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VOICE OF THE MOUNTAINS • VOICE OF THE MOUNTAINS •  
**COBUNGRA  
STATION**  
and  
**OTHER MOUNTAIN STORIES**  
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**COBUNGRA  
STATION**

and

**OTHER MOUNTAIN STORIES**

VOICE OF THE MOUNTAINS

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*This volume is published to coincide with the Mountain Cattlemen's Association 1985 Get-together, held at the Victoria River, adjacent to the Cobungra Cattle Station, Omeo, Victoria.*

*The Cobungra Station has a tradition dating back to March 1851, when George Gray, of Wangaratta, sent his two sons and four stockmen with a herd of some 600 beef cattle in search of pasture following the bushfires of Black Thursday, 13th February, 1851.*

*Their arrival at Cobungra, after a circuitous route which they pioneered, was followed by the discovery of the Bogong High Plains, a route from there over Mt. Hotham to the Ovens Valley and another down the Fainter Spur to the Kiewa Valley, by stockmen Jim Brown and Jack Wells.*

*One wonders why these two superb bushmen, who preceded the 'discoverer' of this region, Baron von Meuller, have not been honoured with a suitable memorial on the High Plains, which were destined to become the premier alpine summer grazing area in Victoria!*

Compiled and produced by  
Harry Stephenson  
14 Railway Avenue, Armadale, Vic.  
for  
The Mountain Cattlemen's Association, Victoria.

# INTRODUCTION

IT is most appropriate that we release this volume to coincide with the 150th anniversary of mountain grazing, and special thanks must be extended to Harry Stephenson for his most generous contribution of time, equipment and expertise to produce it.

I have to offer the most sincere thanks to members of our Association and friends for the staunch support that they have given in public expression of their concern on a number of occasions during the past year.

There is every indication that the people involved with mountain grazing are probably facing the most critical year in the long history of that activity by having to withstand a mounting campaign by a dedicated and publicly funded group who will, it appears, use any exaggeration or distortion of fact to denigrate cattle raising in the mountain regions. Their paucity of substantial reasoning with singular concentration against CATTLE grazing leads to the conclusion that, they must be aligned more in opposition to the private involvement by cattlemen (and women) than they are against cattle.

There has been much public enquiry into Crown or Public land use in Victoria which seems to have, apart from listing matters of conservation significance, mainly revolved around which Government agency should control which area of land.

The many and varied positive values of cattle grazing in terms of private and community benefit as well as in good conservation of the environment have been largely overlooked in official reports so far, and these omissions will be brought prominently and publicly to the fore in the near future.

I hope that as a reader of this volume you will enjoy the articles therein and that many of you will be able to attend our anniversary Get - to - Gether at Cobungra in February that will mark the commencement of another one hundred and fifty years of mountain grazing.

To the people who gave time and provided articles for this book, I extend on behalf of the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria, gratitude and thanks.

*James A. Commins, President M.C.A.V.*

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The story of the Gray family, their famous cattle drive  
which led to the discovery of the Bogong High Plains  
and to the establishment of the

# Cobungra Station

John R. Grenville\*

(Great-great-great Grandson of George and Hannah Gray)

\*with additional information supplied by the following:

Alan Emslie (George Gray descendent), Charlie McNamara (Great-great-Grandson of George and Hannah Gray), Miss Edna Harman, Wangaratta Historical Society, Rev. George Edwards papers, Fred and Diana Bienvenue ('The Faithfulls of Omeo'), Miss Flora Johns and O.S.Green ('The Dog's Grave'), Stella Carr ('The Discovery of The Bogong High Plains') and Alan Riggall.

THE GRAYS IN 1951 were resident at the Pelican Station<sup>1</sup>, about three miles from Wangaratta. George Gray Snr. had first operated a station in the Monaro district in association with Ben Warby, and it appears likely that he came over with cattle from the Monaro to Wangaratta at the same time as, and in association with the Warbys<sup>2</sup>. In making this decision, no doubt he was also influenced by that of John Crisp to take up the Wahgunyah lease<sup>3</sup>, at the same time, in partnership with James Foord, for the Crisp and Gray families were very close.

The Gray family consisted of George and his wife Hannah, and the children eventuating from two marriages, together with their children. It was Hannah who married twice, her first husband being Charles McKenzie<sup>4</sup>. There were four children in the McKenzie union, three of whom were included in the family unit at The Pelican - Hugh, Tom and Jane. Jane had one child, Alice Faithfull<sup>5</sup>, but it is not recorded whether the McKenzie boys were married at this time. There were three children by the marriage of George to Hannah - Mary, Edward Joseph (Ned) and George Henry.

1. Known also as Pelican Lagoons, the station of 12,500 acres is situated near the south-eastern junction of the Ovens and King Rivers, Wangaratta.  
(From Census Oct. - Nov. 1828) George Gray, aged 56 years, Conditional Pardon, arrived in ship 'Britannia' in 1796. Life sentence, Catholic, labourer.  
The 'Britannia' 1797 voyage was known as the 'Hell Ship' - 21 deaths and a lot of floggings. Sailed from Cork, Dec. 10th 1796, arrived Sydney Town May 17th 1797. (Ref. 'Convict Ships' by Chas. Bateson, pp 160 - 165.  
(from Census, July 1837) George Gary in charge of Ben Warby's 'Bungadbo' station, Maneroo.  
Oct. 1837. George Gray took up 'Pelican Lagoons'. 350 cattle.  
(from Census Oct - Nov 1828) Hannah McKenzie (later Gray) 38 years, Conditional Pardon. Ship 'Lord Melville' sailed from England 15th Sept. 1816, arrived in Sydney Town 24th Feb. 1817 (162 days voyage). Protestant. Sentence 14 years.
2. Ben Warby settled at Taminick Plains in August 1844. The Warby Ranges from Glenrowan to west of Wangaratta bears his name.
3. John Crisp and John Foord took up 'Wahgunyah', 30,000 acres on the Murray River in Jan. 1839.
4. Charles McKenzie, husband of Hannah McKenzie accompanied her from England on the 'Lord Melville' in 1816. Conditional pardon. Sentence 14 years.
5. Alice Faithfull. Refer to 'the Faithfull Connection' later in this article.

Mary had married Thomas Worcester in 1839 and they joined the family at The Pelican. However, Tom was killed at Newmarket in 1842 leaving Mary with three children, Thomas, George and Mary. In 1847, she remarried John Crisp by now himself a widower also with three children. They subsequently became the parents of two surviving children, John and Edward. John became closely associated with Cobungra and Omeo, and is the Johnny Crisp of the Dog's Grave story.<sup>6</sup>

The Crisps resided in Wangaratta, John Snr., as well as his pastoral interests being the owner of the Brian Boru Hotel.

Ned married Ellen Scott Meighan, daughter of John and Roseannah Meighan in 1845, and by 1851, three daughters were included in the family story. Six more surviving children were to follow.

George Henry also resided at The Pelican as a bachelor (which he was to remain) and the only member of the expanded clan missing from the Wangaratta scene was Hannah's eldest child Eliza, who does not appear to have come south with the rest of the family.

Drought and bushfires are given as the reason for the Grays seeking greener pastures in their cattle drive to Cobungra in February 1851<sup>7</sup>.

The party consisted of Ned and George Henry Gray, Hugh and Tom McKenzie, John Wells and James Brown. Brown was subsequently to become a member of the family by marrying Jane McKenzie in 1859.

The cattle on The Pelican were of mixed family ownership according to the Pastoral Records, but because the cost of Pastoral Licences varied according to the number of stock owned by any proprietor, family nominees were no doubt substituted for the real owner George Snr. In total, about 600 head were included in the drive.

The Cobungra legend has always ascribed the physical leadership of the drive to George Snr. because father and son were of the same name. However he was by then, beyond such arduous activity. In November 1850, not long before the drive commenced, George received a visit at The Pelican from Bishop James Goold, the first Catholic Bishop of Melbourne<sup>8</sup>. Subsequently, in his diary, the Bishop described him as "A man of 90 years of age. . . He

6. The Dog's Grave article appears on following pages (by courtesy of Miss Flora John and O.S.Green.
7. Cattle drive to Cobungra: 'The Discovery of the Bogong High Plains' by Stella G.M.Carr reprinted by permission from Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria - The Victorian High Plains Symposium, 14th Sept. 1961, appears on following pages.
8. Right Rev James Alipius Goold was consecrated Bishop of Melbourne, on August 6th 1848. He left Sydney on Sept. 3rd 1848 accompanied by four priests and drove by coach to Melbourne, passing through Albury on 28th Sept. and arriving in Melbourne on October 4th. This was the first overland coach journey from Sydney to Melbourne by a private party. In 1850 Bishop Goold returned by coach to Albury and on the return trip he recorded in his hand-written diary: "Tuesday Nov. 19th 1850 - We came to Wangaratta at 3 o'clock. . . . Wednesday 20th. We remained at Wangaratta this day . . . . In the evening I called on a Catholic family who occupy a cattle station three miles from the township. The father, a man of 90 years of age, had been transferred to New South Wales for the Irish Rebellion of 1798. He was in the enjoyment of all his faculties." No mention is made of George Gray's name. However, when I published "The Diaries of Bishop Goold" in 1979, I advised the Catholic Historical Commission that I believed George Gray was the most likely person the Bishop had visited. The Wangaratta Historical Society now accept this to be a fact. (H.H.S. Ed.)

is very feeble, but was in the enjoyment of all his faculties." Again, in 1901, a tombstone was uncovered behind the Royal Hotel in Wangaratta. John and Mary Crisp were the owners of this hotel at the time of George's death. The stone was inscribed with the name of George Gray, and the inscription declared that he had died at the age of 97 years and 10 months in June 1953<sup>9</sup>. There is a discrepancy between the dates of the Bishop and the stone but it all adds up to George being a very old man at the time of the cattle drive to Cobungra.

The Pastoral Records also point to George Henry being the original Cobungra leasee. On the one hand when his father died in 1853, it was necessary for George Henry to arrange for the transfer of The Pelican lease into his name. No similar transfer is recorded for Cobungra at the same time.

Leaving aside the question of who physically led the cattle drive, the stock nevertheless were in large part the property of George Snr., and he sent them in the charge of his sons and step-sons to find better pastures. The end result of this was Cobungra. The story of the trek appears in following pages and it is well known how Brown and Wells, left in charge of the cattle when the Gray and McKenzie brothers returned to Wangaratta, discovered the Bogong High Plains, making George Gray and his family the first Bogong High Plains' cattlemen.

The early story of Cobungra remains a family affair. In those days the Upper Murray Pastoral District was still in the preserve of New South Wales, but the Commissioner of Crown Lands had an office in Benalla and he reported to the Superintendent of the Port Phillip District. Through these channels George Henry applied for a lease of Cobungra in June 1851. Negotiations as to the location of the boundaries followed. Upon finalization of these matters his tender was accepted and the lease granted on 5th September 1851. In consideration of the lease he expressed his willingness to pay £10 rental per annum with an additional £2.10.0 for every thousand sheep or "their equivalent in cattle, above four thousand sheep or their equivalent"

In 1852 the official pastoral census recorded that the station was supporting 640 cattle and 5 horses on an area of 32,000 acres.

George Henry maintained the lease until 1859 when he relinquished it to Ned's father-in-law John Meighan and James Parsloe, who was also a son-in-

9. "A Relic of 1853". (from The Wangaratta Chronicle, Sat. June 22nd 1901.)

"While one of the stalls in the stables at the 'Royal Hotel' Wangaratta was being cleaned this week, a stone that had been buried beneath the surface came into view, and upon examination it showed to be the headstone of a grave. Other slabs of stone were later unearthed.

As the inscription on the headstone had been placed downwards, the lettering could be clearly read, as is as follows:

*Sacred to the memory of  
GEORGE GRAY  
who departed this life on June 15th, 1853.  
Aged 97 years & 10 months.*

Older residents of the town still remember the old man referred to as the occupier of what is now known as 'The Pelican', on the Oxley Flats Road.

The presence of the headstone on the Royal Hotel property is explained by the fact that his relatives were occupiers of the hotel which had first been erected by Dr. John Gemmell as a private hospital in 1850 - 1, and they had the remains brought there for internment.

The Royal Hotel later became the Hotel Pinent."

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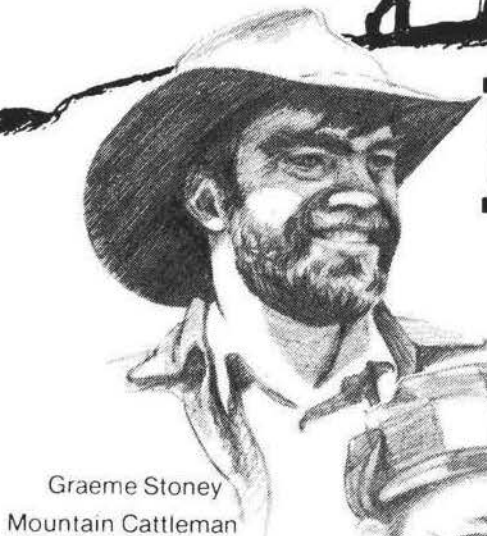
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law of John Meighan, being married to Ellen's sister, Mary. A third Meighan girl, Susannah had by this time married Edward, the younger brother of John Crisp Snr. and so the respective families had close ties. Another Meighan in the story is John's son, Peter, who in one version, is the hero of the Dog's Grave story. By virtue of the spelling of his name in that recording (Meehan) he was not recognised as the son of the second leasee of Cobungra, as well as being a brother-in-law to Ned Gray and James Parsloe.

In fact the Dog's Grave story (irrespective of version) highlights the close-knit family relationships of Cobungra's early days. It includes Ned Gray, his brother-in-law Peter Meighan, Tom Worcester, Ned's nephew by Mary Gray's first marriage and John Crisp, his nephew by Mary's second marriage. In turn Tom and John were half-brothers.

And so in November 1859 George Henry submitted a memorial to have the Cobungra lease made over to the Meighan - Parsloe partnership.

John Meighan married Roseannah Green (born 1805) in Campsey Village, Stirling, Scotland, having himself been born in Donnegal, Ireland in 1794. They migrated to Victoria first settling at Collingwood in about 1840. Subsequently John and his family moved to Wangaratta. The Meighans had eleven children, 8 girls and 3 boys. John died in Wangaratta in 1880, Roseannah having predeceased him by 14 years. He appears to have been a silent partner for there is no evidence of his presence at Cobungra. His sons-in-law were apparently the real operators of the lease.

John Meighan relinquished his interest in Cobungra in 1868, and James Parsloe entered into partnership with Joseph Rawson as a substitute. In September 1871, subdivision of the lease was agreed and Rawson took over the eastern half (Cobungra East) whilst Parsloe continued with the western half (Cobungra West). This part of the lease included the Parsloe homestead, which was on the banks of the Victoria River and was later the site of the Cobungra Hotel.

James Parsloe married Mary Meighan of Collingwood at St. Francis's Church in Melbourne in 1849. He was 24 years old and she was 14. They raised 14 children, 9 girls and 5 boys. James remained active in the Cobungra story over a considerable period of time renewing a lease for Cobungra West with Richard King in 1884, just two years before his death in 1886 at the age of 61. His widow married again to William Hardy, a well known Omeo identity. She died at the age of 78 in 1912.

Ned Gray married Ellen Scott Meighan in 1845. He was 19 and she was 18. They raised 9 children. Ned died in 1889 at Bingomunjie, and Ellen in 1890. Both died at the age of 63 years. Their second child, Hannah married Michael Francis McNamara. Charlie McNamara of Omeo Valley is their grand-son and as he still runs cattle on the Bogong High Plains he represents a continuing pastoral link to the original days at Cobungra. He is a great-great-grandson of George and Hannah Gray<sup>10</sup>.

10. See 'The McNamara Connection' later in this article.



It appears that the advent of free selection drew the Gray family away from a direct Cobungra lease involvement. George Henry in later life continued with various pastoral interests as well as becoming the first owner of the Benambra Hotel. He died in 1910 which in terms of the father - son span of years represents a remarkable period of Australian history. His father was transported from Ireland in 1796 on the "Britannia" arriving at Sydney Cove in May 1797. Father and son spanned 110 years from just 9 years after the arrival of the First Fleet to ten years after the advent of Australian Federation.

Ned selected at Bingomunjie and until the time of his death was a greatly respected citizen of the Omeo district. While Mary did not leave Wangaratta (she died there in 1864) all of her children with one exception opted to settle in the Cobungra - Omeo district. Tom and George Worcester, Mary Cusack and John Crisp were either part of the early family team at Cobungra or lived in close connection with it. Tom and George were for a short time in partnership operating Tom Groggin station. Then they selected - Tom at Bingomunjie (property now owned by Charlie McNamara and Connley family) and George at Benambra (property still owned by his descendants). The Worcesters had a life - long association with Dan Cook who first came from Wangaratta with them as lads together droving a mob of cattle. Tom and George married two of Dan's sisters, Jane and Eliza. Dan married into the Rawson family.

Mary Worcester married Tom Cusack and they eventually moved from Wangaratta to Omeo to be with the rest of the family. Cusack in partnership with Scott built a number of Shire roads and bridges. Mary was also licensee of the Mt. Markey Hotel at Cassilis for a number of years.

So whilst the Grays ceased to have a direct interest in the Cobungra lease, this was not so in terms of the general district. The coming of the Grays to Cobungra in 1851 transferred the interests of many pioneers from the Ovens to the Cobungra, and in family terms, established a continuing presence in the district which remains to the present day.

After the 1871 split, these transfers took place: Cobungra East - Sept. 18th 1871 Frederick William Dreverman; January 5th 1878 Hans Maas and Claus Maas; December 16th 1878 Hans Maas and Richard King of Omeo; August 14th 1884 William and Walter Coughland of Omeo. Cobungra West - April 25th 1884 James Parsloe and Richard King. Several changes occurred until Richard Riggall purchased Cobungra about 1898. He also took over Fred Box's adjoining property and hotel. He had a new brick home built before moving in and he then lived here with his wife Ellen and the family which grew to seven sons.

In 1919 Richard died as the result of a tragic accident. A mob of cattle broke away one evening and Dick, galloping after them in the darkness, rode into a wire line, which caught him across the mouth and lower jaw. Badly injured, he was rushed to hospital, but died a short time later.

The trustees decided that the property should be sold by tender, and along with others Richard's son Alan tendered for the property.

His tender was the highest, but due to an oversight in the trustee's office, it was not passed on to the trustee and Naughtons became the successful tenderers.

The Cobungra cattle were not part of the sale and Richard's son Alan, who was born at Cobungra, recalls driving the station mob down the regular route to their final destination at Bairnsdale saleyards.

Naughtons, who had never seen Cobungra, tendered only because they had seen Cobungra cattle, the sight of which convinced them that the property was a very rich one. Naughtons expanded the station to almost its original size by purchasing the neighbouring properties.

The terrible fires of 1939 took their dreadful toll of Cobungra. The residents took refuge in the Livingstone Creek; however, a stockman named Richards and his dog were incinerated when the flames overtook them near Cobungra Hill. Several thousand head of station stock were destroyed and the historic homestead was reduced to ashes.

These disastrous bush fires of 1939 caused the germination of seed which eventually turned the greatest part of the relatively open grazing country into thick forest thereby considerably reducing its value. As a result, Ed. Naughton, in 1960, sold out to the present owners, Cobungra Pty Ltd. This deal entailed the transfer of approximately 17,000 acres of freehold, 68,000 acres of leasehold and 2,400 head of cattle.

Annual pasture improvement, rabbit control, etc. have enabled the present owners to turn off between 700 and 1,900 head of stock annually. Cobungra cattle have always been noted for their quality. Even the freak storm of June 22nd 1949 which enveloped Omeo in the heaviest snow within living memory (the drifts averaged three feet and sometimes six feet) caused only minor loss. Most of the cattle came out of the experience in good condition.

Cobungra, also, was once noted for its horses which were sold chiefly as remounts for the Indian Army. Sometimes as many as 300 foals were running on the station.

The first Cobungra home which one finds mentioned is that which Parsloe built on the bank of the Victoria River on the western half of the station. Claud Maas on the eastern half had a slab and shingle roof home. Frederick Box established his hotel on the Victoria River side.

The second homestead which replaced that destroyed by the 1939 fires, was partly built of bricks made and burnt on the site. The rear portion and some of the outbuildings were of timber, quantities of which came from the old Box Hotel. An existing hayshed covers the site but a few of the original steps can be seen. The present 40 square homestead built in 1961 replaces a home destroyed by fire which originated in a kerosine refrigerator. Of thick walled adobe construction, it was designed by Alistair Knox, famous for his mud brick and is in fact the forerunner of the present return to favour of that style. Its wide eaved verandahs are paved with local stone.

## THE FAITHFULL CONNECTION

William Faithfull (1774 - 1847) arrived in Sydney in 1792 as a member of the New South Wales Corps. He married Susanna Pitt in 1804 and they had four children. One son, William Pitt Faithfull (1806 - 1896) and Margaret Considine had a son, Henry (1838 - 1896). William Pitt Faithfull married Mary Deane in 1844 and had nine children. The second son of William Snr. and Susanna, George journeyed with William Pitt from the family home "Springfield", Goulburn, New South Wales in February 1838 and occupied Bontharambo Plains (250,000 acres). Here the Faithfulls built a slab and bark hut. However, the brothers were not happy with the safety of the area and often clashed with the blacks<sup>11</sup>. A letter from George Faithfull states: 11. In "Australia", R. M. Crawford writes: *The relations of the squatters and the aborigines have not yet been satisfactorily studied. It is clear that two cultures were meeting which could not both survive. If white men shot the kangaroos, it was natural that the aborigines, who did not know any deed of surrender of the tribal lands, should turn to the squatters sheep.*



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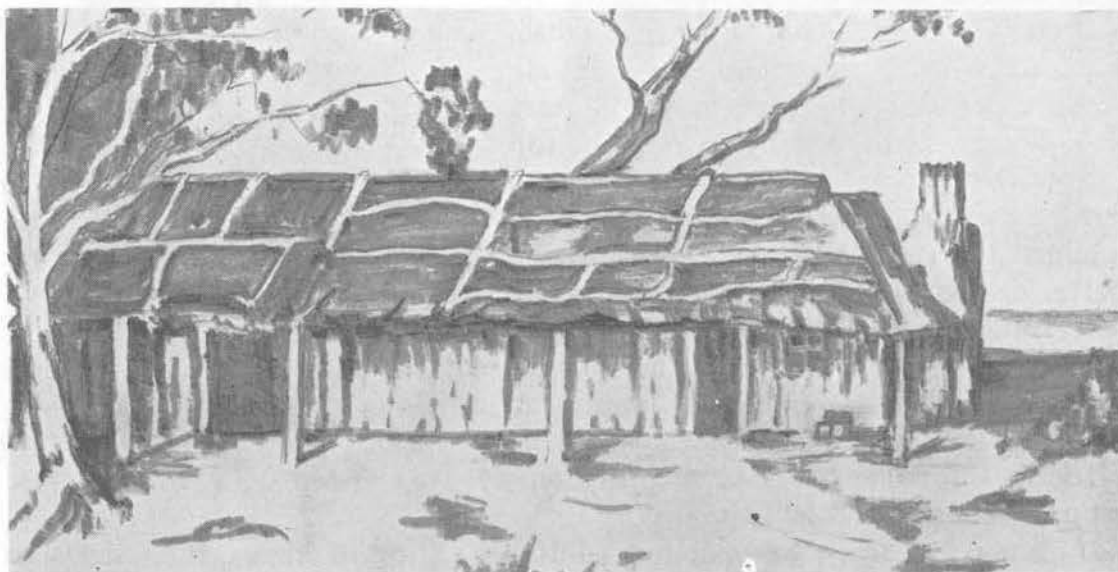
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"It was at this juncture that I sent my brother's sheep under the charge of his overseer to the Broken River (Benalla) to await my coming up. Unfortunately, within a few days of their arrival (10th April, 1838) they were attacked by aborigines. Many of his men were murdered, the stock scattered throughout the country and about £200 worth of property then in drays was taken away. My brother, having arrived shortly after the destruction of his property, we determined for the sake of more fully protection of each other to settle on the Ovens."

So, about 22nd July, 1838 they moved to Oxley Plains. The homestead was named "Wangaratta". Oxley Plains was occupied by George Faithfull from 1838 to 1848 although William Pitt returned to Springfield, leaving George to manage the property!<sup>12</sup>

After the abandonment of Bontharambo Plains, Rev. Joseph Docker and his family occupied it on 9th September, 1838 and his descendants still occupy portion of the old holding.



*The first Bontharambo Home*

George Faithfull also acquired the Buffalo Heifer Station in 1846. He never married but he and Jane McKenzie (daughter of Hannah McKenzie, later to become George Gray Snr's. wife) had a daughter, Alicia, born in 1841.

Jane McKenzie married James Brown (of the pioneer group who founded Cobungra in 1851) in 1859, four years after George Faithfull's death.

Henry (son of William Pitt Faithfull and Margaret Considine) married his first cousin, Alicia (daughter of George Faithfull and Jane McKenzie) at Beechworth in 1857.

The story of the Omeo Faithfulls begins with the arrival from Wangaratta of Henry and Alicia (known as Alice) Faithfull with their six children in

12. The Stock Returns of July 1845 listed Oxley Plains: W. and G. Faithfull, 40 acres cultivated, 41 persons on station, 2,600 cattle, 11,665 sheep.

1870. Two more children were born at Cobungra and Omeo respectively. Their eldest son, William Henry married Louisa Jones in 1883 and the Faithfulls of Omeo are descendants of this union. William Henry and Louisa Faithfull survived to celebrate their Golden Wedding Anniversary in 1933.

#### THE McNAMARA CONNECTION

Dennis McNamara came from Ireland and was one of the earliest settlers in Melbourne. He had five sons - Dennis, the eldest, who broke his neck and died at the age of sixteen after diving into the Yarra and striking his head on a sandbank; Patrick, who remained in Melbourne; Jack, who settled in Cudgewa; and Tom, who went to Cobungra and ran cattle on Dinner Plain with his brother Michael Francis. Michael Francis was born in Bourke Street, Melbourne in 1839. As a boy, he grazed the family cows at the top of Bourke Street, in the area now occupied by Parliament House. Some would be inclined to say that the McNamaras made better use of the land than is now the case! Michael moved to the north-east to live in Wangaratta and there he became acquainted with the Gray family at "Pelican Ponds", before they sent their cattle to Cobungra in 1851. Michael Francis probably met Hannah Gray there.



*Michael Francis McNamara*

Leaving this town he operated a butcher's shop in Omeo, then at Dargo and at the gold diggings at Jericho and the Jordan. He also worked as a horse-breaker and wandered as far as the Blue Mountains. Returning to Omeo, he selected land at Cobungra and married Ned Gray's daughter, Hannah. It was from here that he joined with his brother Tom in sending cattle up to graze on the Bogong High Plains.

Michael Francis and Hannah had five sons - Patrick, Michael, Charlie, George and Ned, and Charlie's three sons were Jack, Patrick and Charlie.

Charlie jnr., whose paternal grand-father was Michael Francis, and whose maternal great-grandfather was Ned Gray, is continuing an unbroken family connection with Bogong High Plains grazing that stretches back almost 130 years. Only the Pendergasts of Omeo can claim a longer continuous occupancy of Victorian Alpine Country. Charlie is grazing the same country that his grandfather ran - Bucketty and Dinner Plain to the head of Bundarra, a holding of some 19000 acres and in addition he shares 6500 acres with Cobungra Station.

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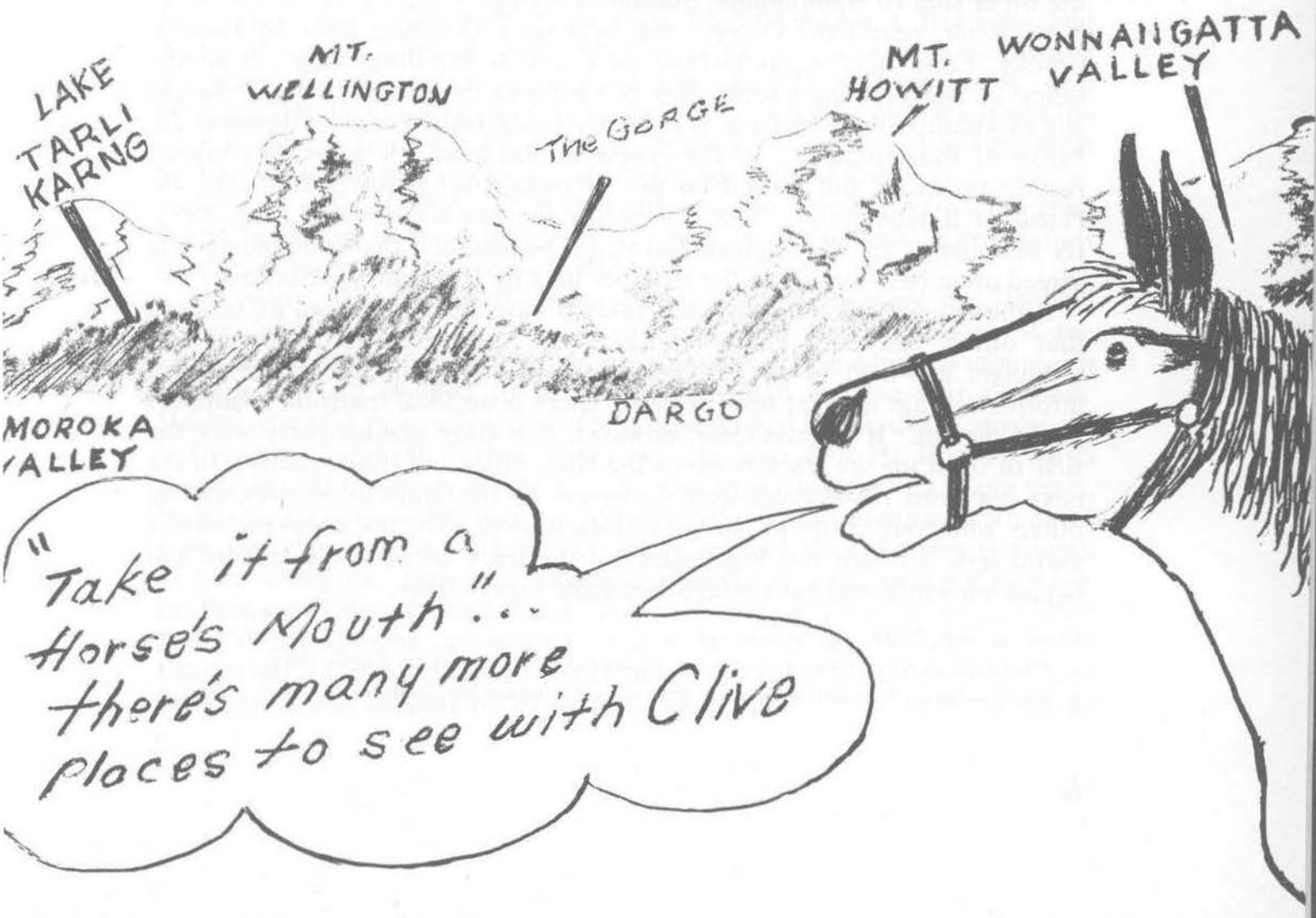
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## THE DISCOVERY OF THE BOGONG HIGH PLAINS

The Bogong High Plains were discovered by two Wangaratta stockmen, Jim Brown and John Wells, who were employed to look after the run at Cobungra which was taken up by George Gray in 1851. Gray<sup>1</sup>, accompanied by Brown, Wells and two others<sup>2</sup> brought his cattle to Cobungra from a property called 'The Pelican', near Wangaratta. The move was undertaken immediately after the bushfires of Black Thursday (13 February 1851), when it became necessary to find grass for the cattle which survived. (Mr. George Fitzgerald, of 'Shannonvale', Omeo, believed that there were 1100 cattle in the mob that left Wangaratta.<sup>3</sup>

They went first to Lockhart's Gap, but finding no grass there they went on to Mitta Mitta Station, then held by Bowler. (This would be Mitta Mitta No 1 Station, a property of 20,000 acres, 16 miles south of Tallangatta. It was held by Sam Bowler and later his son, Sam, from June 1839 to July 1877. Ed.). Again there was no grass available, but they fell in with an aboriginal called Larnie, who told them of Cobungra and offered to take them there. From Mitta Mitta they climbed the Gibbo Range, went down the other side to Hinnomunjie Station (a 36,000 acre property on the Mitta Mitta River, near Lake Omeo, and held since October, 1841 by Edward Crooke, Ed.), then on up Livingstone Creek to the Bingo Gap. From the valley of Bingomunjie Creek, they crossed into the valley of the Cobungra and established their first camp at Dick's Creek (now Crown Allotment 28, Parish of Bingomunjie). In the course of the next few years they moved further upstream and settled on the Victoria River (Crown Allotment 11, Parish of Bingomunjie). The licence for the run is dated 4th June, 1851. Its boundaries are not defined but it can be assumed that a boundary was agreed upon between it and the territory held by Hinnomunjie Station.

Although Gray is officially the first to have held Cobungra he believed that others had been there before him. Andrews (1920) records that Cobungra was held by the Wells brothers in 1842, but the source of this information has not yet been traced. There is no local tradition to support the statement. It appears clear, however, that Gray and his party were the first to open up the track between the Mitta Mitta and Hinnomunjie. In the next few years it was much used by miners, by the Grays themselves, and by others who took cattle to market at Beechworth. The track also provided a useful link between the North-east and the track between the Monaro and Gippsland which had been established some years earlier.

1. George Henry, son of George Gray.
2. This is incorrect, there were six in the party as named earlier in the Gray family story.
3. The Gray family historian, Mr. John R. Grenville says the mob was 'about 600'.

After their arrival in March 1851, Brown and Wells were left at Cobungra in charge of the cattle and lived there for some years. Brown realised that the track over the Gibbo was circuitous and argued that there must be a shorter way to Beechworth. Larnie had described to them as well as he could the Bogong High Plains and had told them also that the Omeo and associated tribes of aboriginals went to the High Plains from their camp at the Bundarra River via Bucketty Plain, that is along the spur which joins the High Plains at Mt Cope. Brown and Wells followed this track and, once on the High Plains, set off in the direction of Mt Nelse. From the Nelse end of the Plains they had a view of the great spur of The Fainter and decided that it was the one to follow. By doing so they found their way into the North-east. It is not known whether it was on the return from their first trip or on their second journey that they found the alternative route over Mt Hotham, but they established both routes before they had been at Cobungra for three years, and had also been over Mt Feathertop. Very shortly after the discovery of gold in Omeo (April 1854) the track over Mt Hotham was much used by miners and until recently there were in Omeo people still living who had been brought to the district as children over this track early in 1855.

Some of the names given by Brown and Wells to parts of the country still remain in use. Rocky Valley, Pretty Valley, Rocky Nobs, Mt Jim, Jim Stream, Mt Feathertop, The Fainter, The Niggerheads, The Razorback, Blowhard and Bucketty Plain are well known. Skiers at Mt Hotham know J.B. (Plain), where Jim Brown carved his initials on a tree, the Old Wangaratta Bridge and Australia Drift. Other names were not officially recognised but are still in local use. Brown called Mt Hotham 'Baldy', and Mt Cope 'Mt Jack'. The older cattlemen still regret that Mt Jack is not the official name. Jim Brown and Johnny Wells are remembered as very great bushmen. Of the two, it is said that Jim Brown was the finer.

As it is generally believed that Baron von Mueller discovered the High Plains his claim to this distinction will now be considered. The relevant portion of his report is given in Appendix 1.

He visited the North-east of the State in 1854, crossing the Dividing Range from the valley of the Dargo River 'near the upper part of the Cobungra'. At the time he thought he had discovered the highest mountains in Australia and claimed to be the first civilised man to visit the area. Mueller climbed two peaks, one of which he wished to name Mt Latrobe, on 3 December, and the other which was to be called Mt Hotham on 6 December. The identity of these peaks remained a mystery for many years, because the compass bearings on other, already known mountains which he took from Mt Latrobe could not be reconciled with the more accurate work of later surveyors. However, Wakefield (1949) following a suggestion made by Barnard (1904) showed that if Mueller's compass readings are corrected to  $33\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  Mt Latrobe can be identified as Mt Loch and Mt Hotham as Mt Feathertop. The compass error is attributed to magnetic interference from the Older Basalt capping of Mt Loch. This explanation is a very reasonable



one, but Wakefield's interpretation of the route by which Mueller reached these peaks is open to some doubt.

Wakefield, relying on an old, very inaccurate sketch plan (not Mueller's) dated 1864, and perhaps misled by the mention of the Mitta Mitta (actually the West Kiewa River) assumed that Mueller crossed the Divide near the site of the present-day Cobungra settlement, travelled by way of the Bundarra Top to the High Plains and thence to Mt Loch. It is difficult to justify this explanation either on the basis of the extent to which the geography of the area was known in 1854 or from Mueller's very brief report. After mining began, there was a great deal of traffic between Cobungra and the Dargo but there is no record or hint of any link between the two districts in 1854. Mueller does not mention his sources of local information but it can be argued that he had access to more than he acknowledged. For instance, he knew the name of the Cobungra and that the Cobungra and Dargo Rivers have a divide in common. He also knew that the Cobungra waters reached the Murray — a point which would not be obvious at the first sight of the headwaters and, further, he was able to make his way from Mt Feathertop to Omeo. In the absence of local knowledge this would have been a complex and difficult journey, chiefly because of the curious stream pattern of the intervening country.

Mueller's report states that, on leaving the Dargo valley (a) he traversed a grassy tableland in a NE direction 'along the Cobungra downwards', (b) until the country to the N appeared practicable and that (c) the ranges were timbered with *Eucalyptus pauciflora*. It is not clear whether Mueller distinguished between the Cobungra and its major tributary, the Victoria, into which Spring Creek flows. If he did not do so he could have crossed the Divide anywhere between Mt Hotham and Mt Phipps. As the Divide and the major valleys all run approximately NW-SE in this area, the further he was from Mt Hotham when he made the crossing the more impossible it is that a course to the NE would have allowed him a view of Mt Loch to the N. This strongly suggests that he crossed the Divide as he said, near the upper part of the Cobungra itself.

A closer examination of Mueller's statement in relation to the geography of the area confirms this. In the Divide between Mt Hotham and Mt Phipps three parts can be distinguished: the Spring Creek section, the Victoria River section and the Cobungra section. Table 1 sets out the extent to which each of these sections satisfies Mueller's description of the journey.

It will be seen that the upper part of the Cobungra fulfils all the conditions. It seems most likely, therefore, that Mueller crossed into this area because the top and spurs on the Cobungra side form, in places, a broad tableland and some of the spurs and tributaries (Brandy Creek and Swindler's Creek) run N.-E. It seems reasonable that Mueller rode across the top until he could get a clear outlook and then made for Mt Loch. Once there, Machinery Spur would present itself as an obvious route to the foot of Mt Feathertop.

TABLE 1.

Section of main Divide	Grassy tablelands	Stream course	View of mountains to the North	Forest type
Spring Creek	Not extensive	NE	No	Higher parts <i>E. pauciflora</i> mostly mixed species.
Victoria River	In higher parts only	SW	No	Higher parts <i>E. pauciflora</i> otherwise mixed species.
Cobungra River	Extensive	Large tributaries NE (Brandy Creek & Swindler's Creek) *Mainstream E of S	Yes	<i>E. pauciflora</i>

This explanation is also satisfactory in that if, as has been supposed, there was no link between the settlements in the Dargo valley and Cobungra at the time, once in the Dargo valley, Mueller would have had no reason (except the roughness and difficulty of the country) to leave it until he reached the headwaters. In conclusion, it is necessary to say that although there is no tradition that Brown and Wells saw Mueller on his way through, it seems likely that he made his way to Omeo by following the Cobungra downstream until he found their track leading to Omeo. On his journey from Omeo to Mt Kosciusko and his return to Gippsland via the Buchan River, Mueller undoubtedly followed the tracks established when settlement was extended from the Monaro to Benambra and the N part of East Gippsland. To record these things does not detract from Mueller's achievement. His was a great and difficult journey, but it is more correct to regard him as the first official visitor than to accord him the status of original explorer.

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## JOHN MITCHELL'S VISIT TO THE BOGONG HIGH PLAINS IN 1843?

In a booklet published by the State Electricity Commission of Victoria "*Early History and Discovery of the Bogong High Plains*" TR-K 596-4, two statements appear – p.3 "Evidence of earlier visits could have been left by men like John Mitchell who made an exploratory journey up the Kiewa Valley to the Bogong High Plains in 1843 . . .", and p.5 "In 1843 John Mitchell crossed the Murray near Thurgoona . . . He was guided by aborigines . . . on to the Bogong High Plains . . . this was the first recorded instance of such a visit."

Dick Johnson in his excellent "*The Alps at the Crossroads*" – p.36 says "The first recorded journey to the Bogong High Plains by a white man was by John Mitchell in 1843 . . ." The Land Conservation Council in "*Report on the Alpine Study Area*" say, p.16 "The Bogong High Plains were first visited by John Mitchell, who climbed from the Kiewa Valley in 1843 . . ."

"*Overlander*", September 1980 p.26 reports "Bushwalkers have been traversing the Alps since the 1850s (? Ed.) . . . they were preceded on to the Bogong High Plains by John Mitchell, who climbed up the Kiewa Valley in 1843".

The last three publications are unable to verify the source of their information, but believe it may have originated in the S.E.C. booklet. A letter to the S.E.C.V. seeking the source for their statement, dated 22nd May, 1980, remains unanswered as at 31st January, 1985.

The matter was referred to the Mitchell Library, Sydney, where all of John Mitchell's writings are held. They discounted any suggestion that John Mitchell visited the Bogong High Plains in 1843.

My suspicions regarding the authenticity of the claim stemmed from the fact that I was aware that in 1843 John Mitchell was 12 years of age. Ed.

## APPENDIX I

Extract from von Mueller's Report (1855).

Left Avon on the 22nd November, thence up the Mitchell, Wentworth and Dargo Rivers and crossed the Dividing Range between the waters of Gippsland and the Murray near the upper part of the Cobungra. Thence I traversed the grassy tableland in a north-easterly direction, along the Cobungra downwards, until the country appeared practicable towards the north, to reach the highest part of the Bogong Ranges. The ranges hereabouts have never been traversed by civilised man. They are timbered with Mountain Gum-tree, *Eucalyptus phlebophylla*\* On the 3rd December I ascended the south-east of the two highest mountains of the Bogong Range, and believed it to be nearly 7,000 feet high. The much more abrupt and yet higher summit of the north-west mount I ascended from the Upper Mitta, which skirts the base, on 6th December; unquestionably several hundred feet higher. On both mountains mighty masses of snow lay far below the summit. Considering that mountains of such altitude, probably the two highest on the Australian continent, deserve distinctive names, I solicit His Excellency's permission to name the grandest of both Mt Hotham, and the second in height Mt Latrobe, as I trust to be entitled to the great honour of being the first man who ever reached these commanding summits of the Australian Alps.

\* Now *E. pauciflora* Sieb.

## APPENDIX II

A full account of the Gray's journey to Cobungra is in the possession of the author. It was given by Mr Michael MacNamara and his brothers, the late Edward and the late Patrick MacNamara, grand-nephews of George Gray. It was confirmed by the late Mr George Fitzgerald and the late Mt John MacCrae, both of whom provided information about the discovery of gold in Omeo. All these people knew Brown and Wells. The dates in the original account and the information given concerning the names of the owners and managers and the boundaries of the various stations in the early part of 1851 have been checked by reference to other sources, some of which are official documents. These provide other corroboration of the verbal evidence. The original licence issued to George Gray was seen at the Department of Lands and Survey, Melbourne.

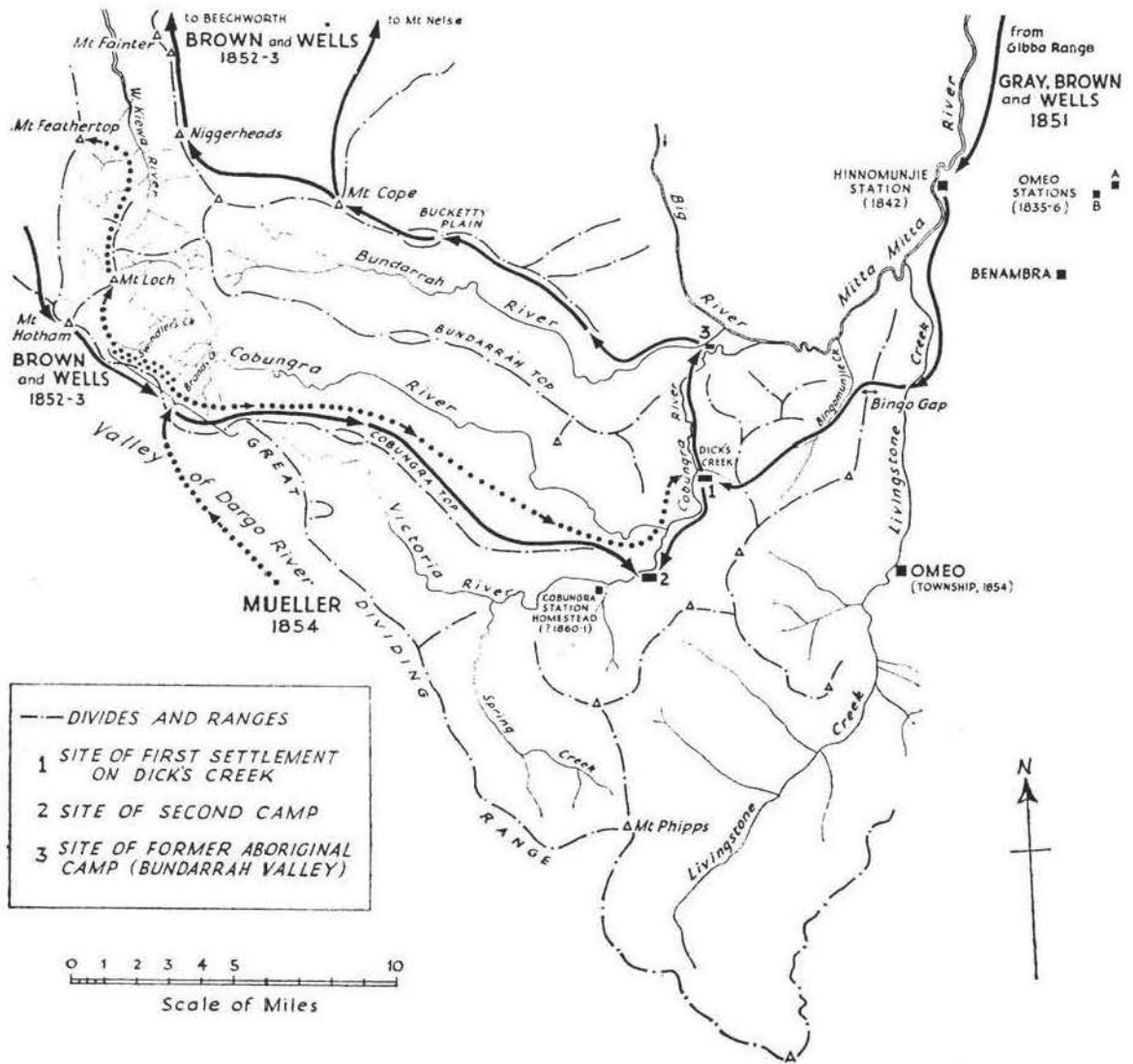


FIG. 1.

*The story of the Dog's Grave is set in the period when George Gray and George Henry Gray held the lease of the Cobungra Station in 1851 - 60. All the men concerned in the story were Cobungra Station men and all were related.*

*This was also the beginning of the Gold Era, 1851 - 59. It relates to the life of the pioneers in this rugged mountain country, and tremendous hardships and effort in making a livelihood from raising cattle.*

*The story is dedicated to the memory of their dogs and horses for without them the life and living of the cattlemen would not have been possible.*

### THE DOG'S GRAVE

Without the valued assistance of working dogs, Australia's great cattle and sheep industry would have been severely retarded. One would have to say that much of the outer and upper regions may not have been developed at all. This story concerns the upper areas of East Gippsland, the winding droving track that links Cobungra Station Omeo to Dargo and down to Stratford. An old saying that "a man's dog is a man's living" holds true today.

Says Don Richardson - Manager of Omeo's Cobungra Station - "Dogs! We just couldn't live without them. We estimate that when we have a big day's work our dogs would travel 100 miles criss crossing in say a 20 mile drive."

On Cobungra, the stockmen generally have four or five dogs predominantly of Kelpie blood but with an infusion of Heeler or Border Collie.

A drover, named Semmens, who some say was the first to breed the Heeler, took mobs of three hundred cattle for hundreds of miles with the help of a couple of dogs.

With a good working dog up the sides, a mob of cattle will move freely and steadily. The cattle know that should they break or stray, the dog will stick with them until they return to the mob. Judith Wright vividly portrays the intelligence of the dog over the beast with her lines -

*His thunder powerless  
The red storm of his body shrunk with fear  
Runs the great bull, the dog upon his heels.*

Collected poems 1942 - 1970 by Judith Wright.

One lesson is generally enough for cow or bull.

Here is cattleman Jack Treasure's version of the Dog's Grave story:

Six miles north of Mt Birrigun, as the crow flies, is a speck marker on the map, eerily dubbed "Dog's Grave". Once upon a mountain time it was the site of the first camp out from the Cobungra Station on the cattle run to

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Dargo but since the last mob went through in 1937 it has been enclosed by the wilderness and left as a speck on the map.

The story from the hills on how this isolated location got its name is folklore. In the 1860s a portion of the Cobungra Station was owned by the Gray family and their grazing rights extended far over The Divide as far as the headwaters of the Wentworth River.

Bushman Peter Meighan was employed by the Grays to mind the cattle on the Wentworth side. In his lonely vigil he got to know every creek and gully in the watershed, from Mt Birrigun to Mt Badland. His knowledge of stock and the high wild country made him something of a legend in his own time.

Meighan had only two companions. A horse which he called "Skinny" and a dog with a cross-matched name, "Boney". When the trio were camped at the little slab hut in the bush, "Boney" found a poisoned bait which was supposed to be a meal for a dingo. The dog died soon after and his master was so stricken by the loss that he made a small grave of stone slabs and erected a picket fence around the site. Years after Peter Meighan had passed on the grave remained intact.

In 1888, a railway construction gang surveying the area for a proposed rail link between Stratford and Omeo camped in the Dog's Grave clearing. The camp cook, noticing the dilapidated state of the plot rebuilt the little fence in his spare time. But later bushfires ravaged the area, burning the fence and the hut. All but the name was lost.

In 1964, prodded by his famous curiosity for mountain history, Jack Treasure of Dargo set out, in company with Department of Mines Geologist, John Neilson to find the grave. The pair located the clearing and after further exploration, Treasure discovered a heap of rocks that was once a hearth and a chimney.

"Then rebuilding an imaginary doorway and placing myself by the door, I tried to imagine what site I would choose to bury my friend the dog, if I had been Peter Meighan.

"A south-westerly direction seemed appropriate and I walked that way for some 20 paces. And there it was, almost covered from view, a setting about three feet by two feet and another pile of tumbled down rocks."

Treasure and Neilson erected a third fence around the grave of "Boney".

Peter Meehan's dog was most likely an Australian Kelpie, which is still the popular breed for the high country. They have the blood of the Dingo in their veins. Described by Mr McNamara of Omeo - "They are forceful workers, bark well, are equally good with sheep or cattle, their feet are more able to stand up to the rugged terrain than most.

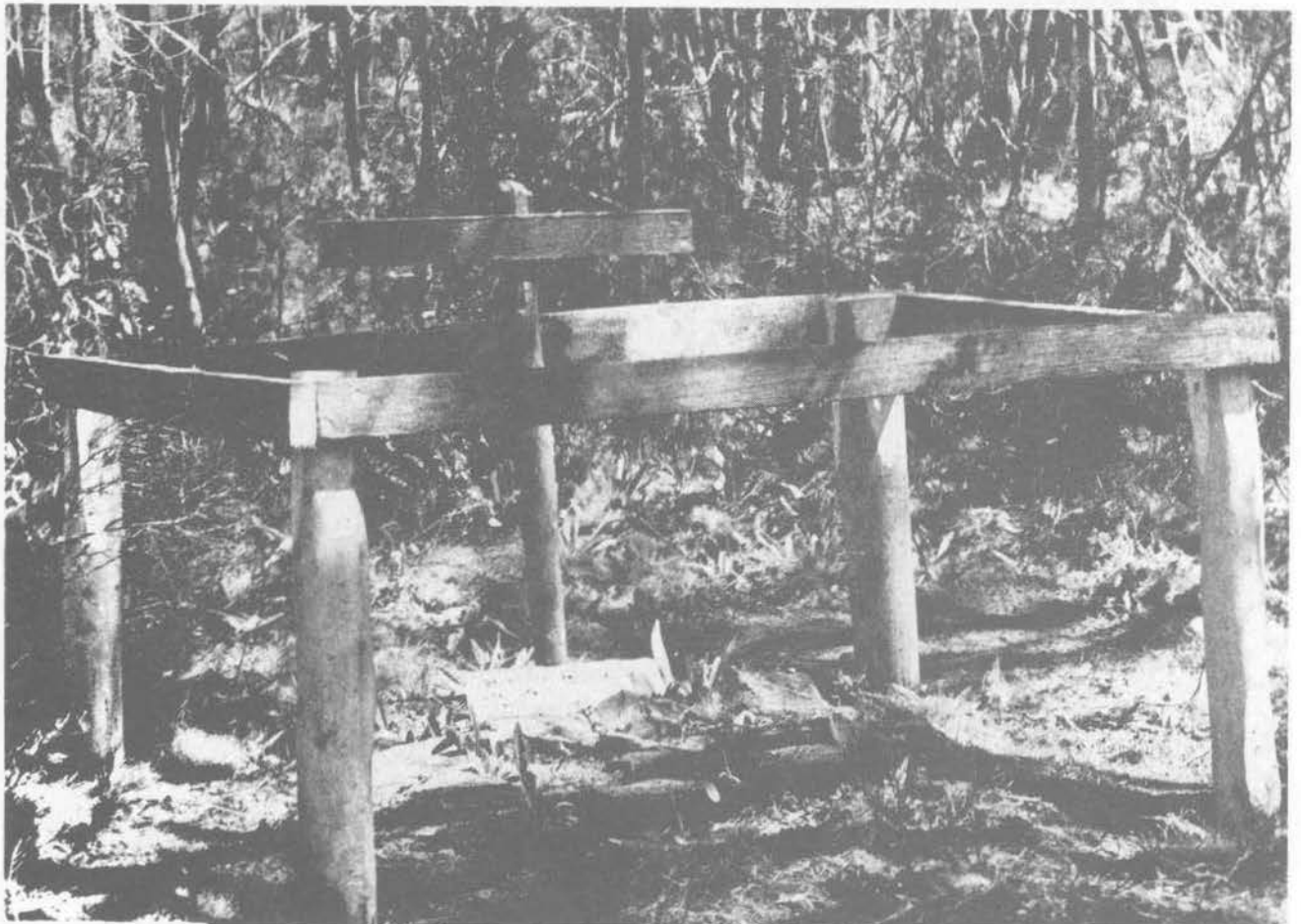
When John Giannarelli, a first generation Italian member of the Australian firm of monumental masons founded by his father, was prospecting in the Omeo district, his companion Jack Treasure, a cattleman and grandson of the pioneer family that founded Castleburn, told him the story of the Dog's Grave as he knew it. In a moment of perception, John Giannarelli



determined that the pioneers and their dogs should be memorialised in stone. Accordingly, on his return to Fitzroy, he caused a block of Harcourt granite to be shaped, engraved and lettered as a tribute to the men and women of the past, and their dogs.

Fortunately at that time, he was able to engage the services of an overseas artist whose name he is unable to recall and who has since returned to Yugoslavia. Using a diamond pointed engraving tool, the unknown artist has beautifully engraved the portrait of a Kelpie dog and underneath that has depicted a lonely bushman boiling his billy while sorrowing for his dog.

The picture was appropriately suggested by Frederick McCubbin's well known painting "Down on his luck", the original of which is in the Western Australian State Library. The two engravings are set into the granite. The monument stands some four feet high on its base and was conveyed to the site via Dargo and in May 1975 it was unveiled. Attending the ceremony were Avon and Omeo Shire Council members, members of Stratford and Omeo Historical Societies, together with groups of cattlemen and their families, 45 people in all.



*The Dog's Grave with fence erected by  
Jack Treasure and John Neilson in 1964*

With the assistance of the Forestry Commission staff, most were driven in four wheel drive vehicles across the Dargo River (no bridge), past the old Dargo Cemetery where Peter Meighan was buried and past the famous walnut tree which covers a quarter of an acre and along a forestry road only accessible to four wheel drive vehicles to the site and to the brief unveiling ceremony

The unveiling was performed jointly by the Avon President, Mr Gordon Hughes and Mr Louis Pendergast, President of Omeo Shire. At the time of the unveiling it was not certain in which shire the monument actually stood; however, it was confirmed later to be in the Avon Shire, almost on the border of Avon and Omeo.

On the left of the monument, is a small slab of granite carrying a verse as a tribute to "Boney":

*He served none else but Peter Meighan  
His master and his friend:  
A comradeship wove of the bush  
To last until the end.  
Mute faith in one: a friendship born  
In rugged ranges where  
A loneliness prevailed the scene -  
Just man and dog to share.  
  
They shared each others humble way,  
The ways of bush lore treading  
From dawn to dusk, through wilderness  
Where cattle pads went treading  
Beneath Australia's sunny skies,  
Beneath the tree ferns bending  
Along the ranges, by the stream -  
A way of life transcending.  
  
Until the end, the bitter end,  
Though dumb, in canine way  
He wove a story of the bush  
That we respect today  
He served to mould a history -  
Though little was he known  
He rests beside the mountain stream  
Beneath these slabs of stone.*

S. J. Treasure  
Dargo 1969

To the right is the original dog's grave. A concave growth of Black Sally makes a fitting backdrop to the group and a short distance away, a mountain stream flows over its rocky bed.

The story as told at the unveiling was that Peter Meighan camping at the site awakened one morning and found his dog "Boney" dead at the door of the hut. Peter accorded his dog a careful burial and for over 100 years the site was known in the locality as the Dog's Grave. However, researching this story amongst the Cobungra Station folk provided a second version of the story.

Mr Charles McNamara, alive and well today, grandson of the owner of Cobungra at the time of the incident, asserts that his story is the true one. His story is supported by many Omeo folk and generally has been accepted down the years by the Cobungra story tellers. He states, "There never was a hut at the time of the death of the animal. The dog was not "Boney" but "Angus", not an Australian Kelpie but a stumpy tailed Smithfield. The drover who owned the dog was Johnny Crisp, well known in Omeo where he kept a hotel and later on was a cordial manufacturer in Omeo. Peter Meighan John Crisp, Ned Gray, Ned Gunn, Tom Worchester and Jack Tolland, all Cobungra station men were mustering in the area when "Angus" picked up a bait that had been carried by a dingo. The dog died. Crisp buried his dog with much care, placed two layers of stones over the plot and erected a fence with bush timber. On a piece of bark he wrote the following verse:

*Once he came across the plain  
Wild cattle to surprise  
Now he's slain  
By Strychnine laid  
And never more to rise.*

Whether the facts have been confused with the passage of time, or which of the stories is the true one matters little. What does matter is that the memory of the pioneers and their dogs has been perpetuated in a fitting manner at a fitting site. The Giannarelli monument is a tribute not only to stockmen and their dogs but also honors the early pioneers.

*The Giannarelli headstone  
over the Dog's Grave in  
its bush setting.*



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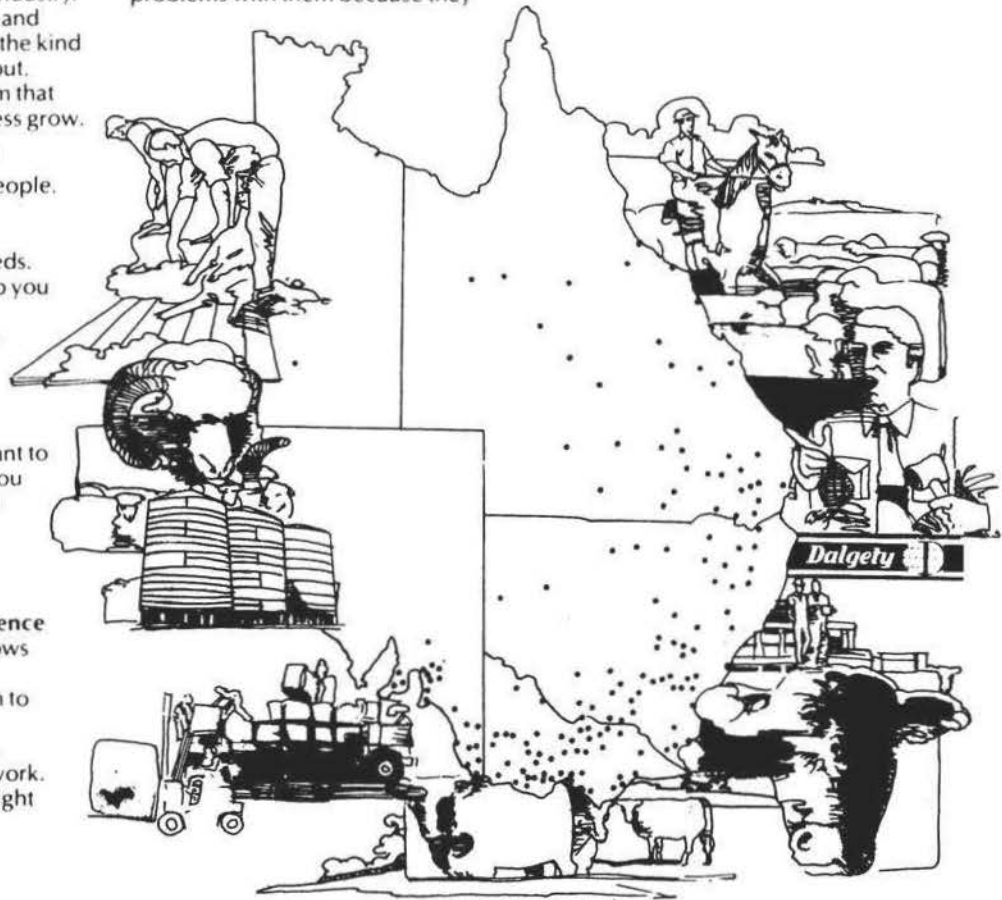
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Peter Meighan was later to meet a tragic death. Following a period of heavy rain in the area, the children of Dargo found it necessary to pick their footsteps carefully in order to keep their feet dry on their way to school in the year 1883 or 1884. Near where Mr Austin Hurley's home stands today, children saw Peter Meighan walking along the flat carrying his boots. He had rolled up the legs of his trousers and when, after walking a few hundred yards and having reached a spot where he might have been expected to replace his boots, the children suddenly saw him dive into the river. He did not surface.

The children told their story to their teacher but were sternly rebuked for telling lies. Later, when the children reached home and told the story to their uncle, David Phelan, a search was organised and the body recovered.

Peter Meighan was a man of supposed temperate habits but had become friendly with some hard drinking fellows who plied him with quantities of the terrible alcohol of the period, which often caused insanity.

The considered opinion at the time was that Meighan took his life while of unsound mind.

#### DROVING COBUNGRA CATTLE TO MARKET

During the years prior to the advent of motor transport, stock from Cobungra (and from other stations) were driven annually along the 38 miles of winding mountain track through forests of red gum and messmate to Dargo, on to Stratford to the saleyards of A. McLean and Co., and Theo B. Little at Maffra on the Gippsland plains.

Deep winter snow on Mt Birregun made it necessary for the drive to start usually in the autumn. Cattle are not taken if snow is covering the mountain. Stockmen on the Cobungra Station would spend perhaps up to a month preparing for the trip, mustering, culling, etc. before putting a mob ranging in size from 300 to 500 head of Hereford cattle on the road.

Cattle in the highlands love the taste of salt, although the salt is not really necessary for the health of the animals. The reaction of the animals to the cry of s-a-l-t is exciting to witness. The nearest animals bellow their acceptance and pleasure and come pounding down the hillsides. Bellows from the nearest animals echo back into the hills and are answered by those further afield until the message reaches into the outer limits of the station. Some of the animals are so far back into the hills, they may take a week or more to reach the salt.

Feeding of salt is mostly routine and the benefits are two-fold; mustering is made easier and it quietens the cattle. Mountain bred cattle are unused to yards, gates, dogs and humans with the accompanying smells, sounds and sights, are nervous, suspicious and frightened when first acquainted by them. Beasts yarded for the first time can become quite maddened with fear; hence the cry of s-a-l-t is frequently heard by the cattle and they come readily to accept the tasty portion.

Further preparations for the drive to the sales included the yarding and

shoeing of the extra horses needed. Horses are always cold shod and those used for the drive had to be experienced, sure footed and sturdy. Drovers rode their own horses and as many as ten drovers were needed for the journey. Extra stock horses were required as well as five or six pack horses. Horses were not injured very often, but accidents did happen. The extra stock horses allowed a change of mount when the drover's usual mount became tired.

Pack horses just had to be reliable and experienced, after all they were not led as a rule and they carried the provisions and supplies. They followed along with the cavalcade judging the width of their packs with skill and patience, negotiating the distance between the rocks and trees. The packs placed on horses needed to be very secure and well balanced and required all the skill and experience of the drover, as a badly balanced pack could easily push a horse over the edge of the track and result in the death of the horse and loss of the pack. Ropes and halters were usually greenhide and made by the stockmen.

Food prepared for the trips was simple - flour, baking powder for Johnny cakes and damper, fresh and salted meat, tea, sugar and treacle were the main fare. A couple of dogs accompanied each drover and killers were included in the mob to feed the dogs.

To protect the men from the intense cold of the mountain nights, drovers donned the famous Tasmanian Bluey made from wool and shower proof. Also the equally famous Thomas Evans oiled coat, long, wide shouldered, light weight and rain proof. Thick grey woollen blankets were carried and sometimes waist coats of tanned animal skins were worn. Leggings for protection of the drovers' legs in the rough bush terrain were also worn.

When all was prepared for the drive, the holding paddock gates were opened in the early hours of dawn and to the accompaniment of the bellowing cattle, the shouts and whip cracking of the stockmen and the barking of dogs, the cavalcade moved off on the eight day journey that was hard on both man and beast.

Good drovers always made camp before dark, never be caught making camp in the dark was number one rule of droving; so always a dawn start and camp before dark. Usually the drovers and their dogs bedded down between logs using whatever they could arrange near the camp fire. A tent fly or tent was sometimes used.

If it so happened that a mob had to be taken through short handed, the drovers were often forced to drop some cattle on the way. Such was the hospitality of the bush in those days that adjacent land holders would muster and hold those cattle until they could be picked up the following year.

The first two days journey was south then south-westerly from Cobungra's southern paddocks to the site of the Dog's Grave, a distance of twelve or thirteen miles between the Dinner Plain and Jim and Jack Creek. At the end of this and the next stretch, the stock were held in holding

paddocks. Therefore accommodation paddocks were used. The second day the mob travelled to Matheison's Flats on the Dargo River south west of Mt Birregun.

The skill and patience of the drover was severely tested on the third day's journey to Phelan's at Dargo. The first ten miles of the sixteen mile walk was along a bridle track approximately four and a half feet wide. In places the drop was sheer to the river some 1,000 feet below. This track had to be seen to be believed. As one drover said - "The cattle only went over once."

It was single file for the men and the cattle and trouble occurred when an aggressive beast turned to horn into the animal closely pressed behind. Unless the aggressor could be stopped quickly, one or more beasts would be forced over the side hurtling to the river below. In order to prevent trouble, the drovers endeavoured to split the mob evenly between them and with the aid of their intelligent dogs keep the animals on the move until they reached the next small river flat.

John Sadlier writing in the 1850s of his first ride in the area, probably on a horse not used to the terrain said - "The view down into those awful depths at one's feet, range rising upon range, striped with snow even at this late season (February) took one's breath away."

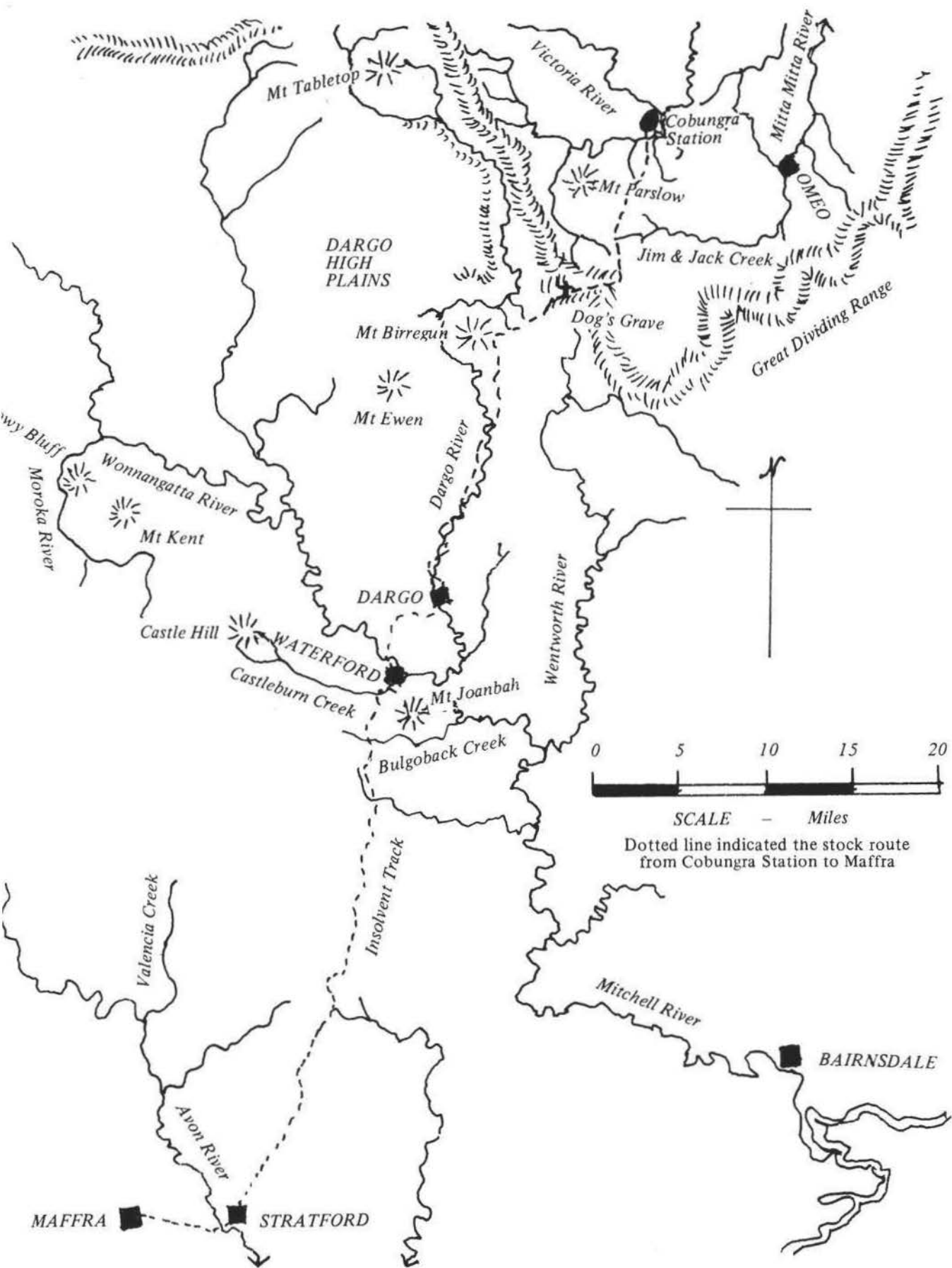
"Fearsome also for man and beast was the deep descent to the River Dargo below. The track was too steep for rider to remain in the saddle yet it had the appearance of having been much used. It was only by hanging on to the reins that we could get the horses to follow and then the fear that should the horses not be able to check their descent, we and the horses would be over the side."

He continued - "Ascending from the river towards Cobungra, the road was very much the same with this difference. The horses went first and we hung on to their tails. We reached the top in a series of short scrambles, horses and men stopping every few yards to recover their wind. Few men would care to undertake alone the journey described." This was the same route taken by the Cobungra drovers and in the same year.

The fourth day, the mob grazed along to Traill's or Long's at Waterford and at the end of the fifth day camp was made at Bulgoback Hotel. The sixth stage was an extremely long one which included travel along the Insolvent Track (originally Anderson's Track) from Lee's Junction on the Dargo Road to Stockdale, the site of the night's camp.

The seventh stage brought the mob to Stratford. On the eighth day it reached Maffra. It is believed that the last time this arduous drive was undertaken was in 1932.

The Insolvent Track was opened up in 1881 at a cost of £1,500 and it's formation was the main reason why Dargo joined the Avon Shire. The road was kept free of fallen timber by Richard Lee. Some said the track was so called by out of luck diggers who wished to avoid the storekeepers at Iguana Creek to whom they owed money. Another version has it that the contractor working on the track went insolvent.





*Late November finds the mountain cattlemen driving their herds in from the home paddocks, preparatory to assembling the mob that will be sent up to the high country in early December for summer grazing on the high plains. None follow a more picturesque route than the Merrijig cattle that cross the Delatite River and follow up the Howqua Valley to the foot of The Bluff – crossing and re-crossing the river along the way.*

*For many years the cows, unattended, led their calves on the four or five day's trek, that they had made many times before, to the snowplains that spread from The Bluff to Mt Howitt. In recent years, however, city safari riders compete for the opportunity to 'go along for the ride'.*

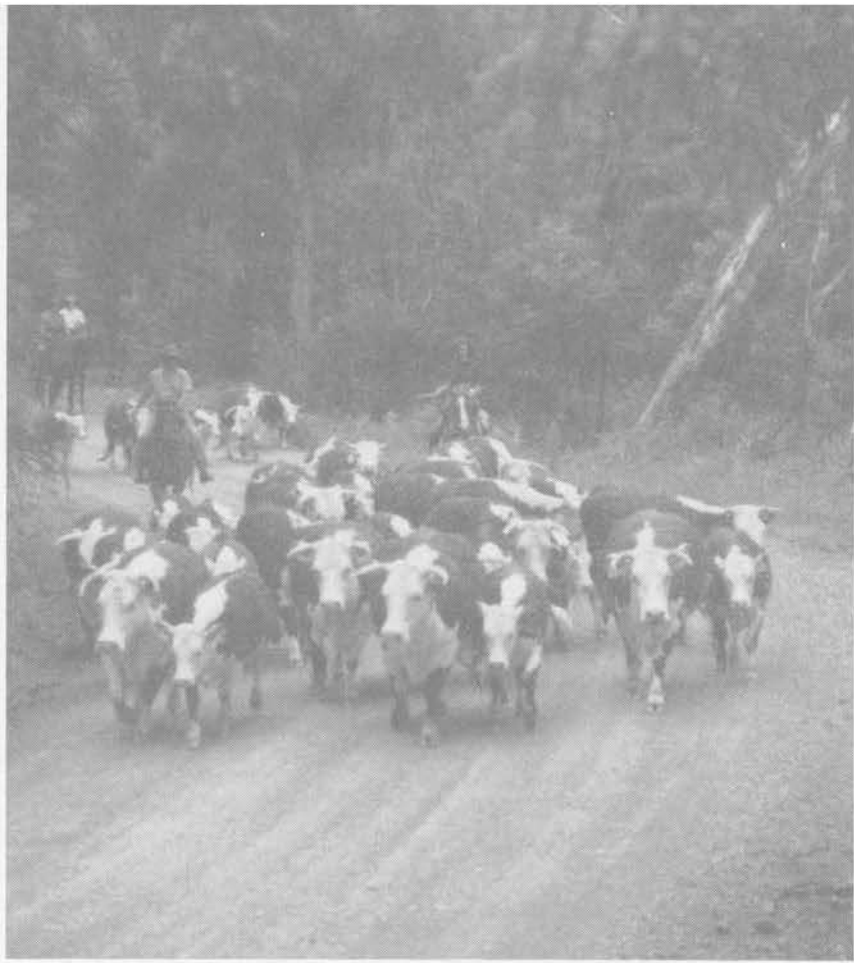
## TOWARDS MOUNTAIN PASTURES



*Here Come the Herefords! Breeding cows and their six-month old calves are driven in from their winter pastures in readiness for the drive-in which will take them across three rivers before reaching summer high plain pastures.*

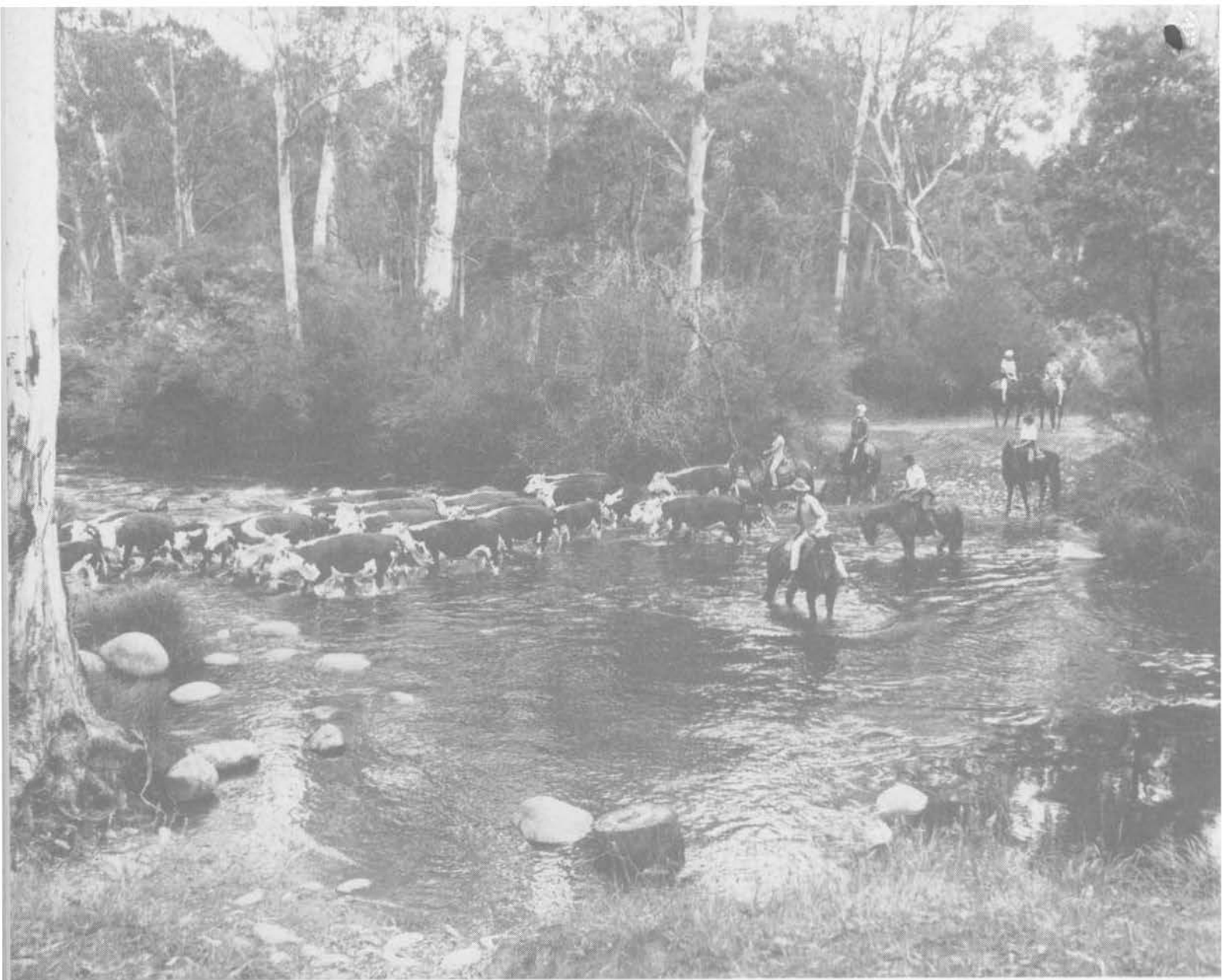
*Pause for a drink from the Delatite River.*





*Cows and calves pair off for the drive along a section of logging road. Leaving Sheeppyard Flat, the drive continues along the Howqua river.*







*Howqua River crossings:*

*(above) Section of the white-faced mob followed by a group of eager safari riders.*

*(opposite) A crossing in calm water, much shallower than in normal years.*

*Glenda shepherds the stragglers across.*



*Mount Buller rises majestically above the Howqua Valley.*



*Lunch-time halt in a forest clearing.*

*Tree-fringed snowplains near Mount Howitt.*



*David O'Rourke, the third of the O'Rourke boys who came across to the Black Mountain from the Monaro, with his brother Christopher in 1843, introduced a fine breed of horses to the area and ran them near Turnback.*

*When David died at Appin in 1855, many of the horses were never mustered. They spread into the surrounding country and soon built up into vast numbers. They were the forerunners of the 'brumbies' of North Gippsland and through to Kosciusko.*

*Here, Ken Connley of Benambra tells what is required of a modern day brumby hunter and his steed.*

## THE MODERN DAY BUCKRUNNER

*Ken Connley*

**T**HE VERY FIRST REQUIREMENT is a sound knowledge of the bush and its ways, i.e. bushcraft. This is something that cannot be taught, it needs years of practical experience to be able to read the signs because if one cannot read the signs then it will probably mean a buster at the first mossbed or underground creek.

**The Horse.** Getting the right horse is harder than may be expected. For instance, you could buy a horse that had won plenty of campdrafts, worked O.K. with cattle in the bush, but when the pressure is really on he may not be able to think quickly enough or may get stirred up when running horses. The ideal horse is about 15.2 hands, deep and solid, free going, excellent temperament and a good eater. If he meets these requirements and is a stallion then that's an extra bonus as you've then got plenty of stamina too. However, if you don't feed him right and keep him fit then you can't blame your horse if he "blows out". The idea is to catch as many horses as you are capable of handling at a time without knocking your horse about. The old saying that a good horse will get crippled chasing a mongrel horse does not apply if he is a good bush horse. The two horses that I am running off at present have caught 382 bucks to date between them and neither have had more than a week at a time off due to injury caused by chasing bucks.

**Gear.** You need a good light stock saddle that fits down on your horse and with a breastplate and crupper so it won't shift in the steep country; good rope as used in today's rodeos and a pair of gloves to stop the rope burns. Make your halters out of polypropylene bailing twine to the same pattern as the old - timers made their hide halters. The poly halters never rot, are light and can be washed out if they get covered in mud, etc.

**Time of Day.** The best time in most cases is to hit them within an hour of daylight as they will have a belly full of tucker and will be down on the feeding grounds and not up on the ridges where they can get the downhill run.

However, down in the low country during summer the best time is 1.00 or 2.00 in the afternoon when they come in for water.

The Run. Again, no set rules as there are never two runs the same and this is what makes it such a challenge. However, the secret is to come at them from the right direction so you can head them uphill. This is what you are up against as they can climb a thousand feet and seem to be going downhill most of the time.

Very Important; ride as though part of your horse and keep him balanced. Don't put too much pressure on your horse too far, that's when they get tired and make mistakes. Don't try and dodge all the scrub as you won't keep up by going around everything. After a lot of experience you will learn to bounce off a tree as a footballer will ride a bump, except trees are a lot more solid. Pick the horse you are going to rope and when you've got it covered, slip up and rope it real quick and run your rope around a tree. Put your halter on and tie up to a tree on level ground.

Leading them back to the horsefloat (this is the best way to take them out of the bush) and loading them is an art on its own, requiring patience and common sense. I've had blokes say to me, it took me an hour to load a buck or couldn't get the darn thing loaded, so had to turn it loose. After years of trying winches, twitches, etc., I found that all one needs to do is blindfold the buck and push it on with your horse - a matter of a few minutes.

So, if you want to have a go at buckrunning, get your horse and yourself fit, don't get on the drink the night before (even though most bucks are caught in the pub!) be prepared to take a knock and get yourself a supply of liniment for all the sore spots you'll get.

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# SNIPPETS FROM A VISITORS' BOOK OF YEARS GONE BY

Betty Fitzgerald, 'Shannon Vale'.

IT IS COMMON TO FIND A VISITOR'S book, in a prominent position in Huts used by cattlemen. Often they leave a message for other stockmen, such as "14th April. Kellys and Fitzs going off with respective mobs. Will be back on Monday. Some of Roper's and Maddison's in the mob. Will contact Tawonga tonight - Bren Fitz."

The Visitors Book in Fitzgerald's Hut started off as an Omeo Hospital book for recording donations. It was given in 1928 by the Omeo Hospital Secretary Mr A. N. Presswell and contained a message that "Visitors to the Bogong High Plains are invited to contribute to the Omeo Hospital. Donations will be acknowledged through the local press and Annual Report if names are entered in the book. It is requested that cheques and large payments be forwarded to the Secretary, Omeo. Signed A. N. Presswell. Christmas 1928." Over the years there have been the odd cheques sent to the Fitzgerald family and handed to the Hospital but mainly it has been a steady flow of cash over the years. Once a collection tin, which someone needed badly - now it is a jam tin on the wall.

There have been five books filled over the years and the comments are varied and interesting, such as the person who wrote that they wished Mr Fitzgerald and his rats and his hut to - - - National Parks for ever. Strangely he was happy to accept overnight accommodation at the said hut . . . rats included! They are bush rats.

Over the years Bush Walking Clubs and bush walkers, Rover Scouts, Trail Riders, Skiers, S.E.C. survey parties and school trips have been happy to use the hut - to boil the billy, shelter from a storm, stay awhile or stay a week. Family groups have been happy to find this little hut when they have been walking. One of the Phelan family of Sydney were intrigued when reading the Visitors Books to find that the Fitzgerald family did exist - unlike Wallace's Hut, Cope Hut, Johnson's Hut etc., whose history perhaps is being forgotten.

Snippets from the first book may be of interest - Christmas 1928 to May 1967.

Extracts:

Names well known, Stan Flattely, A. Rufenacht, W. F. Waters (Commissioner of Rover Scouts), A. W. Shands, nine girls who called themselves "Fitzgerald's Circus" who tramped and trecked all over the Plains,\* led by "Dad" Fitzgerald.

\* The "Fitzgerald's Circus" girls were members of the Melbourne Womens Walking Club, one of whom will be attending the Mountain Cattlemen's Association 'Get - Together' at Cobungra this year. Ed.



In August 1936, P.E.Hull, G.H.Michell and Cleve Cole. The trip that ended in tragedy when they became lost in a blizzard and were rescued by a search party. Cleve Cole died in the Omeo Hospital soon after being rescued. Diana Dyason whose father was involved with the Maude and Yellow Girl mine at Glen Valley near by. The Melbourne Walking Club 1940 Ski trip. Melbourne Women's Walking Club - Christmas 1940 until New Year's Eve.

18th Nov. 1942. Percy Cerutti, Les Curry and Frank Davies. "Fine day - snow still on slope outside hut. Just popped in en route to Tawonga, Mt. Bogong, Hotham, Feathertop and Harrietville.

In 1943 Bill Pow of Glen Valley who took many riding parties to the tops. K.B.Lewis and J.G.Barker - Glen Valley who with George Armstrong and C.Bant skied from Johnson's Hut when they could get away for a week-end.

1944. Melbourne University Ski Club "Spent an excellent fortnight here 19th to 31st August. In 1945 another party from the University Ski Club "Left medicine chest in billy hanging from rafter (NB Contains 2 doses of morphia)." The black billy still holds the first aid kit.

In 1946 Tony and Skippy St Elmo from Dunolly who later came to know the area so well.

A party E.R.Ballantyne, A.E.Ferguson, R.Honeycombe and D.McNabb - "arrived at 6 p.m. 24/8/46 having left Shannon Vale at 1.30 p.m. Weather excellent during whole of our stay. On arrival the snow was up to the name plate on the door. A 12 ft. cornice on the chimney side of the hut. Trips to Wallaces and Ropers Huts revealed that both were completely covered with snow. Left bushman's Saw with spare blade wrapped in brown paper, for others to use.

In Sept. 1946 a party of seven. "Spent first part of a week in Kelly's Hut while previous party in this hut. Caught seven rats in rabbit traps. Weather excellent for three days then strong wind and low visibility. Manufactured one more chair to match existing "suite" . . ."

Lorna and Lyn King and George Armstrong 6th Sept. 1947. "7.30 a.m. just leaving for home. Never had we seen such a welcome sight as this Hut last night!"

24th Jan. 1950. Laurence Harrison and friend "Spent last night in this Hut - a most comfortable bed. It's cheerful fire warmed our hearts and stimulated discussion in the free and friendly way - a night to be remembered gratefully." !!

17th Dec. 1950. "Just a lonely push bike rider from Rocky Valley. Must come up again and ride further on this glorious cycling country. - Les Sobey, South Melbourne Amateur Cycling Club."

29th March 1951 "Weather perfect - like always. Omeo to Tawonga. J.L.Mitchell. Lands Dept."

29th Dec. 1951. "Spent a very pleasant and comfortable night in Hut. An army of moths had taken possession before us, but were evicted after a brave fight. Weather warm but patches of snow still on Mt. Nelse. - N & F.Burns".

G.T.Thompson, Soil Conservation Authority. "Perfect days but then it always is when the High Plains Advisory Committee is on the job." Apr. 53.

And progress . . . 3rd August 1954. Arrived per Sno Cat. Very little snow for this time of the year. E.Massey, J.P.Moloney and W.Deans.

22nd May 1956. "Walked from Langfords Aquaduct Survey. Things have changed around the High Plains since first visit 4th May, 1927. - A.R.Scott, Civil Branch, S.E.C.

30th Aug. 1958. "A small donation for the Hospital, Bren and many thanks for the use of "Park House" for a week. Plenty of good snow and skiing. Inside temperature today with large fire 28 degrees F. Fred Allan and Bert McLeod."

March 10th 1959. Staying at Park House while the Kelly boys are re-building their hut. Should be a fine hut. V.Kelly.

28th Dec. 1959. A party of Melbourne Women's Walking Club revisited the Hut after a long absence - packed up and down from Shannon Vale. Appreciate comfort and equipment in Park House. Thought this end of the Plains very beautiful.

In 1962 the 7th World Rover Moot brought several hike parties to the High Plains and they visited the Hut.

3rd March 1964. Major repairs by Fitzgerald menfolk to chimney, should last for years.

Then the final entry so typical - "May 4th 1967. Jack Roper. Did Paradise yesterday, also Wild Horse Creek and all other points. None of your cattle. Clearing off today. Bren Fitz."



*George Fitzgerald, Paddy McNamara and Jack O'Connell with pack horses in 1928 (top) and three members, Jack Dickson (Asst. Supervisor), Alf Bailey (Chef) and Jim Stewart (Asst. Chef), of the first organised Trail Rides on the Bogong High Plains, 1928.*

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# ALPINE RESEARCH

*Dr. Harm van Rees,  
Soil Conservation Authority*

LIVESTOCK HAVE GRAZED in the Victorian high country during the snow free seasons since the early 1850s. Large numbers of sheep cattle and horses grazed the alpine areas during the drought years and there can be little doubt that during those times long term damage was caused to the alpine environment. The use of alpine areas for livestock was virtually unrestricted until the early 1940s. At this time it was realized that the High Country was a major water catchment and heavy grazing was regarded as being detrimental to water catchment values. In 1945 government departments concerned with soil conservation and land management, in liaison with local cattlemen, formed an advisory committee which banned the use of fire, controlled the number of cattle and determined the dates of entry and departure of cattle in the alpine areas. In 1957 the Soil Conservation Authority (SCA) was directed by government to take control over grazing on all public land above 1220m, the approximate snowline. Since the 1940s the SCA in co-operation with local cattlemen has taken an active role in assessing the condition of grazed areas. In addition, a number of research projects have been undertaken in the alpine region to study the effects of grazing on the alpine environment. Most of the research has been on the Bogong High Plains, with a few exceptions such as the study by Laing on the Nunniong Plateau. Masie Carr was the first Soil Conservation Officer to work in the area, and the plots she established in 1946 and 1947 have been maintained. These plots are of immense scientific value and are the second longest running ecological study in Australia. A resurgence of interest in the alpine region in the late 1970s resulted in numerous studies being initiated, some of these have since been completed.

A study which I conducted while a post - graduate student in the School of Agriculture and Forestry, at the University of Melbourne, has been completed and a report prepared. This study included an investigation of the diet and behaviour of cattle on the Bogong High Plains. Some of the findings I have reported in recent issues of "Voice of the Mountains". A study based on the ecology of the grassland and shrublands on the High Plains is conducted by Dick Williams from the Botany School, University of Melbourne. Dick is in the process of writing up his results and a report should be available towards the end of 1985. The SCA has also been actively involved in research on the High Plains. Vegetation description and mapping was completed by Keith McDougall in 1984. A number of long term monitoring programs were initiated in 1979 and regular measurements have been taken. A report on this work is available from the SCA. I have also been working on an alpine range assessment guide. This guide will be used to evaluate the carrying capacity of alpine areas.

*contd. on pp 45*

# RICHARD BENNISON

*Linda Barraclough*

THE MOUNTAIN RUNS of Victoria have always been of greatest value to cattlemen in the drought years, with stock being able to survive there when pasture on the lower plains is scarce. The drought of 1860 and the disastrous bushfires of February 1861 were major factors in the sudden expansion of grazing into the headwaters of the Macalister, and today the Bennison Plains bear the name of one of the first men to resort to them in order to save valuable breeding stock.

Richard Bennison's cattle first grazed the Bennison High Plains north of Heyfield in 1860, and he took up the Mount Wellington run in 1861. At the same time J. C. Telford took up the Kilbrachan run east of Tali Karng, McMahan and A. G. McCrae took up Ficary, north of Glencairn and McCrae took up Mount Useful in his own right. However, Bennison was distinguished from his neighbours by his continued use of the area after the drought period ended. By 1863 Telford, McMahan, McCrae and their successor William Wallace had allowed their runs to lapse, but it was 1869 before Bennison gave up his.

Richard Bennison was born about 1813 in the English coastal town of Whitby, on the northern edge of the Yorkshire moors. His father was a veterinary surgeon. Richard probably emigrated to Tasmania in the mid 1830s, and was married in 1843 in Hobart Town. His twenty-one years old bride, Eliza, had arrived in Tasmania aboard the "Jolm Edgar" in 1837 with her parents.

Richard and Eliza came to Gippsland a short time after their marriage. In 1846 he took out the licence for the Port Albert Inn, and four years later took up runs at Yanakie and Corner Inlet. However, by 1856 he had transferred his attention to Sale, and in 1857 he sold the Inn to John Gellion. In 1859 he built the Club Hotel at Sale and with a Mr Douglas began the first coach run between Sale and Port Albert. At the same time he disposed of his



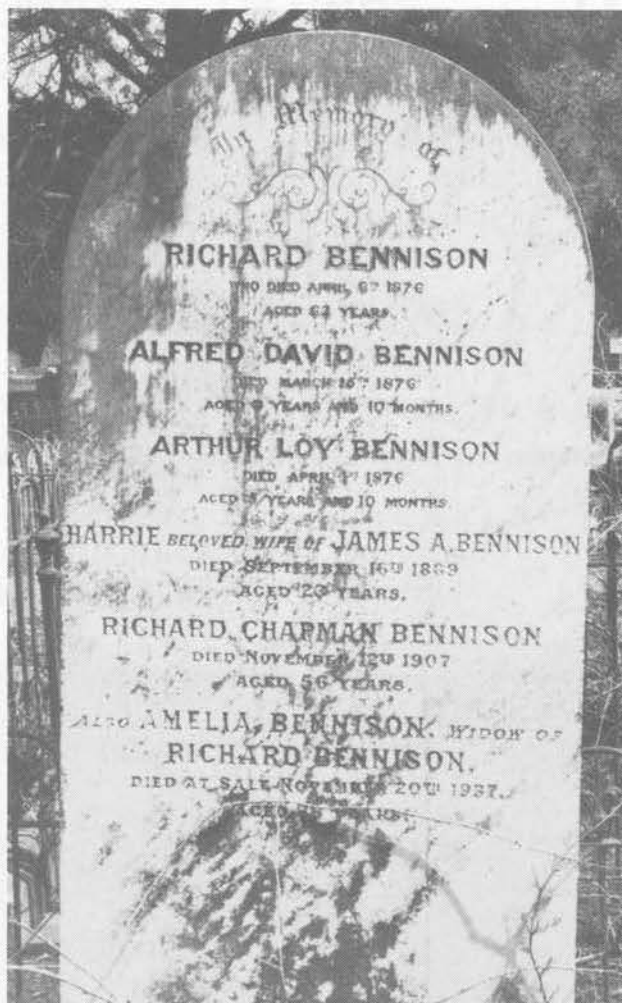
*Richard Bennison*

South Gippsland grazing interests and concentrated on his property "Myrtle Downs" on the Maffra Road near Sale.

Eliza and Richard had eleven children, but few of them survived infancy. The deaths of their two youngest are believed to have contributed to his early passing on the 6th April 1876 at the age of sixty-three. Alfred and Arthur, aged nine and five died during a scarlet fever outbreak. The "Gippsland Times" reported that their father's death was "in some measure attributable to his unceasing care and watchfulness at the bedside of his two little sons who by only a few days had preceded their father to the grave".

Eliza Bennison survived her husband by many years, dying in 1920 aged ninety-eight years. Her advanced age says much for the pioneer lady whose eleventh child was born when she was forty-nine years old. Richard Bennison was survived by two sons and two daughters. One son, Richard Chapman Bennison, died at Sale in 1907 and the other, James, moved to Benalla. Nothing further is known of his two daughters, Julia and Marion.

Today his Plains are held by the Higgins and Chester families of Glenmaggie. There are no Bennisons taking cattle up to the High Country, but the name remains on one of the most beautiful areas still grazed by cattle during the summer months.



*The Bennison Family Headstone,  
Sale Cemetery.*

*ALPINE RESEARCH – contd. from pp 43*

The next important phase in this research is an objective evaluation of the research results and together with representatives from the Mountain Cattlemen a comprehensive management strategy should be prepared. This strategy should aim to preserve the environment which so many in our community enjoy whilst acknowledging the role of the Mountain Cattlemen in managing the area.

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# HOW CATTLE CAME TO BE RUNNING ON THE HIGH PLAINS

Betty Fitzgerald, 'Shannon Vale'.

IN THE EARLY DAYS two tribes of Aborigines inhabited the area, wending their way up when the winter snow had gone and remaining until the end of autumn. Winter months were spent in the foothills of the Bogong High Plains. The luxury item of their diet was the Bogong moth - "Bogong" meaning Big Fella in their language.

Jim Brown and Jack Wells were the first white men to cross the Bogong High Plains from Omeo to Tawonga in 1852. Many of the names given to landmarks by them are still in use. These two men were stockmen employed by George Gray to look after the Cobungra Run. *Cattlemen and Huts of the High Plains* by Harry Stephenson contains much history of the early settlers.

I can only speak of the Omeo area and its cattlemen but I presume it would be similar for Tawonga, Myrtleford, Dargo (some of their country being freehold), Mansfield, Mitta and Whorroughly.



Victorian Government Tourist Bureau Trail Ride party, leaving 'Shannon Vale.  
December, 1928.



From the early 1860s it seems, cattlemen were grazing stock on the High Country. In 1887 the 90,000 acres of the Bogong High Plains was divided into 19 grazing blocks. In 1954 George S. Fitzgerald spoke of having only missed one muster in 70 years, due to an accident, so the first actual muster could have been in 1885. It was that year that a Title was granted for "Shannon Vale", it having been leased by William Jack and then the Braithwaite family.

Of the original run holders of the Omeo side, McNamaras, Kellys and Fitzgeralds remain to this day. A High Plains run cannot be sold, it can only be handed on to the immediate family. Of the Omeo cattle, Kellys of Hinnomunjie and the three Fitzgerald families (two from Dry Hill in Omeo and one from Shannon Vale) gained access via the Lanes track to where Kellys and Fitzgeralds huts now stand. Jack and Bill Batty of Glen Valley who no longer use their run went up Wild Horse Creek track to Mt. Nelse area. McNamaras who had land at Cobungra and Bundara and Faithfulls of Bingo took their cattle via Grassy Flat, to Bundara and to Buckety Plains area. Cobungara cattle headed out in the same direction.

With cattle running on the Plains, huts became necessary. Wallace's Hut built in 1889 and Fitzgerald's hut 1903 are about the earliest still in use. Kelly's hut was burnt down and replaced. Long before the Kiewa Scheme was commenced or Falls Creek ski village became a reality . . . the cattle-



*Trail Ride party lunching outside Fitzgerald's Hut, December 1928.*



*George Fitzgerald with packhorse.*

men were helpful to the bush walkers, skiers, trail riders and others, who were finding a pleasure in this area. Many made use of the cattlemen's huts to boil the billy or stay on for holiday. Cattlemen often packed winter supplies in for the skiers to these huts. The Victorian Tourist Bureau held Trail Rides from Shannon Vale to Harrierville for three years from 1928-30. It was George Fitzgerald and Paddy McNamara who obtained the 200 horses required for the Trail Ride and acted as guides during the trip.

To get back to the cattle . . . early run holders paid an annual fee for their licence. For many years sheep were grazed on the Plains in charge of a shepherd. This practice was discontinued about 1939. No bulls are allowed and only horses used for mustering cattle. The land above 4,000 ft. was under the control of the Soil Conservation Authority. In 1966 the system was changed to agistment and in that year 50 cents per head was charged. Each run holder has an allocation of cattle which he cannot exceed. The number of cattle run at present is considerably less than in the early days. Cattle have a set date for entry and must be off by a certain date. This is decided by an Inspection Committee. This committee for many years consisted of S.C.A. officers and a member to represent each district of cattlemen. An inspection was made twice a year and the date of entry depended on the season. For some years cattle were counted up to ensure that numbers were not exceeded.

Once Falls Creek Village was established cattle became a nuisance. They soon learnt that salt was used around chair lifts and ski tows! To prevent this the cattlemen did a roster to patrol the area. Each run holder doing about a week on roster. In recent years an electric fence was erected by the cattlemen with materials supplied for which they also paid a share. This has eliminated the problem considerably and the roster is no longer necessary.

In 1978 the Land Conservation Council Recommendations were



*Members of the first Trail Ride, 1928.*

introduced. This resulted in the Bogong National Park. From 1st October 1981 the High Country was under the control of the National Parks Services with assistance from the Soil Conservation Authority who had much experience in the area. Changes were inevitable.

A second study was done by the L.C.C. with a new set of recommendations. The final decision will be made in the Autumn sitting of Parliament. This would create a huge National Park stretching from Mansfield to Kosciusko National Park.

Grazing cattle on the Bogong High Plains has been a way of life for generations of cattlemen. Third and fourth generation stockmen now take cattle up to the Plains and 'tho the stock horse is still very much to the fore, the pack horse has been replaced largely by 4 wheel drive vehicles. It is part of Australia's history, a tradition.

What the future holds, who knows?

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Arthur and Jack Guy at Wonnangatta in 1950s.

*As we gather at the graveside of a Guy we knew as Jack,  
And we talk of times gone by, a year or two,  
There'll be stories all unfolding of a tough but gentle man  
Who was a real fair dinkum bushman through and through.*

*He was born at Crooked River as his father was before,  
In the saddle he was moulded from the start.  
He rode the bushland ranges from the gullies to the peaks  
And to the land he loved he gave his heart.*

*How he loved God's given mountains stretching high into the sky  
The valleys with their life supporting streams  
Jack knew the work required, there was no pretending here  
As he whistled and he strove to reach his dreams.*

*For Jack life had a purpose, and in that he set his course  
Being generous, kind and honest as the day  
He gave to men unstinting when their luck was down and out  
For Jack Guy only knew the mountain way.*

*Let us thank our God in Heaven for a mate we had like Jack  
For support and friendship that he gave to all  
It was a privilege to know him, have him touch our very lives,  
We praise you Lord, and listen for your call.*

*As we gather at the graveside of a Guy we knew as Jack,  
And we talk of times gone by, a year or two,  
There'll be stories all unfolding of a tough but gentle man,  
Who was a real fair dinkum stockman through and through.*

Rev. Gordon E. Cooper

## JACK GUY

**J**OHAN DENNIS "JACK" GUY died at Dargo on April 19th, 1984, at the age of 76 years, and with his passing another link between the High Plains and one of the great pioneering families that grazed them, was severed.

Jack's grandfather Edward Remington "Yorky" Guy came to Australia in 1853 and settled at Waterford, moving later to Talbotville, working as a gold miner. His wife, nee Elizabeth Jane Wilson of Port Albert, presented him with eleven children, of whom Alexander, the eighth child, born 1870, was Jack's father. Elizabeth ran a boarding house and acted as the local midwife. Alexander Guy, originally a mail contractor, married the Dargo Postmistress, Catherine Armstrong in 1899. Alex first fattened bullocks at his 270 acre home property "Glen Lee", then on Duffey's Flat which was cleared by Alex and three of his sons, Ned, Arthur and Jack. He later ran cattle in the bush up the Crooked River, the Moroka, Basalt and Ti-Tree. In 1934, Alex, with sons Ned, Arthur and Jack purchased the Wonnangatta Station (1,100 acres freehold), Snowy Plains (320 acres freehold) and took over the grazing leases that

ranged from Mt Clear, King Billy, Howitt Plains and the Snowy Plains — approximately 100,000 acres. The Station was stocked with 900 head, mainly Freisan cross and Herefords, and with the accompanying leases, the herd was expanded to 1800.

Ned sold his interest after a short time, and following the death of Alex in 1949, Arthur and Jack ran the Wonnangatta freehold and leases until they sold to Bob Gilder of "Glenfalloch" in 1970. Jack continued to graze cattle on Ti Tree and Moroka.

The hut on Snowy Plains, which still bears the name "Guys" was built by Jack and three helpers in 1940.

The Guys' knowledge of the Gippsland high country was legendary and it has been said that Crooked River near Dargo should be called 'Guy Country' because of the families' long association with the area. Jack, himself, was one of the high country's outstanding cattlemen. He leaves a wife, Betty, whom he married in 1954, and a son, David. Jack was a foundation member of the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria, who will be the poorer for his passing.



In a little country village  
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In a neat garden setting  
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There's a caravan park  
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And ample parking  
For the tourist to stop.  
Don't turn back  
Ask for Patricia or Jack  
There's meals on request  
And beer at its best.  
And I'm sure you'll agree  
There's none to equal  
their hospitality.

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*The decade between the mid - 1920s and 1930s saw the beginning of ski - touring in Victoria. The pioneers moved out across the Bogong High Plains and relied for their over - night or base accommodation on the cattlemen's huts which hitherto had remained unvisited during the winter months, when the Plains lay deep in snow.*

*It became the custom for cattlemen to provision, on request, a number of these huts with cases of food taken in by pack - horse, at the time of the autumn muster. Skiers, planning forays across the snow-fields in the coming winter would despatch wooden cases, suitably labelled for identification, containing their supplies for a week or a fortnight, to the nearest railhead and be confident that on their arrival at Kelly's, Fitzgerald's, Cope, Wallace's, Blair's, Maddison's or the Tawonga hut, their provisions would be awaiting them.*

*From Dargo, at the end of July 1936, Harry Price, a bushman whose name was to become almost legendary, set out on what was to become*

## *A REMARKABLE JOURNEY*

*This article was compiled from information supplied by Jack Treasure, the late Eric Stewart, H. Robertson and W. Bertram.*

Harry, we are told, went bush during the Depression years and found his way into the Dargo area. Of independent character and endowed with great ability as a bushman, he lived as a "loner", hunting his food - rabbit, wombat or possum; fishing the streams by the effective method of placing his rifle barrel beneath the surface, firing a shot and gathering the stunned fish; collecting wild honey from the hives of bush bees he located, and storing it in rock hollows, first with a covering of animal fat and then a flat stone to protect it from predators. Harry supplemented his worn clothing with leggings and cap of animal skins, and he slept in the shelter of hollow logs and crude bush shelters. He appeared occasionally in Dargo to perform odd jobs and thus purchase the necessities that the bush did not provide.

Harry set off on his journey of exploration wearing the clothes he possessed a few meagre food supplies in a sugar bag, an old blanket, an axe and his .22 calibre rifle.

Disdaining the Dargo road which would have led him northwards to the Alpine Highway near Mt. St. Bernard, Harry wandered up the valley of the Wongungarra River, a trackless route which brought him in some forty miles to St. Bernard's Hospice. Along the way, he fashioned from a sapling, a pair of skis. These he cut and shaped with his axe, and in place of ski bindings, he attached a pair of possum skin thongs which loosely fitted over his boots.

Eric Stewart, a pioneer skier, and at that time employed by the Victorian Railways to escort parties of skiers from Harrierville via the Bon Accord Spur to "Hotham Heights", the V.R. operated accommodation house, was at St. Bernard as a guest of Mine Host, "Barney" Rush when Harry skied up to the front door of "The Hospice". "Barney" and Eric were both rather nonchalant types, but the appearance of the visitor greatly surprised them.



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Now, it so happened that "Barney" supplemented his income as innkeeper, by phoning through to Melbourne newspapers, over - sensationalised versions of news items both factual and sometimes fictional.

Harry Price was immediately ushered inside, offered a drink and invited to tell his story. But, with the cunning acquired from his years in the bush, Harry said: "Gime me a quid, first." "Barney" obliged, realizing that before the night was out, he would have recovered most of it!

Eric recounted the story to this point many years later, and added: "Next morning, Harry stated his intention of skiing across to Hotham in weather conditions that were bad. In those early days, with the road cuttings completely snow - filled, the St. Bernard - Hotham trip necessitated following the tops and skiing along the ridge over Mt. Blowhard, Little Baldy and Mt. Hotham before reaching Hotham Heights. We tried to dissuade Harry from venturing out in the conditions prevailing, but he waved us aside and set off. "Barney" phoned Bradshaw, the manager at Hotham Heights and warned him of an impending tragedy.

Harry, however, arrived at mid - day remarking that "it had been blowing a bit across the top, but nothing to worry about". And then from Hotham Heights, he moved on.

The story of the next section of the journey comes from Bill Robertson, one - time Chairman of the Huts and Tours Committee of the Ski Club of Victoria, and leader of numerous ski tours in the 1930s. He wrote to me:

"It was August 1936, and the plan that year was to spend a week at Fitzzy's hut and then move over to Cope hut for the second week. It so happened that the very day we arrived on the Plains was the day that the hue and cry went up on the Bogong disaster\*, with the result that we didn't know anything about it until a week later. We had foul weather for the first week and when the time came to shift to Cope hut we had to set off in the teeth of a raging blizzard. The usually easy trip took almost six hours instead of the usual two and we spent the last hour sitting on our backsides on the ice at the head of Middle Creek, in sight of Cope hut, but unable to move without labouriously cutting step holes with a hatchet.

I was wearing "Polar Bear" half - crampons on my boots, so was obliged to lead throughout the step cutting. However, there was some comic relief awaiting us in the hut. We must have presented a frightening sight, dirty, unshaven, covered in ice, and that year I was carrying, of all things, my big .50 calibre Martini rifle, because I had heard that there was a chance of getting a winter fox or two. The door of the hut was iced up so we all pushed together and as the door flew open, an apparition arose from a crouch over a tiny fire and as he rose he fired a shot from a .22 calibre rifle that he was holding, up the chimney. The noise was deafening and the effect dramatic. A great cloud of sooty particles descended, putting out the fire and liberally coating the strange figure.

\* This was the Cleve Cole, 'Mick' Hull, Howard Michell party which encountered atrocious weather on their climb to Mt Bogong. Cole lost his life and Hull suffered severe frostbite.

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"G'day," he said, "Y's gave me a bit of a start. I'm Mr. Price. I come from Crooked River." He had to be seen to be believed. We counted at least three pairs of ragged pants that he was wearing, carefully arranged so that the numerous holes didn't overlap. His legs were wrapped in what looked like rabbit skins. He had shaggy, unkempt hair, and was indescribably dirty.

We looked around the hut and a heavy silence suddenly descended. On the floor, and on the table were three of our four cases of supplies, clearly marked in black paint, "S.C.V. Party, August 1936.", all broken open and well depleted. Mr. Price, "The Man from Crooked River", had been having a whale of a time ridding our tucker boxes.

There was nothing much that we could do, short of using the Martini, but next morning he was informed in no uncertain terms that he was "Non persona Grata" and that if he valued his skin he had better be moving on, and smartly, at that! So, we gave him two days food, told him how to get off the Plains down Middle Creek and he left, clopping along on home made skis. He must have circled around, found Fitzzy's hut barren\*, then made a bee-line for Bogong and settled in to repeat his depredations at Aertex hut.

With Mr. Price safely out of the way, Andy and myself set out for Hotham with the intention of bringing another member back from there to join the party. We had a rather rough trip due to the exceptionally low temperatures and high winds. We never did reach Hotham. We got as far as the shoulder of Mt. Loch and were literally blown off it. We retreated to Dibbin's hut for the night and had another go the next morning. This time we didn't get as far as the previous day due to ice crust and dense fog. Back to Dibbins again, camped overnight then up Mt. Jim and headed for Cope hut, which we reached about 3.30 p.m. to be greeted by news of the Bogong tragedy.

Bill Bertram supplied the final chapter to the Harry Price saga. Bill, a pioneer skier who was a member of the first party to traverse Mt Bogong in winter (1932) led a party to Mt. Bogong in September 1936. He had bought the rights to a food supply located in Maddison's "Aertex hut" in Camp Valley and intended spending a week skiing and searching for the Cleve Cole party's equipment, abandoned a few weeks previously.

On a clear, sunny day, Bill's party reached the summit of Mt. Bogong, after having climbed the Staircase Spur. Bill clambered on to the top of the summit cairn to survey the scene. Looking along the ridge that led to Camp Valley, Bill was surprised to see a lone skier approaching. As lone skiing was severely frowned upon by the Ski Club of Victoria and most skiers were a close-knit group, Bill was puzzled as to the identity of the approaching skier. He was never able to positively identify him.

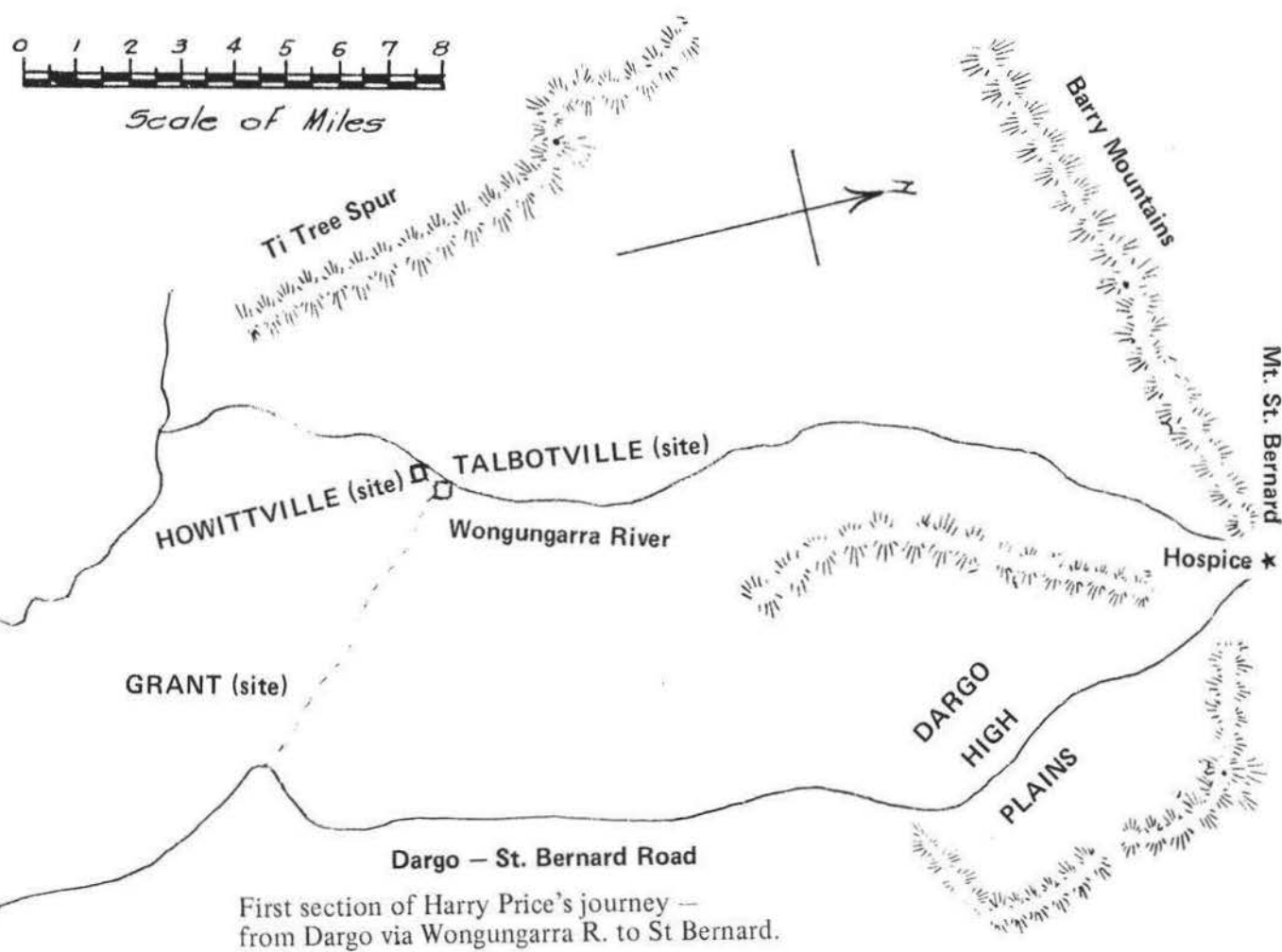
The skier from a distance of about a quarter of a mile apparently looked up and seeing Bill and party on the summit, did an about turn and hastily made off into the distance.

\* Fitzzy's Hut was 'barren' because the Cleve Cole party had collected their provisions only a short time before. Had Harry Price arrived first, one wonders if the Cole party could have continued to Mt Bogong - and tragedy.

Even more puzzled by this action, Bill and party skied on to reach Maddison's "Aertex" hut an hour or so later. The hut interior was a shambles, empty food tins littered the fireplace and floor, their food cases had been broken open and were empty. The lone skier's sudden departure was made abundantly clear. The phantom raider had struck again.

Harry Price in later years acknowledged his presence in the various huts but maintained that he genuinely thought the food in each hut was surplus to the requirements of earlier parties and had been left for the use of needy travellers who might follow later! And many of Harry's Dargo friends supported his claim that had he known the food had been sent in for later use, he would never have broached the cases. Skiers of the day, however, were not so sympathetic to Harry's actions.

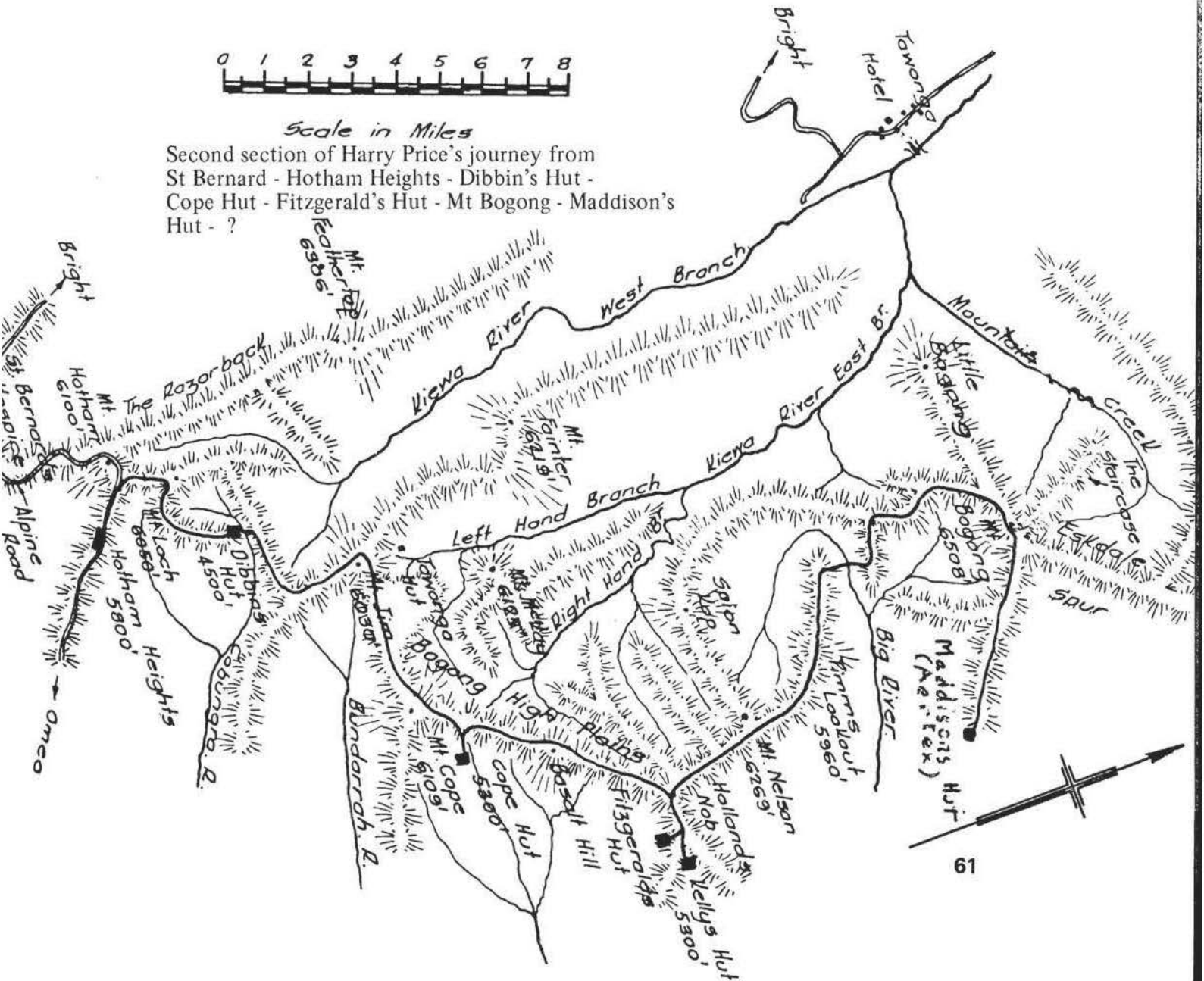
One fact, however, remains. Harry Price, alone and ill - equipped, had made one of the most remarkable winter journeys ever accomplished across Victorian snowfields - one that would have been applauded had it been completed by a party of well - equipped ski tourers. And that was only half of the Harry Price story - he then returned to Dargo. By what route, nobody knows.



About this time, Harry 'appeared' one evening at the Wonnangatta Station, then owned by the Guy family, and he stayed, working for Alex. Guy. He rarely left the station over a fifteen year period, and when he did, he rode his 'Malvern Star' bicycle over what, at that time, was only a pack - horse trail. Arthur and Jack Guy had to pack wet acid radio batteries and every copy of the "Age" newspaper for Harry whenever they rode in to check the cattle. Later Harry developed his own 'Conglomerate Creek Hydro-electric Scheme'!

Harry spent his time replacing fences, extending the yards, trapping rabbits and grubbing briars. Many of the fences on the Howitt and Snowy Plains are a tribute to Harry's work. In 1940, Lennie Campbell, Denny Connolly, Jack Guy and Harry built the hut on Snowy Plains that bears the Guy name. It replaced the nearby historic Bryces' Snowy Plains hut which by this time was a complete ruin.

Shortly after Alex Guy's death in 1949, Harry left Wonnangatta. He returned to the Crooked River where he stayed with the Gibbs family, an esteemed and respected member of the Dargo community until his death in July 1984.



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