drenches and other chemicals to deal with the diseases which eventually occur when greater numbers of animals are congregated together on pasture. There are four kinds of worms detrimental to cattle, which include brown worm; barber's pole worm; long worm; hook worm; and ostertagia, but liver fluke does more damage than any of these.

The scourge of brucessosis came in about the 1960s, and in this regard the interstate character of the Upper Murray district is emphasised by the fact that the compensation for the ravages of this disease is better in Victoria than in New South Wales.

The creation of an entirely new breed of cattle, subsequently known as Murray Greys,

was the result of the intuition and determination of two Mrs Sutherlands of Thologolong.

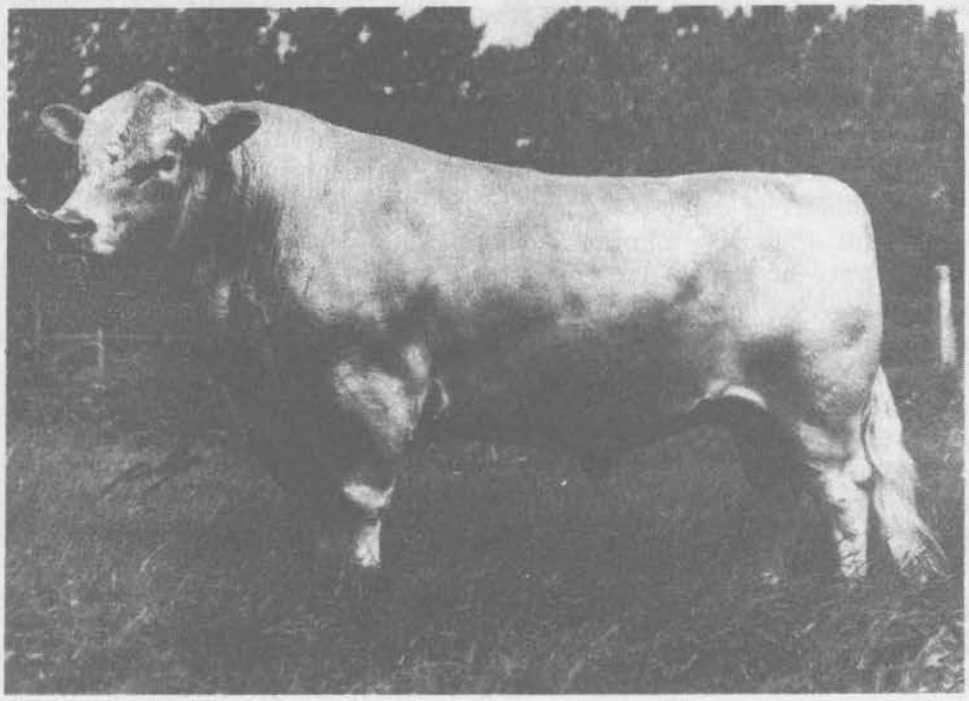
After the 1902 drought, Mr Peter Sutherland of Thologolong bought about 100 Shorthorn cows to eat down the excessive growth of grass when the rain finally came. In 1905, one of these cows, when crossed with a Poll Angus bull produced a strange, pale-coloured calf. Mr Peter Sutherland was all for cutting its throat on the spot, but Mrs Sutherland talked him into letting it live. Similarly coloured calves appeared in the following years, and each time Mrs Sutherland had her way.

Gradually a small herd of these animals built up on Thologolong. They were regarded as a complete curiousity, except for Mrs Sutherland's belief in them, although Mr Sutherland would have preferred to get rid of them all in case they spoiled his Poll Angus herd. This attitude continued right up to the 1950s, when the quality of their meat began to attract the attention of the butchers. Later this grew until it exploded into a boom in 1968, when a Thologolong cow and calf were sold for £6,500. By now the Sutherlands were supported in the production of the breed by their neighbours, the Gadds.

In the meantime, the late Mr Herbert Barlee, (a descendant of an old and distinguished English family), who had been battling it out on Upper Khancoban making a somewhat precarious living from dairying, pigs, (and anything that was going), decided to go out of dairying and into beef, using Poll Angus cattle. Becoming interested in Murray Greys, and encouraged by his wife, he started on the road to prosperity and fame in 1957 by buying one Murray Grey bull and three Murray Grey cows. It is interesting to note that at this stage there was no fixed name for the new breed; they were sometimes referred to as Scottish greys; greys; nun-greys; or mousie-mulberrys. Finally, due mainly to Mr Barlee's enthusiasm and vision, a society of the breed was formed in 1962, and Barlee's suggestion of the name Murray Grey was oficially adopted – an excellent choice, because of the breed's origin on both sides of the Murray River.

Meanwhile, Mr Mervyn Gadd, in 1960, had scored a record price of £250.10. 0 for a pen of five Murray Greys, and also the highest price for vealers.

Barlee quietly and methodically developed his stud on his property near Khancoban. In 1959



"Day Star" bred on "Bimbadeen", Khancoban, by the late Herbert Barlee.

be bought two more Murray Grey cows and a bull, and the same again in 1960, so that he now had all Murray Greys. The quality of his stock was so high that he could refuse £11,000 for one of his Murray Grey cows that started with a bid of £5,000, and rose with bids of £1,000 until bidding ceased. He was later to sell a bull privately on his property for £40,000 and at another sale of his stock on November 7, 1968, he grossed £118,000. With his wife and two sons to help him on his property, he became a justifiably wealthy and respected man. He died in 1980.

The Nankervis family, on the other hand, achieved success by concentrating on the breeding of what could be termed wild cattle, in the two land-locked valleys of Geehi and Groggin, which lie sunk deep beneath the western slopes of Mt Kosciusko and Mt Townsend. These valleys are freak geological formations called "Graben" (German for grave) made, in each case, by the earth, countless thousands of years ago, splitting into two parallel cracks only a mile or so apart. Subsequently the earth between the cracks dropped and caused a long grave-like hole in the earth.

The Nankervis family took over both Geehi and Groggin from Mr Pierce, who had employed Jack Riley, (The Man from Snowy River) on Groggin. There were about 1200 acres of freehold in Geehi which, with Groggin, gave them about 3,000 acres of freehold, half in New South Wales and half in Victoria. Surrounding these two small areas of freehold were thousands upon thousands of acres of lease-hold running deep into Victoria over Mt Pinnabar to the silent bush glades of Buenbar, almost extending to Benambra; and in the opposite direction running all over the highest peaks in Australia, Mt Kosciusko and Mt Townsend.

This country contained rich river flats along the Indi River, which soon gave way to reasonably good, undulating red-soil country, but most of it was rock covered and still virtually unexplored.

All the cattle were extremely wild Herefords and Hereford-cross, about 600 cows, which, with young cattle plus calves, made up about 1,500 head, from which the Nankervis could count on about 400 store cattle each year for their fattening country near Corryong.

However, stock numbers varied greatly in such country. In good years, numbers were high, but when winter cold was extreme and snow lay long, the Nankervis were forced to bring most of their cattle out of these areas and pay for their agistment elsewhere. With little money to spare, superphosphate could not be put out nor pastures sown down, no bridges could be built across rivers often swollen by melting snow, and only the minimum of fencing could be done.

The cattle were mustered up onto the snow leases in the spring and brought back to Groggin and Geehi in autumn. The life was extremely hard, the long hours trying the men's physical resources to the utmost.

The only vehicle that could get into Groggin was a bullock dray, and then only from Omeo. Blackberries were beginning to obliterate what pastures there were and the rabbit was moving in. But it was the Kosciusko National Park's increasingly grasping hand which largely wrecked the Nankervis mountain empire, and with all these accumulating difficulties, the Nankervis family decided to pull out, thus ending, probably for ever, a Wild West form of enterprise which had been part of the Upper Murray for a century or more.

In the early 1940s, with World War II well under way, three-year-old bullocks brought £15 - £20, but with the disruptions of war time, prices rose suddenly to between £30 - £40. Disaster struck in the late 1940s with a vicious outbreak of pleuro-pneumonia in the Upper Murray. Although there was Government compensation at market value for the owners, this contagious disease was a serious blow to cattlemen, and involved much labour in blood testing and quarantining. All cattle having the disease or suspected of having it were shot immediately, and burned or buried. The property concerned was then quarantined for some months, and cattle on it were re-tested before the quarantine edict was lifted.

Pleuro quarantine had a strange and not unbeneficial result for the Upper Murray. Where a property fronting a road was quarantined,

cattle were not allowed to be driven along it on foot. However, it was under any circumstances perfectly legal to take cattle along this same road by motor transport. Hence the pleuro disaster was partly responsible for the benefit of motorised droving, and a new era began.

A major disaster to the cattle industry all over Australia occurred between 1976 and 1978. A great economic slump, due to the collapse of the overseas markets where 65% of Australia's beef was sold, hit the District. No one wanted bullocks over 650 lbs. and, for example, a consignment of Upper Murray Hereford bullocks, weighing 900 lbs. only brought $90 a head. The price for prime fat bullocks that for some years had averaged $300 a head, plummetted almost overnight to $100 (and they had to be absolutely prime - to achieve the $100 mark). Some 1,000 head of unsalable cattle were summarily shot, and then buried by means of bulldozers

By 1978, the cattle market had rallied to a point where at least the careful cattlemen could just carry on and avoid bankruptcy. In mid-1978 bullocks weighing 650 lbs dressed weight brought 37 cents per lb., while a dressed weight of 500 to 600 lbs. brought 35 or 36 cents per lb. Some calves, 10 to 12 months old, still sucking their mothers, were making 40 - 50 cents per lb. Prediction for the future is difficult when the majority of our beef sales depend entirely on the vagaries of the Anglo-European; United States; and Japanese markets. A solution will have to be found also for the fact that, as we have noted before, the Australian beef producer only gets 37 cents of the consumer's dollar, whereas the American beef producer gets 52 cents of his consumer's dollar.

Classification could possibly help the situation if the beef producers have classes, say 3, 4, or 5, and if the butcher wants class 4, he merely asks the beef producer for class 4, for which he is paying 40 cents a pound. This system would probably reduce agents' commissions and yard costs and with less handling, means less bruising of the cattle.

One of the most interesting and characteristic epochs in the history of the Upper Murray was the pasturing of cattle, and later of sheep, on the snow-leases, areas in the snowlands which were leased for about 6 months of the summer season, generally from the first of November to the first of April. Usually they were about 5,000 acres in area and were mostly used as an insurance. If the spring seemed to indicate a poor year on the main stations, young

Photo T.W.Mitchell

Spring muster in the High Alps, near Mt Kosciusko.

cattle were sent up to the snow leases until room was made for them on the home stations by the sale of older cattle which had reached the fat stage, and were sold off during the summer.

The day to day existence out on these snow leases was typical of many decades of the Australian bush way of life. As the days warmed and lengthened and the snows receded, stock horses and pack horses were mustered in and checked, their feet trimmed and the farrier's hammer tap-tap-tapped as the shoes went on the previously cleaned hoof soles. Bridles, halters, breast plates, martingales, girths and stirrup leathers, and cruppers, were repaired or replaced, as a man's life could depend on the soundness of his gear at full gallop over rough country. Enough spare horse-shoes to last at least a month against the suction of the yellow-green spagnum bogs, with special shoes for individual gaits or hooves, had to be got together, likewise enough horse-shoe nails to cope with replacements; the buffer was needed for shoeing as well as the two kinds of farrier's knives, both quarter moon-shaped and hooked, the cutters; pincers; rasps; grease; tar; some kerosene – and any other gear to keep a horse sound and sure-footed, all a bygone language now in this era of motor vehicles and restrictive National Parks.

The cattle to go onto the snow leases had to be mustered, and in some cases their tails had to be "banged" to make them more recognisable when growth of hair in the cold of the snowlands obscured normal brands and ear marks. Stockmen went into the yards into which the cattle had been mustered, grabbed a tail, and with a sharp knife cut right across the hairs at the end. This required accurate timing. If the stockman didn't grab the tail firmly enough, he either made a jagged cut on the beast's tail, or he cut his own left hand. If he hung on too long, the beast panicked and pulled him through the mob, or swung round violently and attacked him.

Rations were all laid out, measured, and weighed, according to the pack bags to be hung on the saddles of the pack-horses. Block-salt was taken for the cattle, and in some cases camp-ovens, pots, frying pans, and billies had to be taken too, although these items usually stayed permanently in the snow-lease huts.

So began the long drive out, climbing, foot after foot, hour after hour, upwards through the aromatic colonnades of Alpine ash, with giant logs and wombat holes under foot, the smell of horse and cattle sweat and of fresh cattle droppings all mixed up, but still pungent separate entities, and over all the cloying smell of the gums.

Then came the final panting arrival at the top, out into the wild tangle of the snowgum thickets, with the first springy unevenness of the snow-grass sward underneath; the dogs throwing themselves down to pant unrestrainedly, and the men off their horses, pipes lit, saddle-girths loosened, horses breathing deeply but easily, and perhaps shaking themselves, their saddles flapping madly, the cattle spreading out and sniffing suspiciously the strange, dry springyness of the snow-grass. Another and a remote world up there, a world of different values from that other world, now a full mile of air far below.

Life on the snow-lease was dominated by the horse. A man got on his horse at 7 in the morning and stayed on it until 7 in the evening, except for a short time out of the saddle to boil the saddle-carried quart pots and eat a scratch lunch, followed perhaps by a pipe of pungent, black shag-tobacco, before tightening the girth and clambering back into the saddle; a whistle to the dogs, and then off, out over the grey-green wistful sea of rolling ridges, with his eyes ever tightened for a glimpse of far-away cattle. Once sighted, it was a case of spurs into horse's ribs and a wild gallop to get them into a mob in some reasonably clear patch before they vanished in all directions.

The mob rounded up, the stockmen would pull up around them, and take a few minutes off to rest their horses and dogs and survey the beasts they had collected. After a close look it was decided, perhaps, that there were fifteen of one man's cattle, four of his neighbour's, and two belonging to someone else – there were no fences anywhere except for small horse

paddocks round the various huts, and cattle strayed where they pleased.

When the men decided whose was what, they all made a quiet move into the mob, but then everything erupted, and after a few seconds of mad confision a stockman probably found himself galloping after about eight head of cattle, three of which might belong to one man and the rest to his neighbours. His job was then to "cut out" at full speed, bogs, clumps of rocks, and over-hanging snow-gums notwithstanding, his own cattle, and chase them back to his own lease, and then return and help chase his neighbours' back onto their leases.

Back at the hut in the fading light there was a speedy unsaddling of weary horses by bone-tired men; some horses perhaps to be hobbled, and when a fire was lit in the great, wide, stone-walled fireplace, billies to be hung on the twisted and blackened lengths of fencing wire, and the evening meal to be prepared, consisting, like breakfast and lunch, of cold corned beef, damper, and thick black billy tea, well stewed and smelling of smoke and charred gum leaves.

Sometimes, particularly for a few days after arrival from the head station, there would be some refinements such as jam or treacle or tomato sauce or pickled onions, and, if the Boss was a good sport, maybe a shot or two of whisky or rum – but after that it was back to corned beef, damper, and black tea.

The evenings, with the men sitting on stumps of wood, old packing cases, or crude home-made chairs of snow-gum branches and sacking, were generally short, quiet and somnolent. Possibly on a Saturday night when there was no work next day, and some-one had a mouth organ, or a comb and paper, or a jew's harp, and there was a little rum or whisky or even plonk left in a bottle, there might be a few songs, but for the most part there were desultory yarns or slow sporadic remarks on sundry disconnected subjects. At first the lined, weather-ebonied faces around the soft red splodge of firelight would be backed by shadowy bodies, but soon these indistinct human forms would merge with the gloom of the hut, and the fire would be ringed in front by heavily etched, disembodied faces hanging in space over the black, irregular line of quart-pots and billies on the stone hearth. Then, even these faces would fade, and blend softly and slowly to become part of the all-dominating gloom of a snowland night, and the voice of an invisible body would remark, "Well, I'm hitting the hay" and, one by one, slowly and stiffly, the others would rise and stumble through the black opaqueness to their rolls of blankets and horse-rugs that, spread on a narrow bark shelf running around three sides of the hut, formed the community bed; and profound silence reigned, except for that most menacing of all melancholy sounds, the howl of a dingo.

Next day would be a repetition, and the day after and the next, except for the occasional taking of blocks of salt out on the pack-horses, until the end of the month, when it was off home to the head station for a few days of boozing, before, nursing varieties of vicious hang-overs, and swearing never again to trust another woman, the pack horses would be loaded up again with necessities, and it would be back up to the lonely snow-leases for another month.

If the snow came early, as it could, there was trouble everywhere. The cattle went off the ranges down into deep-sunk gorge heads, and the horse came more than ever into its own. Horses that had not had any previous experience of battling over snow-sealed land had to be trained, because untrained, a horse will tread boldly and heavily on the surface of the snow with his first foot, and of course will break through and sink in; he does the same with his other front foot, panics, and starts to rear up and throw himself about, finally standing with heavily heaving sides and quivering skin, completely snow-bogged and exhausted. A horse trained to snow will place his feet lightly on the surface, and then gradually adjust his weight.

Another problem comes with a shod horse when the snow sticks firmly to the cold metal shoe, and then proceeds to build up until the horse is literally walking inches off the snow surface. Again, a horse new to this will panic and plunge about, but with experience will get

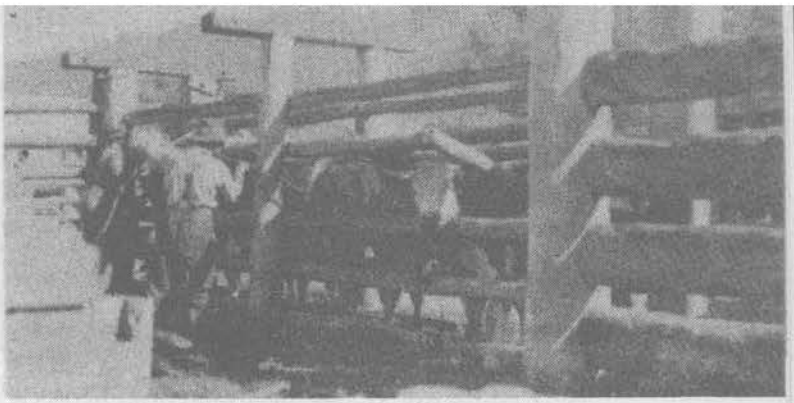
used to it. The best thing to do, however, is to knock the shoes off the horse when the snow begins to fall. In the old days when the snow became too deep for any horse, snow-trained or not, it was a matter for skis. "Snow-shoeing" out cattle was a job for the mountain stockmen a century ago, and more, in the snowlands of Australia. (The term "ski" was not used until the tourist made his appearance on the snowfields early in this century).

In the winters of the 1880s and 1890s, and well into the 1900s, stockmen were constantly employed to snow-shoe out cattle. They were equipped with the traditional Kiandra "butter-pat" skis they had most times made themselves; they had a rifle slung over one shoulder, and a stockwhip over the other, and they carried one long stick to use as a brake while running down hill. And, of course, they had a dog, or, more likely, several.

Cattle, and particularly horses, brumbies or otherwise, when caught in really heavy snow, will do what moose do in similar circumstances in Canada, and stamp a "yard" in the snow. First they will eat any grass or leaves that stick up through the snow, and when these are finished, and the snow has not thawed, they will eat each other's manes and tails, and eventually die. There are heaps of bleaching bones throughout the mountains where horses and cattle have perished in heavy winter snows.

When the stockmen skied up to one of these "yards" in the snow, they would stamp a kind of inclined ramp with their "snow shoes", and then whip and dog urge the stronger animals up this snow ramp – those beasts too weak to respond to this they shot. Then on and on through the bitter cold loneliness until another "yard" was found with its mournful contents of starving animals waiting to be rescued.

Probably the most colourful events in Corryong's year in former days were the special "Autumn Sales" of mountain cattle. For days beforehand these hairy wild-eyed beasts would come along the roads in strung-out mobs, down from the mountain tops of Davey's Plain and the Big Gib, Pinnabar, the Dargals, Numerimang and from the towering flanks of Kosciusko itself.



George Lloyd in operation. Five beasts branded in 4½ seconds. (Timed by the writer and his sister.)

After the sales there would be impromptu but lively celebrations in Corryong, with yelling mountain cattlemen on their horses "making rodeo" in the main street outside the old Court House Hotel. The celebrations continued inside the hotel, and you would see a mountain cattleman standing (none too steadily) at one end of the bar, and with his short, green-hide stockwhip flicking the light switch on and off at the other end of the room.

Next morning there would be heavy-eyed and hang-over smitten mountain men lethargically climbing aboard their horses, to head off through the clammy gloom of the early winter to just about every point of the mountain compass, often sleeping in the snow on the way.

The Kosciusko National Park, created during World War II virtually ended all this, and accordingly never again will anyone in the Upper Murray hear the rippling silver sound of a well-cracked stockwhip linger along the flanks of the Dargals, or the rattle-tankle of restless pack-horse bells deep in the snowland night, or the joyous uninhibited whoops of roystering mountain cattlemen in the main street of Corryong.

Cattle in the Upper Murray occupied a unique position compared with cattle in the rest of Australia. For countless years as rural Australia developed, cattle were in most cases in a very secondary position to sheep.

Things were different in the Upper Murray, firstly because the country was particularly suitable for cattle, and secondly, because of the havoc played with sheep by dingoes and later by sheep diseases such as footrot and fluke.

While convicts could be obtained as shepherds the dingo menace could mostly be handled by

Towong Hill stockyard, built by Jack and George Harrison of Swamp Creek, Khancoban in 1916. Fence of yards is 8 feet high.

personal shepherding by day and folding at night, but with the disappearance of the convict, the dingoes once more had an open go.

The river flats were unhealthy for sheep, and they died like the proverbial flies. Footrot and fluke were not understood at that time, so a compromise was reached by grazing cattle on the river flats, and sheep on the hill country.

There were once thousands upon thousands of sheep in the Upper Murray, particularly in the Tooma - Maragle area, even though diseases took their toll. The bush hill-country provided good pastures until the rabbit arrived in devastatingly hungry millions. That catastrophe effectively ended the grazing of sheep in any great numbers in the Upper Murray for many years. However, in the 1930s, with dingo fences to control the dingoes; netting fences to control the rabbits; improved pastures on the hill country; and scientific enlightenment with regard to fluke and footrot, there was a partial return to sheep on the Upper Murray's hill country; but it had to be a dual-purpose breed of sheep that would produce both wool (of a sort) and an attractive saleable fat lamb. Sheep still required a great deal of attention, but more money could be made out of keeping sheep on hill country than cattle. Some use is made these days of river flats, particularly in a not-over-wet summer, by stock owners buying lambs late in the year, grazing them on river flats for about five months, and then selling them as fats.

The application of superphosphate, and the introduction of the rabbit disease myxomatosis have made dramatic changes in the character of animal grazing in the Upper Murray. Animals are now being reared and even fattened (and hay produced) on hill country that could only be lightly grazed even before the rabbit established its strangle-hold. The rabbit invasion gained its menacing position very quietly and unobtrusively. With multitudes of unburned logs to hide in, the rabbit only started to burrow when it reached the ends of the good country, where the valley-heads with their good grazing impinged on the far less productive bushlands. It is hard, in these days of myxomatosis, to visualise how the countryside looked and smelled. Thousands upon thousands of acres were just bare earth, covered only by loose, spreading coverings of rabbit droppings. Rabbit burrows, with their long narrow streaks of ejected earth, pock-marked the landscape on every side. Near sunset, on any evening, any hill or open flat country would be densely covered by a moving carpet of rabbit hordes, which, in a dry summer, ring-barked all the scrub bushes, and even dug down and chewed the roots of the grass and larger plants.

Every landowner kept large packs of dogs, and used steel and cage traps. Rabbits were also trapped in tin-lined pits about 6 feet deep and 10 feet square, generally sited along a boundary or road fence. The pit, with its removable lid, was on the inward side of the fence, while on the outside two short wings guided the rabbits into a narrow race floored by two hinged metal plates. When the rabbit crept onto one or other of these plates, it swung on its hinge and dropped the rabbit down into the pit. The pits were inspected by the owner of the property or his employees at regular intervals, and sometimes a man would be up to his knees in a squirming mass of live rabbits. His arms would ache as he wrung their necks and flung them out to be skinned.

Then there were the poison carts; these had two large iron wheels and were drawn by a single horse, driven by a man sitting uncomfortably on an iron seat. For company, he had a large open tub of phosphorus poison, mixed with treacle, that was fed down to an iron box suspended below the decking of the cart. Here the deadly mixture was forced into a narrow tube, at the end of which a revolving knife cut the compressed mixture into small lumps. These lumps then fell down a funnel to drop ultimately into a narrow furrow cut in the earth by a small plough-share, this operation being

powered by a belt of metal links activated by a cog on one of the cart wheels.

While the plague years of the rabbit were devastating to any one on a farm or station, they were a God-send and economic salvation to numbers of men at a time when wages were extremely low and jobs not at all plentiful. It is interesting to note that ten rabbit skins made one A.I.F. slouch hat in the war years of 1914 - 18.

The great feature of the post World War II years on the Upper Murray was the highly successful use of myxomatosis and the immediate revitalisation of the pastures, with a considerably increased stock carrying capacity for the whole district; but while conscious of this return to prosperity, it is a very sobering thought to consider the state of the Upper Murray's economy if the rabbit suddenly developed immunity to myxomatosis, even though 1010 poison has been successfully used to supplement myxomatosis and help keep the rabbit population down to a manageable level.

The same would apply if superphosphate was completely unobtainable. The soils of the Upper Murray are not naturally rich in phosphorous, and the native grasses are of little nutritive value to grazing stock; so it is very much a case, even in these days of prosperity, for all who are dependent on grazing to keep their fingers tightly crosses.

The Hon. T. W. "Tom" Mitchell, C.M.G., a great-grandson of Elizabeth Mitchell, nee Huon de Kerilleau, known as 'The Mother of Albury' and 'The Matriarch of the Murray', was born in 1906, at Towong Hill Station, Corryong.

Retired politician, grazier, Scout leader, champion skier and snow explorer, Tom has an abiding love for the mountains – snow-clad in winter and grazed by cattle in summer.

Much of his knowledge and love of the Upper Murray was inherited from his father, Walter Edward Mitchel, who took the poet A. B. 'Banjo' Paterson on the latter's first visit to Mt Kosciusko. They stayed overnight with John Riley, in his log hut above the gorge on the Indi River, and, sharing a bottle of whisky, listened to Riley's tales of his mountain escapades. That night the idea of the famous bush ballad, "The Man from Snowy River" was born.

The Mitchell family, who grazed the high country, were dispossessed of their leases by the coming of the Kosciusko National Park.

"The Upper Murray Scene" is a chapter reprinted with Tom's permission, from his book "Corryong and The Man from Snowy River Country".

TAWONGA CALF SALE

Sale-oh, Sale-oh, the auctioneers all cried.
We had come from many miles around,
The High Plains calves to buy.
This calf sale at Tawonga,
The first for nigh on fifty years,
And the sight of all those mountain calves
Brought back memories and tears.

For years and years of breeding
On these calves have left their mark,
And any stockman with an ounce of judgement
Could pick their breeding, even in the dark.
For all these mountain cattlemen,
Professionals at the job, are they,
Know you can't sell rubbish,
For they'd never earn their pay.

In the breeding of these mountain calves
They know all the tricks.
Just speak to Wally Ryder or just ask Billy Hicks.
They run their cattle on the leases
On the snow plains up on high.
Don't let them take away their leases
And let the mountains die.

The old yards, they were made of wood,
But the white-ants had their say.
Sure is grand to see these new steel yards
That pack up and fold away.
So with these few words, I bid adieu,
And hope the agents all
Will stand us for a round of drinks, or maybe even two.

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BENCH DRILLS	WHEELS	GRINDING & CUT OPP WHEELS
GRINDERS	BOOTS	GRINDING & CUT OFF WHEELSWHEELS

THE GHOST OF ANTONIO GIANETTONI

There's a story long forgotten,
Where the Dargo River flows,
Through a wild and rugged country,
Where no human ever goes.
For the tracks that served the diggers
Are blocked from end to end,
Where the cursed blackberry brambles
In a tangled mass extend.

There are rocky cliffs resounding
To the flooding river's roar.
It's course was carved between the hills,
Ten million years and more,
Beyond the Little Dargo,
And the "Big-a-warther Hole",
As told by old Pat Kennedy,
In the mining days of old.

It was here upon "the Dargo",
That Antonio lingered on,
A recluse of the ranges,
When the golden rush had gone.
Now the priviledge is mine,
His story to unfold;
A lonely man who spent his days
Digging out his yellow gold.

He was happy by his cabin,
Self-contained in every way.
With his garden by the river,
Hemmed by fruit tree blossoms gay.
Native fish swam in the waters,
For the taking of his hook,
Wonga pigeons 'neath wild cherries,
In each cool and shady nook.

Angora goats providing milk,
And cheese was in the vat;
His mohair rugs were tanned and soft,
And goatskins for a mat.

And so it was, so far away
From home, friends overseas,
He came to find his journey's end
Beneath those tall gum trees.

As time moved on, the gold he won
Accumulated vast,
And in some secret hiding place,
He stored it to the last.
His ageing frame was slowing down,
His locks were turning white,
When sickness chained him to his bed,
The end was now in sight.

What recompense to face the worst,
Alone with none to care?
A passing stockman found him dead
In the hut he built back there.
And his faithful dog now starving
Lay beside the goatskin bed.
No hale and hearty greeting –
There was silence there instead.

By the passing of Antonio,
Rose a spirit from his grave,
To haunt those mountain ranges
Where the torrents madly rave;
And from the tree-tops bending
The wind-tossed branches sway,
And storm clouds in the ranges
Dim the light of fading day.

In the distant peal of thunder,
And the lightning's savage strike,
Comes a strange sound from the cliff-face,
In the darkening eerie night.
Then a white robed form in goat-skin
Glides down that mountain track.
'Tis the ghost of old Antonio,
Guarding hidden gold outback.

Based on a true happening S. Jack Treasure

WATER BIRTH

Rain soaked muddy ground,
Thick fog spread around.
The dairy cow I couldn't see,
And wondered where she could be.
I knew her time was very near,
And for her safety felt some fear.
But the cold which kept me home,
Left no wish in the fog to roam.
Then a lightening of the sky,
Made me catch my horse to try
To find where Eve had gone,
On this cold and foggy morn.
Saw her face in long grass hid,
The swamp had become her birthing bed.
The young calf lying behind her quarter,
Half floating, shivered in freezing water.

Wading deep I seized its long front limbs,
Struggling with it, sank deeply in
That dark, cold, watery swamp,
Exhausted, muddy and damp.
Dried the calf off with loads of dead grass,
Poor Eve just floated in the sticky morass.
So help I then called for to save her life,
Good neighbours came, a man and his wife.
Her small horns with a chain linked around,
She was towed out onto hard ground.
Then with sweet hay was put in the stable.
To stand, the calf wasn't able.
By morning they were both warm and dry,
The calf had suckled as hours went by.

Gwen Wright,
Hunters Springs, via Scone

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BAIRNSDALE — OMEO & ENSAY

BOGONG HIGH PLAINS

J. W. Edmondson

In 1901 a bush fire was burning on the upper reaches of the two Kiewas. It appeared to be the first bad fire in that area and burned for about two months – apparently there were no strong winds. That fire scorched all the Snow Gum on the northern approaches to the Alps and the Bogong High Plains. This gum is hardy and fire only kills it above the ground. Regeneration soon appears among the bleached branches. The only mountain ash badly affected were two areas of about 1,000 acres each, one on the West Kiewa's eastern approaches to the Bogong High Plains, the other on the Diamantina Creek, a tributary of the West Kiewa, which rises at Mt Hotham.

The dead woolybutts' roots soon rot and these giants crash in a decade or more and create a pile of logs criss-crossed in places twelve to fifteen feet high. In all my observations and impressions of these alpine catchments, fire appears to be the only cause of abnormal erosion, apart from the erosion which has been active more of less since prehistoric times, of which there is ample evidence.

I was always interested in soil conservation and my first visit to the Bogong High Plains was in 1901. In 1904 I planted basket willows to prevent bank erosion at Tawonga West Kiewa and they are still holding the bank. In 1901 the High Plains were heavily overstocked and exploited. Sheep up to six figures, mostly from New South Wales and more than 20,000 cattle, and on bad seasons, sheep from Omeo district were grazed there until the Soil Conservation Authority took control, prohibited sheep and limited the number of cattle.

The next bad fire was about 1914, but no serious damage occurred. In 1925 a fire did burn many approaches to the alps and the basalt plain north of Mt Flora (Mt Jim) which was of a peaty nature was badly affected and smouldered indefinitely. A heavy deluge of rain eventually fell on the dry ashes, and when this occurrs, the whole surface comes off. I saw the West Kiewa on this occasion – it was a seething torrent carrying huge logs, charcoal, ashes, dead trout, and you could hear granite boulders bumping along the bed of the river.

This deluge swept an enormous quantity of huge logs, the aftermath of the 1901 fire, down the Diamantina Creek and deposited them near its junction with the West Kiewa completely changing the course of the creek. They were burned in the 1939 fire.

I happened to be on the Plains for a week just before this fire swept through from Buffalo River to Omeo in one day, causing loss of life and destroying large numbers of cattle and sheep, also nearly all the mountain ash on the alps. Only the West Kiewa (Snake Valley) timber avoided destruction. It had been kept reasonably safe by out-of-season burning and although the fire burned right through the valley, scarcely one tree was destroyed. Fortunately no heavy deluge on the dry ashes and no disastrous run-off occurred sweeping everything before it. A large area, several thousand acres at the head of the Bundarah River, a tributary of the Mitta Mitta River near Mt Flora (Mt Jim), was burned – much of it was of a peaty nature, covered with matted snow-grass. When I rode over it the ashes appeared to be about a foot deep and looked as if grass would never grow again. To my amazement, when riding over the same area two years later, the snow grass had recovered and a marvellous crop was in full seed.

On the Bundarah there is a very interesting spot about a mile from its source, known locally as the leaf bed. There is a small seam of lignite, a specie of coal and many pieces of petrified wood are found among the gravel in the creek. Some exploring here could be very interesting.

Dividing the East and West Kiewas is the Fainter Spur, which stretches from Mt Beauty to Swindler's Gap between the West Kiewa and the Cobungra River, a tributary of the Mitta.

Another high peak is the Niggerhead basalt formation. On South Fainter is a cap is basalt covering ancient gold bearing river wash on top of cement and rotten granite. The nearest bas-

alt is the Niggerhead about seven miles distant. These two points were evidently once connected as under the Niggerhead the same wash is found at a lower level. It is also found at the lake and the Cobungra hydraulic claim at a receding level like an ancient river bed. Much alluvial gold was found in these areas under the basalt. About nine creeks come into the West Kiewa and there is much evidence of pre-historic erosion, as at their junction with the West Kiewa, extensive deltas of huge granite boulders have pushed the river against the western range, Mt Feathertop. Australia seems to be the last remnant of a pre-historic world, as its flora and fauna are not found elsewhere.

These Alpine regions, which I will endeavour to describe briefly, comprise the headwaters of the Mitta, Kiewa, Ovens and tributaries. Altitudes above 5,000 feet usually carry a heavy and variable mantle of snow for about five months. Animals are not plentiful. Wombats have recently been declared vermin by the Noxious Weeds and Vermin Destruction Department. I have lived in wombat country most of my life and have found them to be shy, inoffensive animals. The only harm I have seen them do is to root under a netting fence when it comes in their way. Several species of rats and mice, mountain opossum, flying foxes, squirrels, and dingo, over which there is a controversy. My opinion is that they are not natives, and may have eliminated summer grazing by emus, kangaroos and Wallaby. Reptiles on the higher reaches are plentiful. Tiger snakes are found up to 6,000 feet, also grass snakes. A small brown one up to one foot is found in the snow grass, copperheads are plentiful up to 5,000 feet, and brown and black are found at lower altitudes.

Birds: Emu, although not plentiful, breed there. I have seen one with a clutch of about eight young, and the most adult birds in a mob, eleven. I have also seen them floundering about in snow. The stately wedgetail eagle is there. Once I was bowling stones from the top of Mt North Fainter when one appeared interested mistook the stones for a wallaby or kangaroo and followed them down many times, trying to clutch them in his tallons. Ground larks are plentiful, also black cockatoos, king parrots and crows. Lyrebirds are numerous, every water gully secretes them. Their nest on the ground or low stumps in the gullies appears like a heap of sticks. They hatch one dark speckled egg about the size of a hen's and the young bird stays in the nest till almost fully developed. Their numbers are gradually decreasing. The fox is almost their only enemy. Wonga pigeons and a species of mountain quail are found up to about 4,000 feet. They live mostly about where the wild cherries are plentiful.

Flora: The type of season is important. On a good season, large areas are ablaze with flowers, mostly of the daisy type. Everlasting daisies are much in evidence, bright yellow and very pale pink. Much heath or heather abounds and always has. I have seen the heathy spurs ablaze with flowers.

Much Scarlet Grevillea is to be found in places about the upper fringe of the snow-gum. Dr Heber Green, of the Melbourne University School of Botany, and also R. H. Croll, members of a walking party, were interested and asked me to procure some seed, which I did.

I have traversed the Alps, mostly with parties of tourists per horse or foot and I have noticed very little change apart from the natural erosion which has been active since pre-historic times. Any serious erosion has only occurred after the summer fires and after a few years, nature has almost effaced the effects. A remarkable fact about these areas is that they are not subject to dangerous erosion.

In the 1880s when gold was discovered at Glen Wills and Cassilas, the traffic from the Ovens diggings was exceptionally heavy, mostly per shod horse and trails were worn through the snow grass. One moss bed on Mt Loch was practically obliterated but is reviving gradually. I will not comment on Rocky Valley, it is a wreck since the State Electricity Commission has been damming it to hold water for the Kiewa Scheme. Rabbits have been a big factor in altering the approaches to the alpine catchment, but they did not encroach much above 3,000 feet. I have seen them survive higher on

light snow years, but heavy snow always drove them back.

I remember the Ovens catchments before the rabbit invasion, many thousands of gold prospectors roamed the hills which were of a park-like nature, big timber and grassy and many fat cattle grazed there, mostly belonging to the miners. About every three years fires crept about for weeks, burning the grass and leaves. Disastrous fires were unknown after the hoards of rabbits arrived about the late1880's.The grass was soon eaten out and scrub took its place. Also the Forest Commission imposed burning restrictions which tend to create periodical summer fires on drought years, with disastrous results. What was good grazing country soon deteriorated into timber and scrub land, but enough rabbits always remained to keep the grass down until the myxomatosis practically wiped the rabbit out and the grassy bush is making a slow, but gradual recovery. If our scientists concentrated on making this virus more virile and contagious and it was actively distributed, it would still be a vital factor in exterminating this pest in our bush Crown lands. Although it spread into the upper catchments, the strain of the more virile virus was not introduced into these areas and the rabbit population is building again.

Snow thaws in the months of August, September and October, and warm breezy days result in floods at night in the Kiewa which drain much of the High Plains snow, but what happens when warm rain falls on deep snow has to be seen to be believed. The rain appears to go right through the snow and form a flood of water. Every gully becomes a raging torrent and the river is a white foaming flood, but even with these spring floods very little erosion occurs. The Bogong Creek race was a victim of one of these snow floods which cannot be imagined. Only on the spot contact can picture them.

In about sixty years contact, I would say without fear of contradiction that the only noticable deterioration has been caused by summer fires and S.E.C.operations. But, nature, the great healer, is steadily at work.

At present, the approaches to the Victorian Alps are in a shocking state of neglect and everyone is living in fear of the next summer fires* which usually start in the open country lower down the rivers.

I put the first trout in the Kiewa at Tawonga about 1908 – 800 yearling rainbow. I also, with the assistance of two lads, put Loch Leven trout into Pretty Valley Creek about the 1920s; they evidently could not make this beautiful creek from the Kiewa on account of waterfalls. I conducted the first skiing party per horse and pack-horse about the 1920s† and with a small party for many years spent a week on the snow in September, and have negotiated the alps every month in the year.

The only way to save the alps from destructive erosion is to make the northern approaches safe from disastrous summer fires and this can only be done by systematic burning between the first of April and 30th October, when there should be no restrictions. Fire is a good servant but a bad master. The present restrictions in our bush country tend to make fire the master in dry seasons.

To conclude my observations of the High Plains and surroundings, extending well over half a century, the flora has changed very little, if any. Its appearance varies and is caused by seasonal conditions. A brief review of the Victorian Alps shows that they contain ten peaks of 6,000 feet and over, with the big rivers to the east. The two Kiewas, the Bundarah and Cobungra drain the main portion of the high plains and surroundings. The peaks are Mt Bogong, north-east of the Plains, Mt Nelse, Mt Cope (Jack), Mt McKay, Mt Flora (Jim) and North and South Fainter. West of the Plains are Mts Feathertop, Loch and Hotham.

I have climbed all of these peaks per horse and foot many times with parties of enquiring tourists. From 1910 to 1954, gold dredges

**This article was written prior to J. W. Edmondson's death in 1976.*

† Skiing history records the first winter visit to the Plains in 1925, when the Blair brothers packed a party to their hut on the upper West Kiewa. Evidence of an earlier stay on the Plains by a party would be appreciated.

operated on large areas of the Ovens flats and tributaries. Their power was generated by wood "obtained from the surrounding hills which were almost denuded of timber" by sniging or dragging it to the flats, and although this encouraged erosion, very little was noticeable and now the great healer, nature, has obliterated all sign of their activities. I would say that these three rivers for 50 miles from their source are not subject to serious erosion. Of course, there is erosion but that has been active since the beginning of time and will continue to the end. I have seen the Ovens Valley road completely blocked by huge logs and immense heaps of rocks, caused by the run off after a summer fire.

The High Plains, as a rule, are not generally susceptible to fire, but on a droughty year, patches will burn. The areas enclosed for several years in Rocky and Pretty Valley, in my opinion, would suffer severely by fire which will always be a possibility. Many years ago, in sinking a well on terrace ground on the West Kiewa, a layer of charcoal was passed through at 40 feet, giving evidence of the run-off from some pre-historic fire.

The tourist potential of the Bogong High Plains is enormous and if opened up for that purpose, would be the playground of Australia, both summer and winter, and a marvellous attraction for overseas visitors. This huge area of rolling hills and valleys has an elevation of between 5,000 feet and 6,000 feet, mountain peaks, the Big River tributary of the Mitta on the north-east, between the Plains and Mount Bogong, and the West Kiewa, or Snake Valley on the West, between the Plains and the Razorback and Mt Feathertop.

A week or so spent in this rarefied air, puts new life and activity into both man and beast. Horses are keen to gallop. When called, cattle, instead of sauntering up, come at a gallop with tails in the air. Humans are keen to do weight tossing, leaping and jumping, even on the warmest day. One can bask in the sun and enjoy it, the thick snow grass carpet almost resembles a sponge mattress. There is no limit to the variety and extent of walks, although to have a comprehensive inspection and do it justice, one needs a horse. Of all the tourists I have conducted, from here and abroad, many world travelled, their comments were that the Bogong High Plains are amazing and equally attractive, although different to anything seen abroad. The snowfields of at least 30,000 acres usually carry snow for skiing for about five months, and I have seen drifts persist right through the summer. On one occasion, a party I was conducting had their first experience of skiing, on the slopes behing Mt McKay, in January 1925.

At the head of Rocky Valley is Basalt Hill, Ruined Castle and The Cemetery, a huge glacial deposit of granite boulders which seen from a distance has a marvellous resemblance to an outsize burial ground.

Foxes and hares, although not natives, are there, but not plentiful. The foxes remain through summer and winter, but the hares are seen only in summer months. Wild horses of unrecorded numbers also graze on the Plains in the summer, but in winter, retreat to below the snow line. Some do get trapped in the snow, eat all the hair from their manes and tails, and if not released, they perish. One year, a mob was seen near the centre of the Plains in September.

The blackberry menace is a serious problem affecting these alpine catchments. The Ovens River valley for fifty miles from its source is badly overrun and I would say 30,000 acres are badly affected and practically nothing is being done to control them. They are spreading at an alarming rate and it is almost impossible to estimate the fire risk this growth presents in a dry summer.

Another tourist attraction the alpine rivers and creeks hold is that they are literally teeming with trout, both Loch Leven and Rainbow.

At the altitude of between 1,000 and 2,000 feet, much of the fauna has disappeared or is seldom seen. In the late 1880s and early 1890s, Koala or Monkey Bears as they were then called were in evidence. Kangaroo rats, like a miniature grey kangaroo opussum, silver grey and red chested, were numerous, but contracted some disease and were often seen at the foot of trees

containing their nest, unable to climb. They now appear to have recovered and are getting back to their old numbers. Native cats, greyish in colour, with yellow spots, and about the size of a rabbit were plentiful and tiger cats, although not so plentiful, are still to be found.

Stone plovers or curlews, known by their corroboree at dusk in the summer months;

The black cockatoo is a remarkable bird and flocks spend most of their time in the snow-gum country living on grubs extracted from these eucalypts. Occasionally, when seeking a change of diet, they fly about twenty or thirty miles down the valleys in search of wattle grubs. They locate them by sight and hearing, and with their powerful beaks make the chips fly. I have seen a peppermint sapling six inches in diameter gnawed in search of a grub, until the sapling collapsed. Some people say it is a sign of bad weather when the cockatoos fly down the river, with their harsh cries.

Satin or Bower Birds, known by their jet black leader, and King Parrots, with their multi- coloured king, although rare, may be seen and heard. Many of these natives lessened in numbers after the rabbit invasion, although bandicoots, with their cry 'fit fit' can still be heard in the bush.

At a basalt outcrop known as The Battery, five sided columns of varying lengths project, and from a distance have the appearance of gums. This outcrop is the home of innumerable Bogong Moths, about one inch long. Aborigines who frequented the Plains during the summer months looked on them as a delicacy. A stone axe was unearthed on terrace land on the West Kiewa, buried deep in the soil. On the eastern slopes of Mt Loch, an outcrop of gold bearing quartz was discovered by Bill Spargo. The first parcel from this lode, delivered by pack horse team to the crushing battery yielded over one hundred ounces of gold to the ton. This mine, the 'Red Robin' is still producing and lower down Snake Valley, an area known as Damn's Flat was worked successfully for alluvial gold. A gold reef was also found at Hut Creek, which rises behind Mt Feathertop. A three head battery was lowered by block and tackle down Machinery Spur into Snake Valley but the gold content was not payable and the project was abandoned. The battery is still on the bank of the West Kiewa. Another rich gold bearing reef was discovered at the headwaters of the Ovens River, under the Razorback, between Mt Hotham and Mt Feathertop. A ten head battery was installed and much gold was produced before the reef petered out. The battery is still there as its removal presented too many difficulties.

Nature produces grass to be grazed or fed to animals, even on our rich river flats and alpine catchments, where improved pastures have been encouraged by sowing grasses. Fence an area in and exclude all grazing or haymaking for a number of years, and these grasses, introduced and native, will deteriorate and eventually almost die out, leaving a litter of imflamable material. This proves that systematic grazing keeps land in a healthy state and is a big factor in aiding the control of summer fires. Our native fauna such as kangaroos, wallabys, emus, wood ducks or geese and most of our native animals subsist on grass. A good, healthy sole of grass almost eliminates erosion.

STAND UP AND FIGHT

There is sadness in the mountains
For they've passed the word around –
No more cattle on the leases,
Soon no more the mountain stockman will be found.
It was right down there in Parliament
They passed the dreaded word,
And soon no more the baldy cattle,
These mountain men will herd.

In the balancing of nature,
The cattle are the tools,
Park rangers think they know the lot,
We know they're bloody fools.
For you cannot gain experience
From reading in a book,
Just go to Kosciusko
And take a real good look.
They get some academic
To draft up their reports
About the damage done by cattle,
But don't mention ski resorts.
So all you mountain cattlemen,
Don't take it lying down,
Don't let them take away your leases
And force you into town.

With this country's unemployment
Running at its peak,
I think the politicians' attitude
Short sighted and so weak.
For by closing up their leases,
The mountain men will lose their way of life,
There'll be agents, there'll be drovers,
And many others too, in financial strife.

And the younger generation,
What will they go and do?
With no work around or work at home,
They'll leave the mountains for the city,
Forever more to roam.
In the opening of the leases,
Their ancestors played a role,
Now they have to live in stinking town
And exist upon the dole.

For you are a legend
In the Australian way of life
And are fully self sufficient
In these times of economic strife.
And all these years you've paid your way
And kept your head held high.
If they take away your leases,
A chapter in this country's history book
Will well and truly die.

So, all you mountain cattlemen,
Stand up and make a fight.
To protect your heritage and livelihood
Is both your duty and your right.

Allan Brewer,
"Sylvandale" Herefords

RAIN FOREST

Native beeches tall, tower over all,
In the rainforest evergreen.
With here and there a waterfall,
Where many ferns are seen.

In treetops high against the sky,
Tree orchids and staghorns grow.
Birds nests, too, are seen on high,
And tall treeferns down below.

Flame trees so bright in rays of sunlight,
All over the side of the hill.
Spreading a carpet below to delight,
Right down to the edge of the rill.

The forest glades all over arrayed,
With a colourful carpet of leaves.
Wild turkeys build mounds where eggs are laid,
Deep in this litter, you see.

And a master of mimicry in those aisles behold,
As silently through the brush you walk.
The lyrebird's brilliant skill unfolds,
Imitating alike, birdcalls, whistle or talk.

The shouted word, driving the herd,
And sound of the stockwhip's crack.
The bellowing cows and barking cur,
As they go running down the track.

Birdcalls are there, ringing through the air,
Where many rare birds are found.
Tranquility and peace are everywhere,
And music and beauty abound.

Gwen Wright,
Hunters Springs, via Scone.

IN DEFENCE OF THE MOUNTAIN CATTLEMEN

Shiela Cotter

There was a time when there were two groups of people who loved the mountains - cattlemen, for whom cattle grazing on the high plains was a way of life, who knew every crag and precipitious gully; and bushwalkers who trained and endured hardships to be able to enjoy the beauty and peace of the bush and mountains.

There was, I felt, a bond of friendship between the two groups - how I envied those walkers who met and camped with cattlemen and listened to their yarns far into the night! They are experts in local history and masters of story telling (even if they do make them up as they go!).

It's sad that some antipathy has developed between two groups of people who love the mountains so much. To some cattlemen, bushwalkers are synonomous with conservationists - those city bred 'experts' who think they know best and how to preserve the environment and who are trying to evict the cattle from the mountains.

Cattlemen cleared the tracks, gave us the hospitality of their huts, transported us and our equipment in the early days, and have looked after the mountains superbly for 130 years. They are part of the Australian heritage and a unique breed of men. Let us not lose this.

But it not for sentimental reasons that I support cattle grazing but a conviction that it does no harm to the environment - certainly no more than do our boots! After all, the Alps of Central Europe have been grazed for centuries.

Over grazing in the early years may have caused damage, but it is my contention, that controlled grazing, as is now practised, is not harmful, and that most damage was caused by rabbits, bushfires, in later years by increasing numbers of feral cats and dogs, and most of all by motorised vehicles.

The moss bogs on the Bogong High Plains were severely damaged by the '39 bushfires (it takes a fierce fire to affect bogs). Cattle do not eat bogs and do not like walking in them. While crossing the Bogong High Plains in '80, I noticed that the bogs were untouched by cattle except for one or two places. According to one who has studied them, the indentations make little dams which fill with water and eventually with new-grown moss. By the way, if cattle were destroying the spagnum-moss, how do we explain the seemingly unending supply for hanging baskets, and where does this supply come from? Where indeed?

Where cattle graze effectively, the risk of fire is greatly reduced as the pasture is trimmed and remains green longer. Compare this with areas surrounding tracks on Mt Feathertop, Mt Birregun and many other areas where the chaos of scrub, fallen timber and debris would cause havoc in the event of fire.

Accessibility is easier - instead of impenetrable scrub which may well overgrow the land if cattle are withdrawn and if controlled cool burns are not permitted. (Remember, 2 years ago, two walkers on Kosciusko were overdue by a week - not lost, but impeded by scrub.)

The sight of cattle in the high country adds a pleasing dimension to the scene - they look great, and remember they are very lightly dispersed - 1,000 head over 1200 square kilometres.

Native plants co-exist where cattle graze, as can be evidenced every season. The Cattlemen's Annual Get-together in February, 1980 was held on Holmes' Plains, where cattle have grazed for 100 years, and the many acres of wildflowers were an absolute blaze of colour.

I do not like 4 - wheel - drives nor trail-bikes, and on my last visit to the Bluff I noticed an unused track that was very well grassed over - nature's healing at work.

Assertions of erosion from cattle have been grossly exaggerated. Grazing by cattle causes virtually no erosion - the greatest damage occurs when fires are followed by heavy rain,

by vehicles and by rabbits. The Land Conservation seems to be more tolerant to mining and quarrying of stone for road-making. I find this incomprehensible.

MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE, the silence from conservationists - including walkers - on the development of a new skiing village on Mt Stirling and also Dinner Plain, is astounding and hypocritical. Some who have jumped up and down about cattle grazing are remaining remarkably quiet about these environment damaging developments.

Contributors

All contributions to next year's magazine will be gratefully assessed for inclusion. Opinions, Poems, Bushman's Stories and Photographs are all suitable.

Advertisements are also valuable!

Please forward to Graeme Stoney, Minto Park, Mansfield. Ph: (057) 75 2212

CATTLEMEN CARE FOR THE HIGH COUNTRY

Eleanor Evans, 16 years.
'Voice of the Youth' Competition - 1983.

"The was movement at the station
For the word had passed around,"

So begins 'Banjo' Paterson's poem, 'The Man From Snowy River'.

Under present day laws, the Man from Snowy River would no longer be permitted to ride over the country he made famous.

The cattlemen are a breed of their own, a unique group of people who are important to the heritage of all Victorians - and Australians. In 1979 legistation was passed and a ten year phase-out was begun. The cattlemen are no longer going to be permitted to take their cattle up to some areas of the high country. The cattlemen are losing a way of life and we are losing part of our heritage. Every Summer for over 100 years the cattlemen have taken the cattle up to the high plains, to graze on the rich mountain grass and then bring them down again before the winter sets in.

The cattlemen know the high country as only years of experience could have taught them. The cattlemen are part of the high country and most definitely are not out to destry it. In fact, we 'greenies' are the ones who have marred the beauty of the mountains, with our roads, our ski lodges, etc. The cattlemen are willing to share the high country with us, but we are not willing to share it with them. The injustice is not of the cattlemen to the High Plains, but of us to the cattlemen.

Further proof of their concern for their grazing land was shown when they voluntarily joined with the soil conservationists to study how many cattle could be safely grazed without damaging the soil. When the survey was completed, the cattlemen then reduced the number of cattle to within the required limits.

There are many stories about cattlemen, one such story being related to me by Mr Don Kneebone - just one of his memories of his days on the high country.

"It had been a hard year and the cattle were all pretty poor". Mr Kneebone and a friend of his were up bringing come cattle down from the high country. They were fairly late in the season bringing them down and as they were so poor, they decided not to let them cross a cold river because of the danger of being swept away. They kept them up as high as they could, going along a narrow cattle track, which is situated at about 1,000 ft. up the mountainside. The cattle were all strung out in single file with a rider at the front and Mr Kneebone at the back. There was a log across the track and as the last cow came to it (she was a very poor cow and had a calf of 4 months at foot), she stopped to contemplate wether she could manage to get over it or not. She gamely decided that she could try it. She stepped down a bit and, unfortunately, off the edge of the track. As she teetered there for a few seconds, Mr Kneebone jumped off his horse and attempted to balance her, but was knocked sideways and over went the cow, rolling down the incline. She was bouncing down the hill, each time bouncing a little higher, until she bounced right over the sheer edge. Meanwhile her little calf, still up by the log, looked around at Mr Kneebone and the dogs, and before anyone could realise it's intention, decided that where it's mother could go, it could go, also.

Down the hill it slithered until it went right over the edge, following it's mother. Mr Kneebone sent the dogs down to the river for a drink, while he sat for a few moments deciding the best thing to do. He heard the dogs start to bark, and thought they would only be barking if there was something alive down there. He worked his way down to the river until he reached the dogs, and found them in midstream, trying to coax the calf out. There it stood, with hardly an inch of hair left on its body after its rough descent.

Mr Kneebone called off the dogs and managed to get the calf back onto the bank. Every so often it would turn toward the mountain and bellow for its mother, who was caught in some scrub on a ledge, but was badly injured. Mr Kneebone tried several times, unsuccessfully, to climb up to her and put her out of her misery. He then left the calf on a flat away from the river and went back to the camp, returning later with a rifle to destroy the cow. Mr Kneebone then led his horse with the calf following, back to the track, where the calf again tried to follow its mother, but this time the dogs were prepared and prevented it.

Now the love and courage this calf showed is akin to what keeps the cattlemen going up the mountains year after year. They have survived floods, droughts, bush fires, snow storms and other catastrophies to Mr Kneebone's experience, and now they face something much more destructive to their way of life than any natural disasters. US!

Now, I ask you, why should we try to harm these people who have never harmed the high country?

STRANDED IN THE SNOW

Mansfield cattleman, Mr Fred Ross and his wife spent a cold night recently, stranded in snow on Mt Skene, on their way home from the annual Hereford cattle sale.

They had purchased cattle at the sale which follows the muster of snow leases of the Wonnangatta and Licola areas.

The following account of their adventures has been supplied by well known cattleman, Mr Norm Chester, of Heyfield.

"Mr and Mrs Ross drove by car across Mt Skene on the morning of the sale and encountered light snow but had no difficulty in getting through. They arranged for Messrs F. Forrest and John Kelly, Mansfield transport operators to follow later in the day to take delivery of the cattle next morning. After consideration of the weather conditions, Mr and Mrs Ross left Heyfield after the sale to return home, but encountered very heavy snow, and unable to proceed, were forced to spend the night in the car about a mile on the Heyfield side of the "look-out" on Mt Skene.

John Kelly driving the stock transport got as far as the Snake-Edwards Divide on the Jamieson side and was halted by very heavy snow. Miraculously finding a level spot wide enough to turn back he was able to get home and immediately rang Heyfield to advise Ross's not to attempt the trip, but too late, they had left too long to be contacted.

It was a long night in the car, starting the engine every couple of hours to use the heater. They had a small supply of sandwiches and a little "drop of the doin's" for Fred. Next morning, a C.R.B. gang from Jamieson with Mr John Dovean in charge of a grader, unexpectedly found the car and its occupants in good spirits, but greatly relieved.

Within a short space of time two four wheel drive vehicles driven by police and Forests Commission people also arrived, having been advised that the Ross's had not arrived home the night before. Mr Dovean soon cleared the road of snow, allowing the car to proceed, arriving home about 11 a.m."

Mr Ross commented later: "It wasn't exactly a honeymoon, but I've had worse nights when mustering in the bush.

LOOKING BACK

Horses, horses, horses, of black and brown and grey,
Large and small, short or tall, taffy, chestnut, bay.
Transport for the early settlers, who used them every way,
For pleasure and for sporting, they are used today.

My father was a mailman with saddle horse and pack,
Left in early morning and in darkness he came back.
Riding way down off the mountain, climbing up again,
In the heat of summer, in snow and pouring rain.

The faithful working horses gave always of their best,
Quietly toiling daily till their day of rest.
Plodding in the furrow, up and down the field,
Plowed the heavy drafts, for what the land would yield.

Light horses trotting smartly on the roads to town,
Pulling the buggy, up the hills and down.
Those days a good horse could be bought
For a few pounds, but now add several noughts.

Now many horses graze in every paddock green,
But reliable oldtime horses are seldom seen.
Gone those old breed names, Cock Robin, Cecil, Pasher,
Old Radium must have been a dasher.

Many descendants are seen from coast to coast,
Hundreds carry his blood, though a trace at most.

Gwen Wright,
Hunters Springs, via Scone.

CONNLEY

Ken Connley is a mountain man
He's a master at the game
From catching wild horses on the Cobberas
Now he's rode himself to fame.

At the gathering of the cattlemen
Down at the Sheepyard Flat
Resplendent there was Connley
In moleskins and bushman's hat.

Astride a tough little baldy horse
Who answered to "The Ace"
He let the leaders have their way
When early in the race.

The danger man was Rusty
Galloping on his Blue
There was Hodge, Purcell, Stoney and Lovick
A list like a bushman's Who's Who.

Through boughs and logs like wildfire
Ten horsemen with one aim
To be in front at the finish
Would add to a bushman's fame.

The scrub was thick and tangled
The logs were high and wide
But Ace just glided through the bush
While others had a hell of a ride.

They plunged into the swirling stream
And more than one came down
Regardless now the leaders rode
Each striving for the crown.

The horses plunged, their nostrils flared
As leaping for the bank
With quarters bulging, glistening, dripping
Showing spur marks on their flanks.

Neck outstretched flat gallop now
Hoof beats, thunder on grass
The final flag — and still it's close
The baldy one must pass.

Ears flattened, white face in front
Ace beats them to the post
And that's how Connley came to win
In the game that he loves most.

For Connley is a mountain man
He's a master at the game
He beat the best in "The Cattlemen's Cup"
And rode himself to fame.

Alan Brewer, Wodonga