



# Voice of the Mountains

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THE MOUNTAIN CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA INC.

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Editorial Committee: Linda Barraclough, Debra Squires and Sue Silvers

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### COVER

Fitzgerald Herefords on the plains near Rocky Valley.

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

A battle looms ahead for the Mountain Cattlemen.

The first seven-year grazing licence expires at the end of this grazing season. The opponents of alpine grazing are still active in their unwavering efforts to have cattle removed from all the mountains.

Parks Victoria has indicated a desire to close down Mount Fainter to grazing and droving. Thirty-five other sites are listed for inspection around the mountains prior to the renewal of grazing licences.

A fight is going to be inevitable as we cannot have any further cuts to licence holders' numbers; any reductions in allocations will cause a corresponding downturn in the economic viability of those affected.

The vast areas through the mountains that are closed to grazing or ungrazed for other reasons, represent the major part of the total alpine and sub-alpine areas now.

The remnants of grazing that continue in the high country are an important reminder to all Victorians of our pioneering past, whilst at the same time, keeping the old skills alive.

This year sees the launch of the Mountain Cattlemen's Weed Initiative. In co-operation with Parks Victoria, this voluntary program will see Mountain Cattlemen identifying and tackling specific weed infestations around the mountains. This voluntary initiative shows the benefits that can come from a co-operative approach to caring for the high country.

Once again, thank you to all those in the Association who have worked so hard over the past twelve months. Special thanks must go to Linda Barraclough and Debbie Squires for another superb effort in putting together this copy of *Voice of the Mountains*, and also to Sue Silvers, our tireless secretary, thank you.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Harry Ryder". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the page.



East Gippsland fires January 1998

As *Voice of the Mountains* goes to press 'out of control' bushfires that have destroyed more than 35,000 hectares are raging in Victoria. Last year the fires were out of control just north of the border in the Kosciusko National Park, however, this year, they are somewhat closer to home in our own alpine region. The area from The Crinoline to the Pinnacles, north of Maffra has either been destroyed by wildfire or is under serious threat.

Fires are also burning in the Cann River and Bendoc areas.

It appears that one of Dunsmuir's huts, some yards, a bridge and some stock have already been lost.

Members of the Higgins and Cumming families have lost stock, and others have stock at risk.

It is difficult to ascertain just what the losses are at this stage but Millers Hut, Moroka Hut, Guys Hut and Holmes Plain Yards are at serious risk.

# Mild Fire Conservation or Wild Fire Catastrophe

*James A. Commins*  
*Special Projects Officer, MCAV*



East Gippsland fires January 1998

The heading 'Hellfire' beside a photograph of John Longstaff's 1898 painting depicting bushfire horror, and the question 'Can we ever stop the bush from burning?' in the *Saturday Age News Extra* on 6 December 1997 encapsulates a dilemma born from many decades of environmental mismanagement.

A greater risk than ever now exists for the most calamitous bushfires in recorded history if this summer happens to become one with frequent hot dry winds interspersed with thunderstorms that produce little or no rain.

Until there is less reliance on costly modern machinery, that is quite ineffective for suppressing the front of a wild fire in adverse conditions, and there are directional changes towards more safely and diligently applying the practice of using mild fire to prevent very extensive wild fire, the damage to natural assets and valuable property will increase. There is now a huge accumulation of flammable litter over a vast area where forest workers fear it will burn too fiercely, even in the cooler months of the year.

About thirty years after the first white colonists occupied the Port Phillip Settlement, the Western district and the Omeo plains, the Victorian Government enacted legislation to make most of the land which was suitable for closer settlement available for selection. Early maps of the state showed these selected areas and all the remaining land was marked as 'Pastoral land'.

The Eastern section of that pastoral land amounted to about four million hectares and extended to the Northern and Southern aspects of the Great Dividing Range, bounded by the Eastern seaboard and the New South Wales boundary.

During the first 100 years of the European occupation of this large area only two roads were put through it - to connect settlements in the North East and South East of the state, and one to the Monaro district of New South Wales.

Until the post World War II period, almost the only human presence in this most extensive area were cattle graziers, although during the latter years

of the 19th century itinerant gold prospectors would have searched most of the area.

The Crown land allotments of pastoral land were let by grazing licence, and over the years some hundreds of runholders did occupy and manage them for cattle grazing.

In the early 1900s, graziers holding Crown land leases burned parts of their lease holdings each year as they believed appropriate. The graziers were following the practice of the Aboriginal people by using fire to keep the forests open. Reports from early settlers and explorers described the Australian bush as being similar to the open parkland of the English countryside. There is no evidence of regular Aboriginal habitation, except along the eastern coast, although it is recorded that native tribes hunted through the mountains in the summer months. Most of their frequent campsites would have been near lakes and rivers where farms and towns now are. Their propensity to light and maintain fires in all seasons soon found them being discouraged from camping anywhere near the homesteads and farm improvements of pioneer white settlers.

In the years prior to 1959, smoke was often seen rising from the forests in any season of the year except winter. Naturally ignited fires burnt unattended except when farmland was imminently threatened. Cattlemen burnt many patches when their experience indicated that it was appropriate to do so. Where cattle grazed the regrowth annually following a burn, the fire retardant effect of fuel reduction was prolonged for some years more than it would have been without the cattle. Practical graziers knew that very hot fires from a heavy fuel base were counter-productive because they promoted the regeneration of thickets of tree seedlings and woody shrubs which overwhelmed the pasture species for many years.

In the first quarter of this twentieth century expressions of concern about forest fires were raised when many people were then more familiar with the environment of Europe, while the harsh Australian climate was foreign to them and not well understood.

Unfortunately decision-makers must have relied more on dubious theory than practical facts to devise management plans which eventually produced disastrous results in Victorian forests. Many runholders felt overwhelmed by management regulations and abandoned their runs.

Areas suitable for timber production were delineated as reserved forests and in 1919 the Forest Commission of Victoria was established to supervise timber harvesting and to police a new policy that outlawed all the firefighting on Crown lands. This was seen as a complete folly by the relatively few people with 'hands on' experience, but their warnings went unheeded.

The ban did cause some graziers, particularly in the west of the region, to abandon their grazing leases as they considered that these areas were not worth persevering with unless they were periodically subjected to patchwork style burning.

During the two decades prior to World War II, the only major timber harvesting and sawmilling industry was to the east of Melbourne and extending to the Erica and Noojee districts. It was over this region that the Forest Commission exercised its responsibility. Further to the east, before the days of aerial surveillance and watch tower management remained the same and cattlemen continued their fuel reduction burning as they always had. They were doing as the Aborigines had done for untold centuries before them.

Following the dry season in 1938 (very similar to the 1997 experience) and the continuing drought conditions in January 1939, disaster struck as wildfire swept through most of the forests at Eastern Victoria. The forest resource where major timber-harvesting was in progress was destroyed, as were sawmills, and more than seventy lives were lost. Continuous fire burnt through to Mount Kosciusko in New South Wales and beyond, and it swept over drought-parched bare paddocks into the town of Omeo, where the hospital, a three story hotel, the power station and many houses were burnt. It was a more extensive and devastating conflagration than the well-remembered Ash Wednesday fires of 1983. The sun was blanketed with smoke and in much of East Gippsland it became completely dark about 3 p.m. on 13 January 1939, and lamps had to be lit to see anything for about an hour in many places.

The most appalling losses were where control of the forests and timber harvesting had been exercised by the Forest Commission for twenty years and it was practically all a total loss. It is a very significant fact that further to the east, where cattlemen had effectively reduced much of the fuel, the destruction of commercially valuable forest was very much less. It is also interesting that during the



East Gippsland fires January 1998 - note vegetation in path of approaching fire

terrible fires of 1939, graziers (including the writer of this article) were able to shelter in grazed areas which had previously been burnt in defiance of government policy, and these sanctuaries were also shared by native animals and birds.

In the eastern forests, where extreme drought prevailed some large patches of snowgums with thin bark were killed, but only relatively small amounts of alpine ash with the more protective bark were destroyed.

It is especially notable that sawmillers were able to relocate to the Mansfield, Heyfield, Omeo and Orbost areas fifty years ago, where they have operated ever since, and continue to do so on sustainable yield basis.

Widespread public concern led to the establishment of two Royal Commission enquiries - one to establish the cause of the fires and the other to examine forest grazing. These were presided over by Judge Leonard Stretton and he delivered reports in 1944, in verbose language that did not mention important aspects. The report placed the blame for the fires on cattlemen, miners, timber workers and indeed all those who lived and/or worked in the bush; although the cattlemen became the main focus.

The report did not address the question of fuel reduction burning. It is possible that the issue was not understood at that time outside country areas.

Lightning was only mentioned once, and in the context that it was a 'rare occurrence' and unlikely to cause fire. It was assumed that the

cattlemen were the principal initiators of wildfire. Lightning did and always will cause forest fires and ignorance of its role contributed to a policy that banned fuel reduction burning and failed to protect the forests.

The enquiry was held in a past era when communications through the mountains were virtually non-existent, the frequency of lightning strikes was virtually unknown, and a common presumption prevailed, as Judge Stretton boldly proclaimed, 'The fires were lit by the hand of man!'

Individual cattlemen presented evidence to the enquiry, but were not organised as a group in order to mount a defence of the situation in which they found themselves. The presiding Judge conferred little credibility on them. In dealing with soil erosion and response to cattlemen's explanations that uncontrollable rabbits were responsible, he trivialised this concept as he 'supposed Brer Rabbit would have blamed Brer Fox'.

The findings of the Royal Commission enquiries brought much pressure to bear upon cattlemen who practised forest grazing. They provided impetus to continue misguided policy and also made an effective launching pad for the emerging environmental movement to attack grazing and forest enterprises. It is now widely known that lightning ignites a great many fires and in a drought year when little or no rain may fall with a thunder storm, there is every likelihood of many fires being started and not being extinguished by rain. There



can be no doubt that just such a chain of dry thunderstorms led to such a widespread inferno as Black Friday on 13 January 1939. Common sense should have indicated that no grazier is likely to try and burn his pasture and chance losing livestock when drought and dangerous fire risk conditions prevail.

Over the last fifty years, cattlemen have observed profound changes in Crown lands management, and in the condition of the mountain environment. Very large areas of forested land have not been touched by fire for over fifty years. These could suffer enormous damage if subjected to the not unlikely sequence of drought, north wind, fire, then flood. There has been some fuel reduction burning in places, but this has been very inadequate, with very long periods between attempts to burn.

If a widespread outbreak of fire should occur, the only reliable safe havens for wildlife, humans and livestock in much of the mountain areas, are in new growth areas where significant numbers of cattle are returned to graze for a few months each year, or in recent logging coups.

Even in times of severe drought, when these grazed areas in the mountains might support a fire through them, it is extremely unlikely that there would be sufficient fuel at ground level to maintain a dangerous fire. Certainly not enough for a deadly 'treetops' inferno where fire rages from the floor of the forest up to the tops of the trees, where the pre-heated eucalyptus leaves have become highly inflammable.

There have been occasions when students of nature have questioned entrenched policy, but their work has usually been submerged in academic controversy. An American author, Stephen Pyne, investigated Australian environmental research and wrote a very informative book entitled *The Burning Bush*, in which he very comprehensively reported on the conflict of ideas about fire that had been like a tug of war between researchers on the subject. In another book, entitled *The Future Eaters*, archaeologist and author Dr Tim Flannery explained how the Australian natural biota became thoroughly attuned to fire since the demise of large prehistoric animals, and how the severity of wildfire was reduced only after Aborigines came and adopted their well-known habit of lighting and keeping fires alight at all possible times. Dr Flannery has pointed out that, unlike other continents of the world, Australia has

for aeons of time not had the mega fauna to complement the effects of fire and effect a more balanced ecological development. He did not say that cattle might fill that role, but it is quite logical that they can. The Victorian practice of part-time or seasonal grazing with cattle ensures that no vegetation is eaten to extinction, while the annual trimming of dominant grass and many shrubs helps to maintain a wide diversity of vegetation. Unless in a stockyard situation, cattle do not cause bare ground, in Victorian bushland grazing conditions, as several academic researchers have set out to try and prove.

Most of our rapidly concluding twentieth century has been clouded by misguided fire policy. However, more recently, half-hearted fire prevention management has been a move in the right direction.

This year of 1997 has been one of, perhaps, record low rainfall and the threat of forest fires becomes increasingly more dangerous as the dry seasonal conditions remain.

I suggest that the highest priority effort should be applied along the following lines as soon as possible to reduce the fire hazard and environmental imbalance that has been increasing with very little impediment for many years.

- Establish burnt fire breaks then set alight areas of limited size that will burn with low or moderate intensity to that which has already been burnt.

- As more fuel reduction burning is achieved lightning fires should be recognised for their peril and value and should be allowed to make a natural contribution to fuel reduction.

- The grazing of animals perfectly complement fire by keeping regrowth in check. Domestic cattle can be managed to make many areas safe havens for man and beast.

- Public relation exercises should aim to inform people of the urgent need to address the dangerous condition of forest and educate them to understand and accept that accumulated forest litter and senescent pasture species must be reduced. This will protect native plants and animals as they have an intrinsic capacity to survive low or moderate fire but are devastated by holocaust wildfire.

Let us hope that common sense will demand effective programming of mild-fire conservation before another major catastrophe by wild fire occurs.

# A proposal to expand and rejuvenate "Bush Alert"

## **The problem:**

Victorian public land and people's enjoyment of this land are under increasing pressure from illegal behaviour and nuisance behaviour.

## **What can be done now:**

People can report incidents to the police. The extent to which this is done is diminished by:

- people's natural reluctance to "get involved";
- the distance and time that might pass before a report can be made; and,
- the perception that DNRE or the police only act if they can obtain a conviction.

## **An outline of existing "Bush Alert":**

It has operated in East Gippsland for several years. It encourages people to report suspicious activity to police. The police tabulate this material in order to identify trends and target major and persistent offenders. "Bush Alert" is an excellent program and, at its active best, achieved widespread support. It has faltered because it is chronically under resourced.

The new aim:

- To encourage the public to report illegal and nuisance behaviour to the police.
- To achieve the apprehension of criminals.
- To educate miscreants to ensure that they stop their unacceptable behaviour.
- To enhance the security of people in "the bush".

## **How the rejuvenated "Bush Alert" would work:**

It would work in a manner similar to the existing "Bush Alert". Its extension to all public land and inclusion of nuisance and irresponsible behaviour would be highlighted. Reporting would be as follows:

1. Anonymous - Action would be at the discretion of the police. Action might include counselling<sup>1</sup>.
2. Signed but including the proviso that the reporter does not wish to be called upon to be a witness.
  - Police required to take action but not necessarily prosecution. Action might include counselling<sup>1</sup>.

3. Signed and indicating that the reporter would be prepared to be a witness.

- Police required to take action that could lead to prosecution.

(<sup>1</sup> Counselling includes writing to people reported enclosing codes of practice. The purpose is, more than anything else, to let them know they were sighted and reported.)

**The impact on offenders:** It is expected that the offender, knowing he had been seen and reported to the police, would "think twice" about doing the same thing again - particularly as he would be aware that his first misdemeanour had been recorded by the police. Offenders who were counselled would need to be given the opportunity to refute any allegation.

**Resources:** If a trial expansion of "Bush Alert" was introduced into the eastern highlands south of the Great Dividing Range, the following resources would be required:

*Police:*

- one full time police officer in the "central office" of "Bush Alert"
- resources to allow regular patrols in the bush by an identifiable police vehicle to ensure that "Bush Alert" is seen to be operational and have a presence in the bush.
- resources to allow for major short term blitzes on specific aspects of concern.

*DNRE:* Some involvement of enforcement staff but not sufficient to warrant a full time officer.

**Efficient policing:** The "Bush Alert" proposal would be highly efficient policing.

- The public would be involved in the reporting process. It should actually lessen the need for a full police presence in the bush.

- "Bush Alert" would result in offenders being cautioned about minor incidents which might well prevent them from moving on to more serious crimes, damage or misbehaviour.

- "Bush Alert" would be a pro-active police effort and hopefully prevent more misdemeanours and crimes than it would actually catch.

**"Bush Alert" - stopping crimes before they are committed.**

Prepared by the Public Land Council of Victoria, 03 9429 9324, PO Box 83 Burnley 3121

# Photographic Essay:

## Shannonvale Stables and Honeymoon Hut

*Voice of the Mountain* featured David Oldfield's work last year and is again pleased to include more of his work.

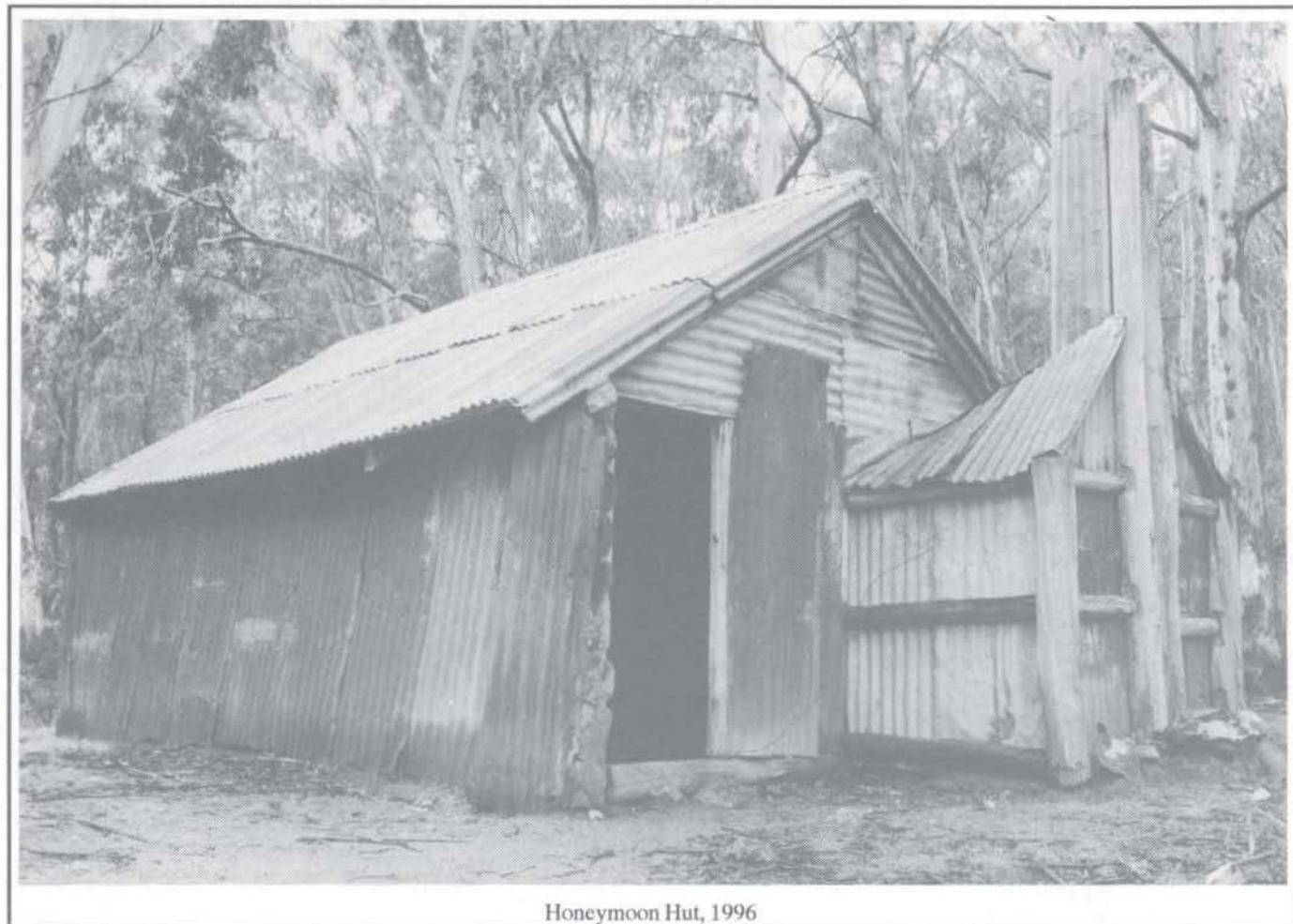
Honeymoon Hut is thought to have been built by Old Percy Huggins, Stan Johns and Ted Davis in about 1940. It is constructed of horizontal logs, mostly woollybutt, with an iron chimney and roof. It is believed that at the time of construction, Stan reckoned Little Percy, who was then about 17 years old, would spend his honeymoon in the hut and in charcoal wrote 'Honeymoon Cottage' above the door. Young Percy, however, did not fulfil this expectation! The name however has stuck but now above the door all that can be discerned is 'Huggins'.

'Shannonvale' has been in the hands of the Fitzgerald family since the original purchase of 160 acres in 1861.

David would be delighted to hear from any *Voice* readers about huts which they think he may not know about. He is quite happy not to tell anyone else about their location but feels it is important (and we agree) that they are properly recorded before it is too late. He will present photographs of the huts to those who have told him about them. He is also interested in the recording of buildings on the home block, such as the 'Shannonvale' stables, before they become faded memories.

His hut exhibition is currently running at the Benalla Historical Society until March 1998 and his book, *Havens of the High Country*, is available for \$29.20 posted, from:

The Black and White Enthusiast,  
22 Nandi Ave,  
Frenchs Forest 2086



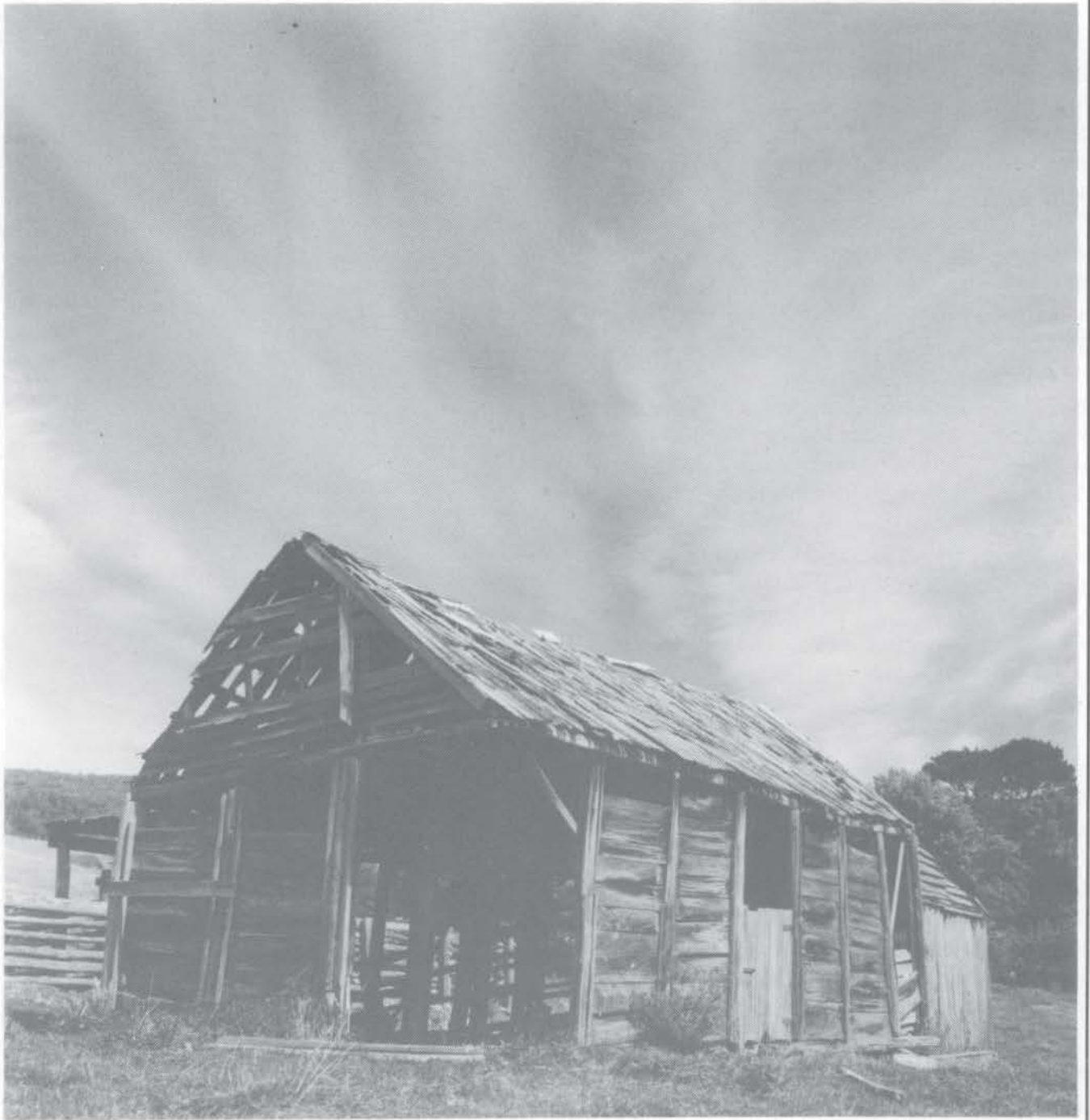
Honeymoon Hut, 1996



Interior of Honeymoon Hut, 1996



The stables at Shannonvale, 1996



# Around Rose River

*Linda Barraclough*

James Alan Bennie, known as Alan, the cattleman who was to become synonymous with Rose River, was born at Whitfield in 1895. His mother's people, the Tyrells, were early settlers there, conducting an accommodation house, and later a hotel. For a time he was employed by Victor Tiernan at Mount Typo station, one of the first to run cattle on the plateau at Mount Cobbler. Alan then enlisted during World War I, and served in France and Belgium. Recalling the war in later years, he saw it as senseless killing, that drove him away from the cities and people, with their bitterness and cruelty.

Alan came home after the war and selected 2,454 acres of hilly scrub country at the head of the Rose River, which included half of Mount Typo station, for less than five shillings an acre, calling it 'Rivermount'. Harry Stephenson believes he set out with a horse, a dog and no money, but unlimited enthusiasm. He set the property up, built a home, and some time after 1930, married Rosalie Frances Meldrem, the daughter of Thomas Meldrem and Rosalie Bank. Mrs Bennie, according to the records of her age at the time of her death, was 19 years older than her husband.

The Bennies became well-known for their hospitality, with Alan being sought after as a guide for fishermen, and a source of pack-horses for trips as far afield as Mount Wellington and Holmes Plain. He built a number of huts around the house for fishermen, and the couple lived there, content with the isolation that saw them sixteen miles from the closest mail at Cheshunt, with the closest store another three miles away at Whitfield. It was many years before the road was to reach the property.

The house in which they lived was Alan's own work, with only an earth floor throughout most of the dining room, although the table was on a timber section supported by stumps in the middle of the room. The piano was likewise accommodated, on a timber section against the wall.

Two men who knew Alan well, and worked with him in the bush for many years, were Ian Mackay and Frank Ryan. Both are sure Alan never held any bush leases, but that he used the bush around

him on a casual basis, without recourse to any official pieces of paper, running mainly Herefords.

Frank Ryan, from Cheshunt, started going into the bush with Alan Bennie, Ian Mackay and Percy Doig (the Gippsland and Northern Agent from Wangaratta), who had cattle out there, going bush for 'the fun of it', probably from about the mid 1950s. Ian Mackay started going out there much earlier, when he was a stock agent in Myrtleford, before he had his own property, lured by Alan's ability to find good fishing spots.

Ian Mackay was at Rose River with Mrs Bennie when the 1939 fires went through. This is how he remembered it:

A few days previous I was out in The Basin with him [Alan], and there were fires, little fires, starting up everywhere. We were working on them and got them all out. Then the fires started up down, lower down the Rose River, below Martins, and Alan went down to help them, and I went on back up to Bennies in case there was any fires there. Then a fire came in from the north, with a really strong gale with it, it was driving it along. And I was up at Bennies and only Mrs Bennie and I were there. This fire came roaring through the trees. There was a clearing round the house and very little grass or anything to burn there, and the little paddock where the horses were was a fallow paddock, and there was nothing there to burn, so the horses were in there and they were out of danger. There was a fairly small clearing behind the house and I made a little trail, across, behind the track into the bush, and set it alight. That saved the fire coming right down to the buildings. It was so hot that any little sticks or anything on the ground would just start to light, would just flare up. The first time I ever saw a coil of wire burning. It had been oiled and the oil on the wire had started to burn. Well, that night, after the fire had come past, it came



The interior of Bennies about 1945. (Courtney Collection, Centre for Gippsland Studies)

roaring through the trees again, and burnt everything in its way. We had filled a tub of water. I had wet bags, I didn't have anything else to stop the fires with at any time. A little flame would start up where we didn't expect, I'd put it out with wet bags.

That night, at midnight, the temperature was 140 degrees, close to 50 degrees in the scale now. It was mighty hot, I can tell you that. Anyway, we managed to get through it.

At Bennies there were three little sleeping huts the visitors used to camp in. I was camped in one of them, and the one

next door to where I was camped, after the fire had gone out I went and had a look in it, and there was a little round spot on one of the beds there that had come alight, but whatever put it out I don't know, call it Providence. But whatever, it went out, otherwise the whole place would have been burnt.

Alan Bennie was badly burnt in the 1939 fires, and lost all his stock, but he recovered and lived there through the 1940s, 1950s and into the early 1960s. Mrs Bennie was hospitalised in Wangaratta towards the end of her time, and Alan would walk from Rose River to Wangaratta to visit her, a round trip of five days.



Mrs Rose Bennie died in 1962, aged 86, and Alan lived on alone for a time at Rose River. In his final years, he moved to Wangaratta. Towards the end, he sold his stock to Frank Ryan, and when Ian Mackay heard of this, he suggested to him that Frank should 'let me have some'. They put the stock through the race at Bennies, and went pick for pick until they had half each, and then branded their own. Ian was living and running a property at King Island at that stage, but was beginning to build up leasehold, having the area from the Dandongadale right across to the King around that time. Frank Ryan cites Ian Mackay as one of the best horsemen he had seen, rating his trip on horseback from Cheshunt to the Holmes Plain Get Together in 1980 at the age of 75 as a 'very good effort'.

Frank Ryan bought a freehold block on the Wobonga Plateau in the early 1960s. Later he acquired a bush lease on the Dandongadale. His original route was to take a mob from his place at Cheshunt to the Wobonga block, drop some there, and go over Mount Typo to Bennies and from there to the Dandongadale country. After Alan's death he split the mobs, taking the first mob along the main road to the Rose River turnoff, then up Wildhorse Gap on the Cobbler Road, and about a mile past the Gap turning down to Possum Point on the Dandongadale River, a two-day journey. He then returns for the mob for the Wobonga block. Always one for a good turn of phrase, Frank describes his mustering technique as 'Take some salt out on the first day where you expect to find them. Then next day take the salt out to where you think the cattle won't be, and that's where you'll find them.'



Frank Ryan, photographed by Adam Ryder, at the 1997 Get-Together.

Frank Ryan is perhaps best known among the cattlemen as the epitome of perfection when it comes to packing a packhorse, a skill he learnt working with Alan Bennie, who he considered the best he had seen. He still has, and uses, three of Alan's original pack saddles. Asked to remember stories of packhorses, he and Ian immediately remember a yarn about a packhorse that two cattlemen were using to pack in supplies for a combined fishing/cattle inspection trip, that was carrying some gelignite and detonators. The horse was let off the lead to walk free, and immediately began to buck. No-one was game to go near it because they were scared of its load, and it 'unloaded' quite a bit before it settled down.

Asked what he had learned from Alan Bennie, Frank recalls that he taught him 'how to get from one place to another, to keep my eyes open and to look for landmarks'. Asked if he had ever been lost in fog, Frank recalled times when 'I've never been lost, but there's been lots of times when I didn't know where I was', when he had to rely on his horse, who knew the country, to get him home.

Alan Bennie died at Wangaratta on 15 July 1968, aged 73. Ten years later, 'visitors' burnt his home to the ground, and a later group burnt the cabins. Both groups of buildings had survived the 1939 fires, and provided hospitality to over a thousand people for the period from 1937 to the early 1960s, but failed to survive a certain type of 'tourist'.

A substantial proportion of this article is based on a taped conversation with Ian Mackay and Frank Ryan, held by the author.

## *For the Old Grey Mare*

A hammer of hooves and a cloud of dust  
as the triallist gallops by  
His time for the mountain race to make  
and his mountain horse must fly  
To Sheeppyard Flat from afar and wide  
drawn by a legend's call  
They've come for a glimpse of the final twelve  
top mountain horsemen all.

New riders had made the cutoff fast  
while cracks from years gone by  
Had spared their steeds; for a lesser cup  
tomorrow they would vie.  
Of the three time winners from earlier rides  
Egan would start the race  
And Stoney, back on an untried horse  
had missed out on a place.

That night bush music rolled over the flat  
and under a shining star  
Country fourstep met city beat  
and a hell of a crush at the bar.  
A horse with colic and a rider's out  
bring on the first reserve  
And a crowd rolled home from revelry  
to give last chance Stoney a serve.

By the firelight said Froggy "He won first up  
On a grey mare brave and true  
But as next year came she pulled up lame  
so on my Grey he won two."  
"And now he's back to ride her colt  
he's never raced him yet  
But a cooler head when the riding's hard  
I swear I've never met."

At sober dawn he stared at the coals  
and I asked him how he'd fare  
"I really shouldn't ride" he said,  
"but I'm here for the old grey mare."  
"I trained her too hard in '89  
so young I didn't know  
But when I saw her foal grown up  
I had to have a go."

Rain stayed to grey the morning sky  
and from a flooded track,  
Two riders in Mansfield hospital  
'fore the main race starting crack  
Then from the whip a dash to the swags  
and the old hand running wide  
Was off with twenty yards of a start  
his mountain grey in stride.

But Marshall came up on his thoroughbred  
and blazed right through them all  
He led them all up the mountainside  
at a pace to make lesser men pall.  
Then a wild descent to the Howqua ford  
and the jumps spread out the pack  
But all along it was Marshall first  
with Stoney at his back.

At the last river cross and its treacherous bank  
the mountain grey let fly  
Sure footed as his breed can be, like  
he knew it was do or die.  
To the inside track on a final bend  
and Stoney's line was bolder  
Their horses clashed and he shot up the straight  
from an equestrian hip and shoulder.

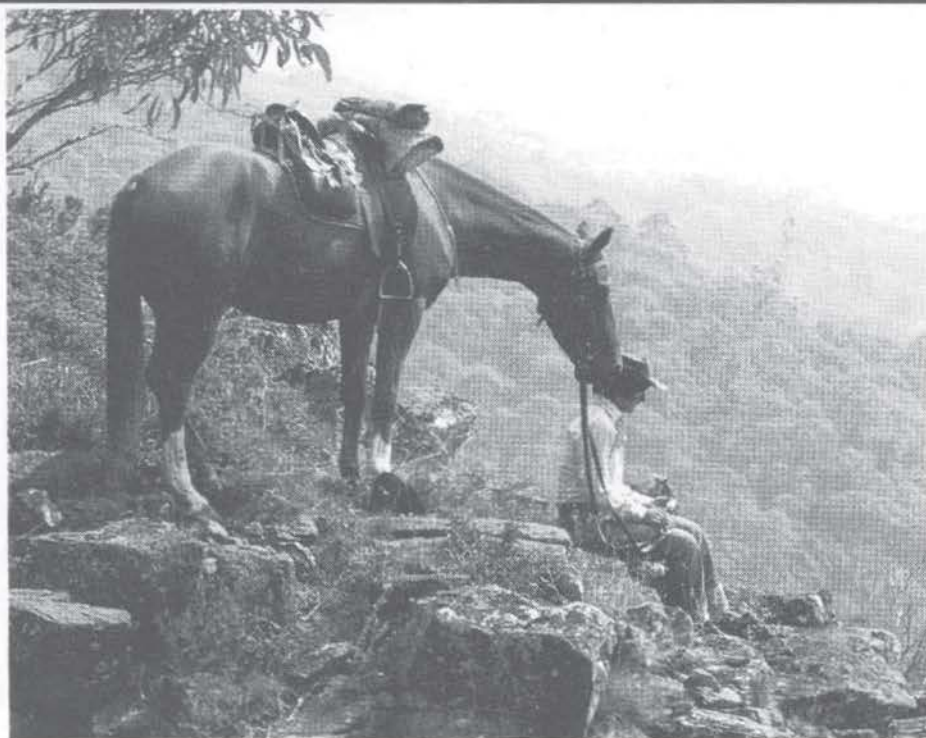
As tired horses steamed the dismount yard  
two rivals shake hands, I saw  
Our mountain riders are a sporting breed  
even two brothers-in-law.  
But they all looked lost on the winners' stand  
bereft of their horseborne flair  
"I didn't ride for this" he said  
"I rode for me old grey mare."

*Laurence Webb*

# DISCOVER THE TREASURES OF THE HIGH COUNTRY

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HIGH PLAINS DROVING



For more than 115 years, the Treasure family have run cattle on the Dargo High Plains and they now invite you to join them on one of their droving expeditions or cattle salting weekends.

Each summer, their Hereford cattle start a 150 kilometre trek, the longest cattle drive in Victoria, following the old stock routes, to the high plains. You can be part of this annual trek to the high country and recapture the spirit that has remained a traditional way of life over generations of mountain cattlemen to the present day.

For a brochure and full details contact Ben and John Treasure,  
High Plains Droving, C/- Homelands, RMB 2027, Stratford, Vic. 3862  
Phone 03-5145 6055

# Stormy

High in the hills on a stormy night  
A brumby mare found shelter  
From the wind and the snow and the driving cold  
And the trees tossing helter skelter.

In the height of the storm the foal was born  
Named Stormy she said with a neigh  
Tiny filly got up in true mountain style  
To wait for the new coming day.

The months slid past and the strong foal grew  
As black as the storm she was born in  
She was curious and bold and wandered too far  
That made easy prey to be run in.

Her captors were kind, her training was gentle,  
The feed in the bucket fair trade  
for the hungry young mare with a will to survive  
And a child's pony the brumby was made.

Some years in the lowlands with keen young riders  
A foal of her own she bore.  
Then another new owner, a tentative rider  
But two of a kind adults saw.

Trust in each other and their confidence grew,  
Now stock work was part of the deal.  
To muster the cattle to take to the mountains  
And a new side of Stormy reveal.

Her body alert, her nostrils extended  
as she encounters the crisp mountain air.  
And the memories of foalhood amongst snowgums and grasses  
and clear waters, the sweet mountain fare.

Return to the mountains, homecoming for Stormy  
Yet the bond with human still strong,  
Mountain cattle to muster, they work as a team  
Brumby pony carries young girl along.

This poem was written by Kate Treasure and  
presented by her during the Don Kneebone 1997.

# Bush Yards:

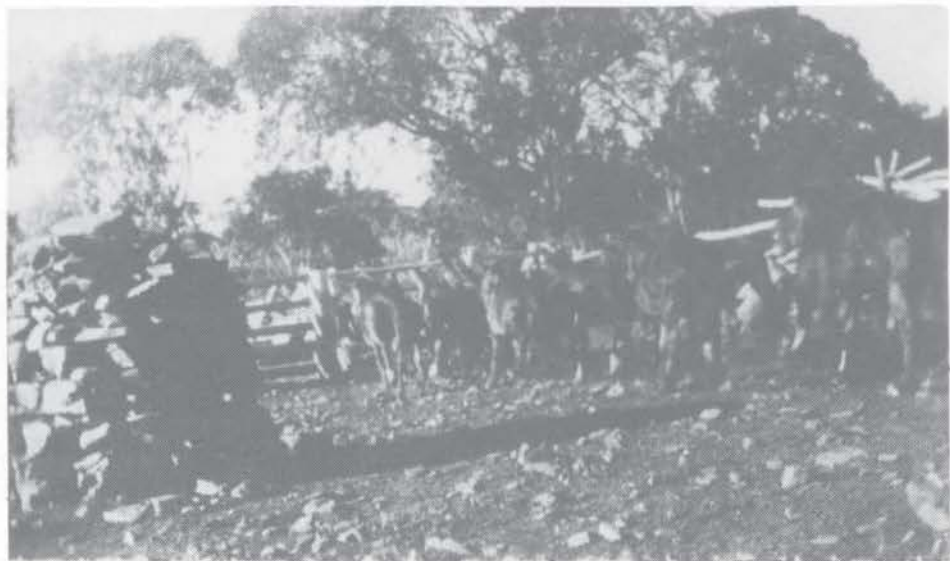
## Another Aspect of Our Heritage



Top: The Moroka yards, undated, and above, Charlie MacNamara's yards, when photographed by Jan Hobbs about 1992.



Above: Kellys yards about 1994 and right, the cattlemen from the same area, Andy Estoppey, Arch Timbs and Eric Bateson.



Top: The Moroka yards  
Centre: Treasures yards,  
Dargo High Plains, 1992  
Bottom: Treasures yards,  
before the 1939 fires

## *A Special Breed*

You'd have to be born of a special breed  
To be in the exclusive clan  
For their numbers are few, but their legend true  
The dogmen of East Gippsland.

You'd have to be tough, and kind of rough  
To take on that lonely game  
To match your wits, with dog or bitch  
Nearly have to live the same.

You need bushmen's skills, for these Gippsland hills  
You need strength and guts in the outback  
And you'd have to be keen, and know what they mean  
To follow the clues of a dog track.

Time doesn't mean much, nor comforts and such  
To a dogman who's hot on the scent  
Of a killer of sheep, while the cockies asleep  
He'll go after that dog hellbent.

Setting traps at will, with unerring skill  
Up the valley or spur or jeep track  
Reads the dingo's mind, cos he knows their kind  
Won't rest till he carries the pelt back.

Like the mounties of old, or so I've been told  
That they always get their man  
So the dogman will itch, till he gets that bitch  
If it takes a six month plan.

When he's back from the scrub, and he visits the pub  
Its always a pleasure to meet  
For a yarn and a beer, and a bit of good cheer  
Bush company's hard to beat.

Yes I know them indeed, they're a wonderful breed  
And I'm proud to shake their hand  
For their numbers are few, but their legend true  
The dogmen of East Gippsland.



Dingo skins, Wonnangatta, 1932

*Kevin Costello*



## *The Fat Little Man from the Fisheries*

Forked lightning flashed across the sky, the rain in deluge fell  
Upon the dry and thirsty land, and the Latrobe River swelled  
Until its banks no longer held the onslaught of the flood  
That raced across low lying ground to where the brumbies stood.

The stallion with his little band, six mares with new born foals  
Stood girth deep in the swirling tide, flanks trembling with the cold.  
They had roamed the Common wild and free, where tall the grass is green  
Concealed by day in tea tree scrub, or places rarely seen.

But the Common is a State reserve, a wildlife game refuge,  
And thus all creatures now are banned with hard or cloven hooves.  
They would have to be destroyed forthwith, less other ways were found  
And so it was for that next day, to muster them was planned.

But the fat little man from the Fisheries, a kind and gentle soul,  
Lay caring on his bed that night, of the mares and little foals.  
It did not seem quite right he thought, to destroy this little band.  
So I'll shift them by myself, he mused, Old Nev will understand.

But sleep although it came at last, was fraught with vivid dreams  
Of frenzied horses plunging through a torrid, raging stream.  
His heart was rent with sympathy, a lump came to this throat  
As gamely he the rescue planned with aid of motor boat.

Out on the lake he found himself, unassisted and alone  
Just like the Snowy River man who 'turned their heads for home'.  
He sped his little boat around, his every card he played  
But the stupid blooming horses, still they swam the other way.

So from the boat he hurled himself, the time had come to act.  
He'd not be beaten by a nag, he gained the stallion's back.  
He'd show these mustangs who was boss, he'd take this in his stride  
And show his lanky workmates, how a stumpy bloke can ride.

But the brumby had quite other thoughts, it arched its muscled neck.  
No bit had ever passed its teeth, nor saddle forked its back.  
It churned the water to a foam, it twisted, pitched and bucked  
But the fat little man from the Fisheries, like a leach to it was stuck.

He raked that mustang's ribs and flanks, he screwed its muddy tail.  
He pulled its ears and bit its neck, he fought it tooth and nail.  
He kicked it on the starboard cheek and spun the critter round  
Then he cupped his hands across its eyes and steered for higher ground.

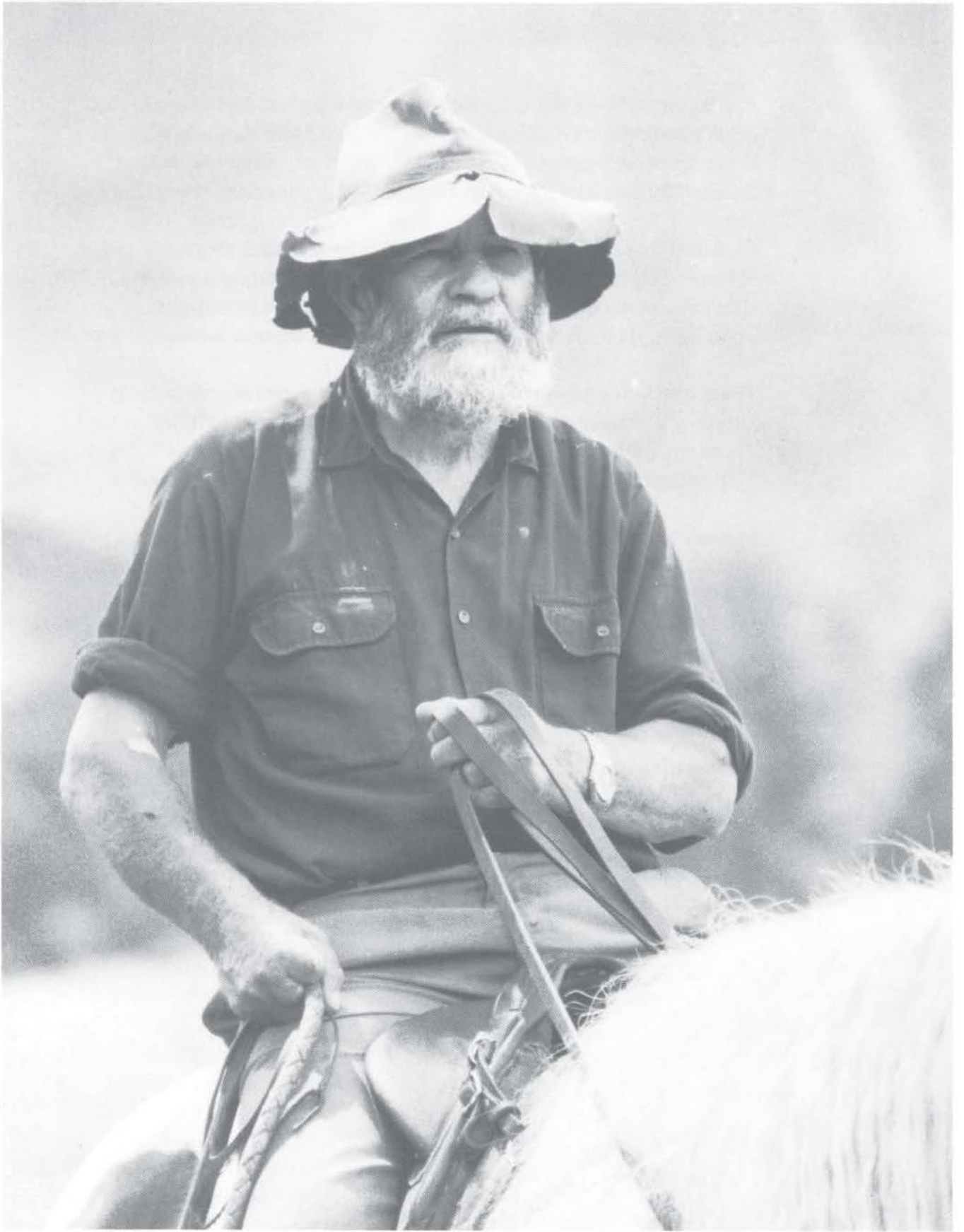
There lined along the water's edge, his work mates standing mute  
Saw him clamped upon that stallion's back as though he'd taken root,  
Then saw their hero come undone and pelted to the skies  
That moment that his hands uncupped that bloody brumby's eyes.

In panic mad he clutched and clawed, his breath in gulps it came,  
He thought he heard an angel's voice, he thought it called his name.  
His past life flashed before his eyes, he almost was beserk  
When that angel took him by the scruff and dragged him back to earth.

There stood his fond and lovely wife, poor girl she could not smile.  
Her hair was mostly all torn out, her ears were stretched a mile  
He'd ripped the pillowslip to shreds, he'd mangled too the sheets.  
He'd torn the mattress cover and the toe nails from his feet.

And now on cold and rainy nights, when fierce the west winds blow  
Across the Common's low lie land, where floods they come and go  
The brumbies with their little foals no longer seek to hide.  
They're grazing greener pastures now beyond the Great Divide.

*Bill Rautman*





## Ross Blair

With Ross's passing on 9 January 1997 we lost the last of the elder Bogong High Plains cattlemen - and another era came to an end.

Ross was a third generation of the Blair family to live in the Ovens valley.

Frank Blair, Ross's father, obtained a Bogong High Plains lease in his own right in 1918, having previously sub-leased part of William Holland's run in 1900.

Ross first went to the plains on one of his father's walking tours. Ross recalled

*we started from here [home] at Christmas Eve and we had 21 members of a walking party. Father and Uncle Tom were the leaders. I was 11, I think, we went right over to Wallaces and back into Harrierville New Year's Day. Morrie Harkins was in that party. He remembers when my father put me in a sack one cold night on Hotham and tied it round his neck to keep him warm.*

The Blairs are the only mountain cattlemen who run Black Angus on the Bogongs. This resulted when St John's Wort took over Frank Blair's property at Freeburgh on such a large scale that raising the more commonly grazed Hereford cattle became impractical.

Both Ross and Ettie were fine horse riders and took an avid interest in breeding part Arab horses for stock work. Ross competed in horse events at mixed sports meetings in his younger days and won many a flag and barrel race.

Like all mountain cattlemen, Ross did a good turn when he could. His knowledge of the high country together with the help he graciously offered and gave, made him a true friend.

In October 1994 the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria presented Ross Blair with Life Membership in recognition of his contribution to our mountain heritage.

Despite his failing health, Ross still loved to take his cattle to and from the high plains each year, a practice he enjoyed for nearly 70 years. In 1984, his granddaughter, Tanith, made history as the youngest girl to assist at the annual muster. Tanith started riding as a young three year old. After much pleading from the young seven year old she was allowed to accompany her father, Max, grandfather Ross, and three cousins to the muster at Pretty Valley. In that year they mustered 370 head and rode nearly 100 miles in four days. The last muster in the high country for Ross was during the 1994/95 grazing season.

Only three weeks before his death, Ross enjoyed a long ride around the family property with Krystelle, his younger grand-daughter. Such was the spirit of the man.

Ross had a real talent for story-telling, and the tape recordings and videos the family have, will long be cherished.

In his younger days, Ross had a somewhat mischievous streak. This involved short sheeting the beds of his fellow cattlemen after a night on the town. There are some other stories involving horses and spring carts which are better left alone, but perhaps can be imagined.

We will all remember Ross Blair with respect and affection and offer our sympathy and condolences to Ettie and all members of the Blair family.

An article on the Blair family appeared in *Voice of the Mountains* No. 13 (1990) with a photograph of their black Angus on the cover.



## *Arthur Patrick Guy*

With the death at Maffra on 20 September 1997 of Arthur Guy, the last of his generation of legendary mountain cattlemen, there goes another link with Wonnangatta Station, one of the most remote and mystical places in Victoria's high country.

Arthur Guy was born on 11 January 1906 at 'Glenlee', the family property at Crooked River, near Dargo. Both of his parents could trace their families back to the earliest days of the European occupation of Gippsland. The Guys came into Port Albert in the 1850s, but were soon running an accommodation house at Talbotville on the remote Crooked River goldfield. His mother, Catherine Armstrong nee Connolly was a member of the Scott family of Delvine, who came to Gippsland by dray overland from the Monaro in New South Wales in the 1840s. His father, Alexander Guy, was one of the best-known bushmen of his era, and as a councillor of the Avon Shire, would make the two-day ride from 'Glenlee' at Crooked River, to council meetings at Stratford, attend the meeting, and then make the two-day ride home again. The family by that time was running cattle on summer leases on nearby Snowy Plains, and Arthur's earliest memories were of "taking a few head up. We'd take a tent, that's all, and a few blankets and that. Pretty rough camps, some of them." His only formal education was at the one teacher, one-roomed slab hut school at Crooked River and as a teenager he was often the horseback mailman for his father's mail contract, on overnight trips that were hot in summer and cold, wet and miserable in winter.

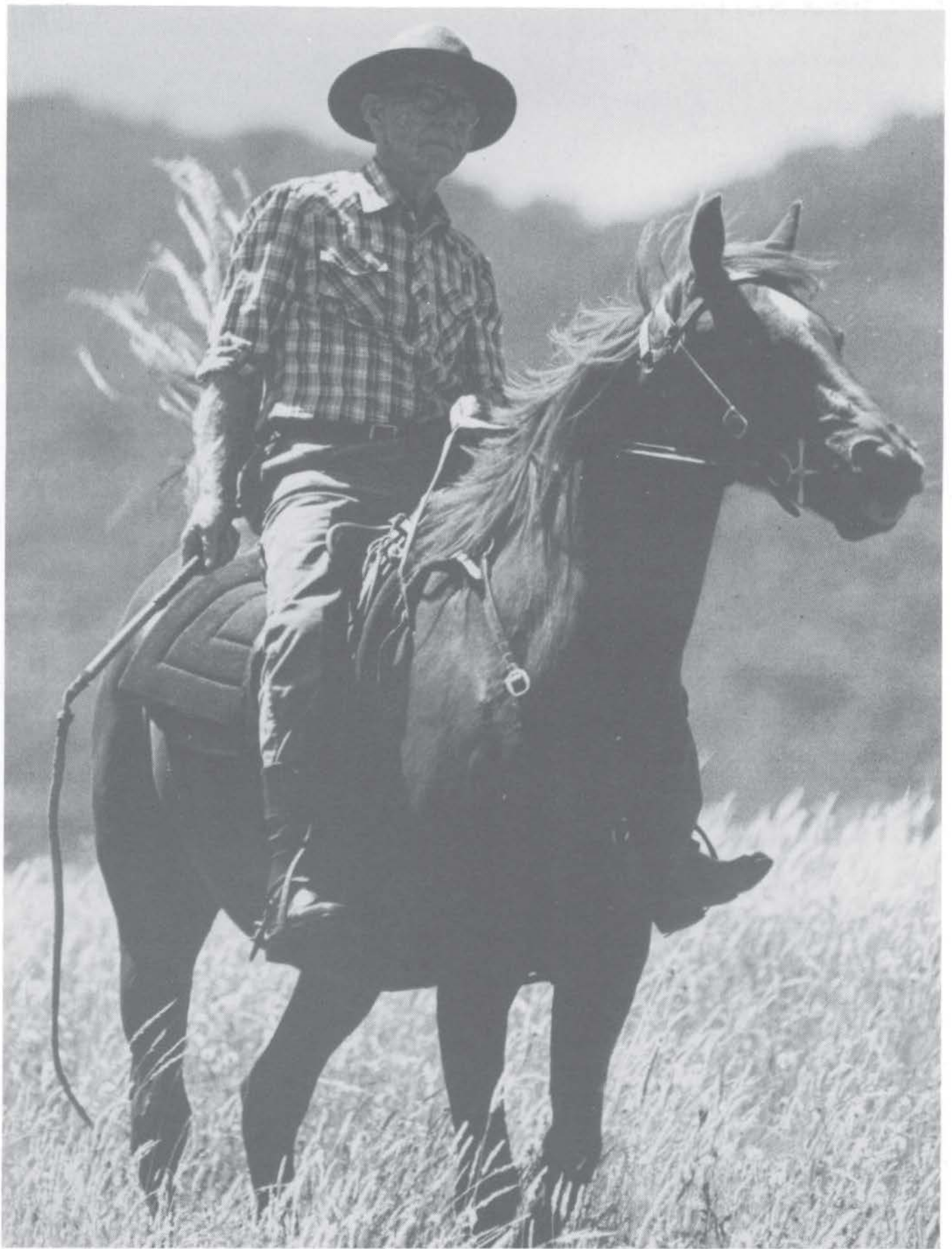
When the Alexander Guy and his sons purchased Wonnangatta in 1934, it already held a place in the folklore of the Victorian high country, following a famous, unsolved double murder in 1917. However, by that purchase time, Arthur was already established as a tour guide. From about 1930 until the start of the Second World War, he was providing packhorses and local knowledge to groups hiking in the high country and was associated with the early 'Skyline Tours' promoted by the Victorian Railways and also operated independently, especially with the Melbourne Women's Walking Club. Often he saw these excursions as having the potential for him to explore further afield from home, and treasured his investiture as a 'Barry Mountaineer', a high honour amongst bushwalkers of the time. It was during one of these trips that Arthur met a Melbourne

bushwalker, Agnes Miller. They were married in 1948 and were living at 'Glenlee' when their only child, Catherine was born. In 1954, the family moved to their Bellbird Corner property, near Maffra, while still running Wonnangatta. Arthur and Jack, who lived at Waterford, south of Dargo, would make the two-day ride to the station, which, under all the time of their stewardship was only accessible on horseback. At Wonnangatta they had the assistance of Harry Price, who maintained the property in their absence, and from there they worked the high plains around Mount Howitt and Bryces Gorge. Another famous bushman closely associated with the Guy brothers was their uncle, Denny Connolly. Guys Hut, a small, beautiful log hut still on Snowy Plains, was built as part of this operation, and remains one of the last links with the station.

Under the ownership of the Guy family, Wonnangatta was a prosperous and productive cattle property, sending large drafts, that at times numbered up to four hundred cattle, to the annual autumn sales at Heyfield. They often topped the market. Arthur dearly loved his cattle, and always ensured the best beasts were in the front paddock on show.

As a family that enjoyed a remarkable relationship with bushwalkers, the Guys were saddened when the Wonnangatta homestead was burnt to the ground in 1956 (not by, Arthur would always hasten to add, real bushwalkers), and with the lack of security and increased advent of four-wheel-drives in the late 1960s, they chose to sell in 1970. Arthur continued to run cattle on his home property near Maffra, and on Guys paddock at Heyfield. In his final years he toured the paddocks on an old tractor, only suborned, as he was not mechanical, onto this substitute horse when he could no longer mount the real thing. He remained, to the end, a bush gentleman, with clear, twinkling blue eyes and a great sense of humour, who loved a good yarn, either as the teller or the listener.

The sale of Guys paddock, in 1995, led to his last 'compulsory' visit to the Newry pub, one of many local hotels over the years where he and his brother commanded the bar, as only men of their standing could do. He is survived by his daughter, Cath Noble, and dearly-loved grand-daughter, Susan Noble. He was pre-deceased by his son-in-law, Charlie Noble, who died two weeks before.



## *Sydney William (Syd) Ryder*

Sydney William Ryder was born on 24 December 1903, the only son of William James Ryder and Esther Ryder *nee* Spencer.

Syd first visited the Bogong High Plains as a young boy with his father and uncles Walter and Harry. In his youth, Syd, rode horses as a jockey.

In 1923 the Ryders, and other cattlemen on the Bogongs, mustered their stock late. There had been a drought in the low country and they wanted to leave the stock in the high country for as long as possible. In early May they started their muster but they were caught in extremely heavy snowfalls when up to five foot of soft snow fall. They endeavoured to get the stock out but the elements were against them and the stock floundered in the snow. It is thought that as many as three thousand head perished that year. Syd recalled it as being the four coldest days of his life, trapped at the Tawonga Hut with little in the way of provisions.

In 1937, Syd went to Tallangatta, where he worked for Gippsland and Northern. It was here that Syd met his second wife, Myrtle Blewett.

A romance followed, with Syd and Myrtle marrying on 15 July 1940. Prior to their marriage, Syd's work had taken him into Wodonga, where he worked as a stockman/drover at the Wodonga saleyards for G&N/Mulqueeny.

He left their employ to go sharefarming for Jim Lindsay. In 1942, Syd and Myrtle moved to Sandy Creek, where Syd's association and partnership with Ben Cooper commenced.

Syd's friendship with Ben Cooper continued, with Syd and Myrtle moving to Dederang in 1943, living first at Briggs' and then Piddingtons'. Syd was still working for and with Ben Cooper, both at Dederang and on the Bogong High Plains.

In 1952 Syd and Myrtle purchased their farm on the Dederang Gap, where they ran their cattle and milked about twenty cows. This was also the year that Syd, in his own right, took over the family licence (#39) on the Bogong High Plains. He continued to take cattle to the high plains until his retirement in 1971.

Syd is remembered as a superb horseman and an excellent maker of whips. Like all cattlemen of earlier days, Syd liked a yarn and was a great story-

teller. However the following story about Syd Ryder and Bill Hicks was told to Allan Brewer by Bill Hicks.

*In 1954 Syd Ryder and Bill Hicks were several cattle short after mustering their runs on the Bogong High plains. The missing cattle were yearling heifers and despite a couple of trips back, the cattle were not found.*

*As always snow fell and any further attempts to find them were abandoned. In August, some SEC employees told Bill Hicks that they had seen cattle on the spur down from McKay Creek Power Station.*

*Syd had bought an ex-army 4WD truck so Syd and Bill loaded their horses onto the truck and went for a look. Bill said they drove up to where the road starts, then rode their horses about a mile up the ridge. They found the heifers and although they were in poor condition were still quite strong.*

*It was a bitterly cold winter's day with sleet and a strong wind blowing. The cattle were driven down to where Syd's truck was parked. Bill and Syd then cut down some strong saplings to make a set of wings and a yard.*

*Syd happened to have a bale of hay on the truck, so this was spread out on the back of the truck. The heifers being hungry went for the hay and were soon loaded onto the truck. Syd then headed down to Mt Beauty, a distance of some ten miles, with the heifers.*

*Bill was left with the horses and dogs to await Syd's return. Deciding it was too cold to stop and wait, Bill headed off down the road. About three hours later and almost into Mt Beauty, Bill came across Syd coming back in the truck.*

*After dropping off the cattle, Syd had met a neighbour and stopped for a yard, and sort of forgot about Bill!*

Syd is survived by his wife Myrtle, daughters Roma and Jeanette and son Ken.



### *Herbert Graeme Murray (Charlie) Noble*

In all his 49 years, Charlie Noble lived in the Valencia Creek area, and this was reflected in his unusually high affinity for the landscape around him and the mountains of the Great Divide that began literally across his paddock.

Charlie, the son of Murray and Eva Noble, was born at Maffra on 22 August 1948 and inherited special qualities from both his parents. His father, who also died young, was a prominent leader in the dairy industry centred around Maffra, and from him Charlie inherited, among other qualities, a keen brain and a sense of leadership. From his mother, a member of Shepparton's Furphy family, who predeceased him only seven months ago, he inherited a strong sense of history. He loved the mountains, but especially the majesty and beauty of the famous Wonnangatta Station, and for many years ran tour operations there that allowed people who could not otherwise reach it to visit the site. A trip there with Charlie was a special experience to be treasured for a lifetime and not a single detail of its history escaped him.

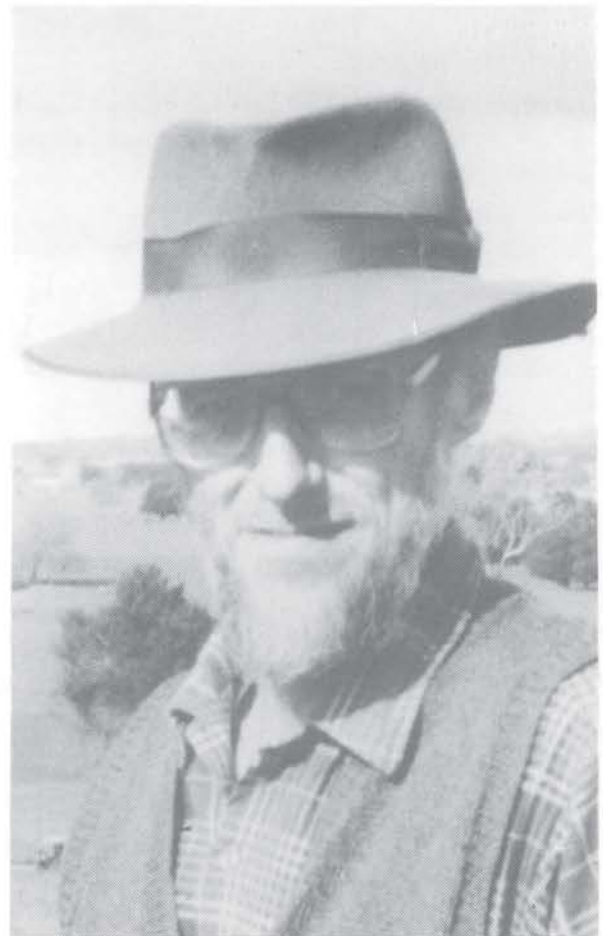
In 1971 Charlie married Cath Guy, only daughter of Arthur Guy of Wonnangatta Station and Agnes Miller, an active bushwalker. Charlie and Cath commenced farming family properties, gaining a reputation as sound, practical operators who cared greatly for their land and their livestock. In 1972 he joined the Maffra Unit of Civil Defence, now the Maffra Branch of the State Emergency Service, and spent the last fifteen years as its deputy controller. At the time he joined it was expanding its role to that which it has now - one of the leading Victorian Units in the field of bush search and rescue. Maffra SES controller, Des Sinnott, claims that during the 25 years of Charlie Noble's membership he doubted if there was anyone else in Victoria who had contributed more voluntary time to an emergency service. "In that time he participated in over two hundred active operations and innumerable community service operations and training sessions involving thousands of hours of voluntary service. Charlie has seen action in the extremes of all weather, day and night, he has slogged through the snow, rain, mud and heat - he has ski patrolled, assisted at sporting events, sold raffle tickets, filled sand bags, sat around camp fires, stood around with his hands in his pockets, agonised over unsuccessful search operations and celebrated successes. Charlie never

gave up hope when there was a person missing with little chance of survival, he could always come up with a reason why we should keep going - and he was usually right".

On 6 September 1997, Charlie Noble died suddenly and unexpectedly in his stock yard at home, and has been laid to rest, as he wished, in the beautiful little cemetery at Dargo with blue mountains towering in the background. At his memorial service at Valencia Creek, Peter Madden, a former controller of Maffra SES, described him as "straight as a barrel in his dealings in all things, open, straightforward. Sincere. He would look you in the eye, full of common sense, practical."

Charlie was a regular and supportive member of the MCAV. He could often be found in the marketing tent at Get-Togethers and assisted greatly in the production of *Voice of the Mountains*.

This gentle and caring man's spirit has touched many people. He will be sadly missed by the many he helped, his friends and his family. He is survived by his wife Cath, his daughter Susan and brothers Robert and Ross.



## **Molly Taylor**

Molly Taylor, Cooma's 'Matriarch of the Mountains', who died on Friday 19 December, aged 94, was synonymous with the high country of New South Wales. Molly, a visiting bushwalker from the Sydney area already had her place in history, when she met a young Tom Taylor at Rules Point in 1929. A foundation member of the Sydney Bushwalking Club, she and a friend had taught another friend, a young bushwalker named Paddy Pallin, to sew. Paddy, unhappy with the absence of decent bushwalking gear, went on to be the doyen of bushwalking outfitters.

Molly and Tom were married in 1934, and lived first at Old Currango, near Rules Point, between Talbingo and Kiandra. Then, after a time in Sydney, they lived at The Pockets. They then moved to Currango homestead, surrounded by National Park, until they left there in 1988. Molly was described as a natural leader, with a tremendous enthusiasm for life, partnered with Tom, who was a great innovator. She thought it a minor matter to ride a horse the twelve mile round trip, through snow two to three feet deep, to collect the mail and yeast to make bread. In later years, she was to say that she 'always had my own horse, saddle and bridle. When I got off my horse for the last time, I lost my freedom'.

Molly became known for her outstanding hospitality, and operated the home as a guesthouse, after the closure of the Rules Point hotel. She often chose to seat passing bushmen besides the likes of Sir Garfield Barwick and Rupert Murdoch, and treat them as their equals. In 1988, after she had retired to Tumut, Molly became the first woman to be a recipient of the Man From Snowy River Award, an honour she shared with her husband.

Departing guests long had memories of Molly standing on the verandah, farewelling them by ringing a bullock bell. Ten bells were taken to her funeral, one for each decade of her life, and the hearse left the church to their tune. Her ashes, at her request, are to be scattered at Currango, 'on a windy day'.

## **Harry Stephenson**

Harry Stephenson, author of *Cattlemen and Huts of the High Country*, died in 1997. His work, recording the history of the mountain cattlemen did much to bring knowledge of them to the wider community.

## **Vera Eva Fitzgerald**

Vera Curtis, was born on 14 February 1916 in Nuttfield, Surrey, England. In her youth her ambition was to be a nurse and at the outbreak of WW2 she applied to be trained. She started her training on 24 April 1947 at Hamstead General Hospital, London. She nursed in England for five years before boarding the *Fairsea* on 6 December 1955 and setting out for Australia. Within two days of her arrival on 10 January 1956 she again packed her bags to accept a position at the Omeo Hospital.

Soon after her arrival she met recently widowed Harry Fitzgerald. When his wife, Ida *nee* Shelton, died, Harry was left to raise their three girls, Glenda, Rhonda and Coral. Harry and Vera married at Bairnsdale and after a time their family grew with the birth of Rosemary and, later, John.

Harry and Vera ran a property at Livingstone Crossing, near Omeo, until Harry died on 28 April 1986, aged 81 years.

After his father's death, John took over the running of the farm and continued to take the Fitzgerald stock up to the Bogongs. Vera stayed on at the farm until recently, then with the economic downturn, the property was leased. Last year, 1997, was the first year that the family has not taken stock up top.

Vera was the inaugural winner of the Don Kneebone Bush Laureate Award, an award in which she found much pleasure, as writing poetry had come to her late in life. It is hoped that a collection of her work will be published later this year.

She died peacefully in Melbourne on 20 November 1997, aged 81 years.



# LOVICK'S Mountain Trail Safaris



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

## We Ride The Great Divide

Throughout the summer months, 8-day tours leave Merrijig, travel up the Howqua River, beyond Mt. Buller to the mountains of the Great Divide and on to the High Plains of Mt. Howitt and Snowy to some of the most beautiful and inaccessible parts of Victoria's High Country — areas that cannot be visited except on horseback or on foot. Shorter tours also available.

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All fresh food carried under refrigeration.

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# 1997 Get Together

## Gibbo Park, Benambra

The 1997 Get Together saw a return to Gibbo Park, also known as the Goat Farm, for an enjoyable weekend organised by the Omeo Branch. Camping was spread along the Gibbo River, and events took place downstream, on a flat across the river.

For many, the highlight of the weekend was seeing the very versatile Rick Hodge, win both the Cattlemen's Cup and the Bush Minstrel section of the Don Kneebone Mountain Heritage Award. Since that time Rick, who fills in his spare time coaching the Buchan Football Team, has won the Australian Intermediate Shearing Championship. After being presented with the cup, Rick immediately handed it to Leigh Woodgate, who is still recovering after a fall that led to her early retirement from bush racing, in one of the most emotional victory speeches heard at a Get-Together.

Another highlight of the weekend was seeing Dick Dale come third in the Cup, after taking over Barbara Cooper-Babidge's mount when she was injured in an earlier event. Another sight was one of a very valuable younger generation cattleman on a small and weedy beast, carrying the hopes of the Coleman clan in the Runamuck Cup - and the sight of the horse crossing the finishing line riderless. Another steed that seemed to get a good workout over the weekend was that four-wheeled thing that John Cook used to get around - he would have needed it to keep up with his team of workers, most of whom seemed to go under the name 'Dug'

The Don Kneebone 'first readings' were held under a shady oak at the old homestead site, and the finals, in the tradition of Don's performances, from the back of a Mazda farm ute. This year saw the Don Kneebone Heritage Award leave the state for the first time, with Bob Skelton from Minmi, near Newcastle, take it out. Timothy Lee, now of ABC television news, was on hand to present Sue Beeton with the Bush Laureate award.

Over the weekend the crowd moved from horse events, to whipcracking, to cross-cut saw races, to dog high jumps and the site of a bush hut being built in the traditional manner. Don Porter was there with the MCAV photograph competition, joined this year by David Oldfield, with his brilliant

photographs of interiors of huts. And then, there was the new team in charge of the Marketing Tent, who survived their training at the hands of the regular and very energetic support crew that facility seems to attract.

Results for the weekend were:

### **Mountain Cattlemen's Cup:**

- 1st Rick Hodge riding 'Harry'
- 2nd Tim Faithfull riding 'Chance'
- 3rd Dick Dale riding 'Walkabout'

### **Junior Mountain Cattlemen's Cup:**

- 1st Luke Mitchell riding 'Cool Choice'
- 2nd Adam McCormack riding 'Sunny'
- 3rd Melissa Connley riding 'Jodie'

**Run-a-muck Cup:** Results not available.

### **Leigh Woodgate Open Race:**

- 1st Rick Hodge riding 'Big Red'
- 2nd Paula Morgan riding 'Doc'
- 3rd Derek Faithfull riding 'Cascade'

### **Jim Treasure Memorial Sprint:**

- 1st Barbara Cooper-Babidge riding 'Ghost'
- 2nd Sharon Pendergast riding 'Black Jack'
- 3rd Shannon Byrne riding 'Buddy'

### **Associates Dash:**

- 1st Barabra Cooper-Babidge riding 'Ghost'
- 2nd Sharon Pendergast riding 'Black Jack'
- 3rd Shannon Byrne riding 'Buddy'

### **Wally Ryder Horse Walking Race:**

- 1st Ron Connley riding a horse'
- 2nd David Neilson riding 'Dan'
- 3rd Bruce McCormack riding 'Blondie'

### **Great Australian Packhorse Race:**

- 1st Ron Connley
  - 2nd Sarah Smith
  - 3rd Sarah Connley
- Neatest Pack: Result not available.

**Relay Race:** Results not available.

### **Local Race:**

- 1st Daniel Connley riding 'Noddy'
- 2nd Nick Cook riding 'Rambo'
- 3rd Shannon Byrne riding 'Buddy'

### **Cattlemens Cut-Out:**

- 1st Ron Connley riding 'Red Wings'
- 2nd Ken Connley riding 'Paper Boy'
- 3rd Frank Ryan riding a another horse'

**Dog High Jump (Little Dogs):**

- 1st Chelsea with 'Brindle'
- 2nd Garry Radde with 'Jody'
- 3rd Paul Tobin with 'a little dog'

**Dog High Jump (Big Dogs):**

- 1st Johnno with 'T Rex'
- 2nd Derek with 'Banjo'
- 3rd Sharon Ross with 'Tinbo'

**Crosscut Saw:**

- 1st Carpenter and Rumble

**Open Whipcracking:**

- 1st Jack Cross

**Ladies Whipcracking:**

- 1st Allison McGrath
- 2nd Diana Hurley
- 3rd Aleshia Seivers

**16 Years and Under Whipcracking:**

- 1st Diana Hurley
- 2nd Aleshia Seivers

**Junior Whipcracking:**

- 1st Wayne Campbell
- 2nd Brian Campbell

(Unfortunately, all the placegetters of the whipcracking competition for 1997 were not available to *Voice of the Mountains* at the time of publication. Every endeavour will be made to include a this list in the next edition and we wish all competitors good luck in 1998.)

**Don Kneebone Mountain Heritage Award:**

- Bob Skelton

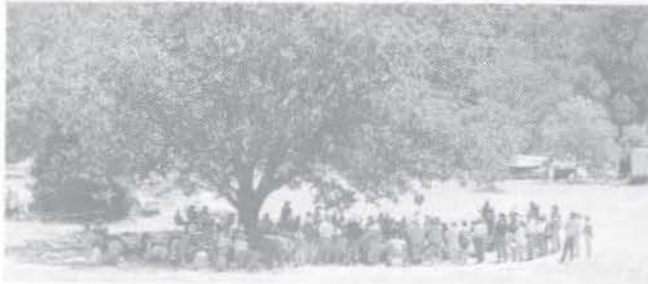
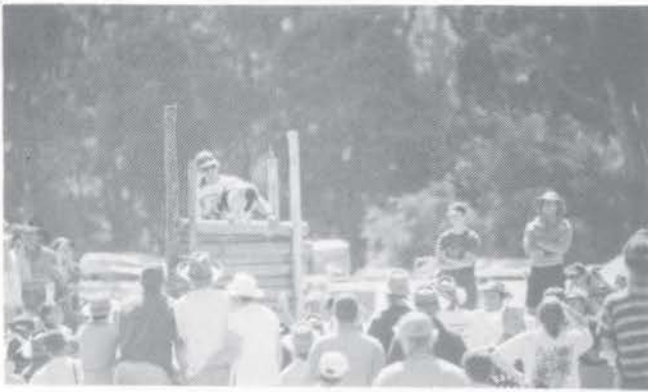
**Bush Minstrel:** Rick Hodge

**Bush Laureate:** Sue Beeton

**Allan Brewer's Encouragement Award:**

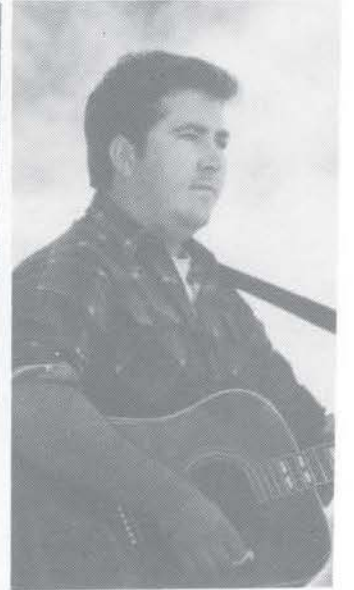
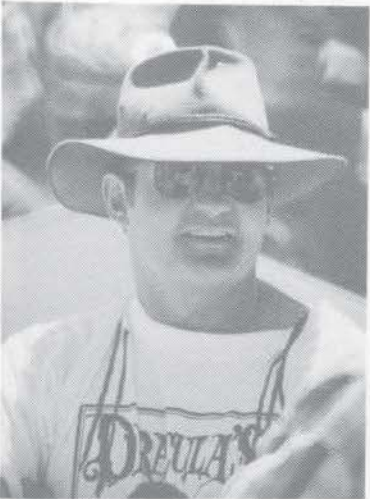
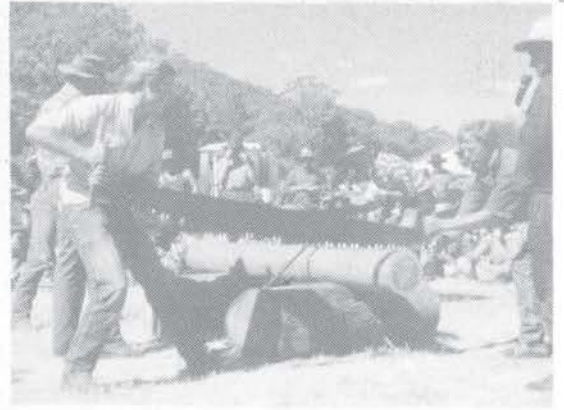
- Kate Treasure





## 1997 Get Together





## 1997 Get Together



## A Tribute to 'Dug'

If you were at the 1997 Get Together you could not help but notice the proliferation of 'Dug' caps that seem to have appeared. You know the ones, they offer little protection from the sun, are bright red, and have wording such as 'Truck Dug', 'Cook Dug', and 'Doctor Dug' and heaps and heaps of others. You probably also heard the occasional outcry of 'DUUUG'. On approaching a 'Dug' seeking explanation, *Voice* was offered the following 'Dug Anthem' from 'Truck Dug' together with the information that membership was full! You may have also noticed that despite the sentiments of their anthem, many of the 'Dugs' worked very hard all weekend.

It began in a crowded beer tent  
at Bowmans '94

Three young men on a mission  
out to make a score.

They cast their eyes through the crowd  
like eagles watching prey  
Then swooped down on a prospect  
with can in hand they'd say:

I'm Dug, he's Dug and that's Dug too  
That's how it all began  
And now they come from everywhere  
to join the Douglas Clan  
The calls become infectious  
you can't help get the bug  
You throw the head and fill the lungs  
and then shout out DUUUG.

Each year we wet our camp  
intent on having fun  
We sit and watch the moon go by  
and then the bloody sun

With kids chowded down and horses fed  
It's time to relax a bit  
Consuming loads of alcohol  
and talking heaps of shit.

You can't pay a fee  
to join in on the fun  
It's the skulling of a tinnie  
in more ways than one.

This is not a passing fad  
or a legend tried and true  
To be a part of this big clan  
You must be Douglas through and through.

But when it comes to race day  
riders and horses all kit up  
'Cos this is what we've come for  
the running of the Cup.

But now the race is run and won  
we gather up the gear  
And make our way back to camp  
to finish off the beer.

For now the Muster's over  
but it don't matter a shit  
We're already planning next year  
You've got to be part of it.

And you can always find a Dug  
just use the family call  
Throw your head and fill the lungs  
and give a bloody great roar.

I'm Dug, he's Dug and that's Dug too  
That's how it all began  
And now they come from everywhere  
to join the Douglas Clan  
The calls become infectious  
you can't help get the bug  
You throw the head and fill the lungs  
and then shout out DUUUG.





# 'Bushlore'

by the Public Land Council of Victoria

In the bush today you are likely to come across people pursuing all sorts of recreations and commercial activities. Many of these activities can have an impact on how much you enjoy your own experience. Similarly, what you do affects the enjoyment of others.

Most recreational and commercial activities have detailed Codes of Practice. These explain in detail the 'do's' and 'don'ts' of each activity. This material covers information that each group would like the other bush users to be aware of and understand. It is the 'unwritten law' of the bush - the bush lore.

Some of these items will be second nature to you but may be unknown to other, especially new, users of the bush.

- **Mountain cattlemen** have a 'prior right' to the use of their huts when involved in grazing operations. This means that they might come along at any time of the day or night and at any time of the year (except winter) and expect to be able to use their huts. Although by law they can require you to leave, they generally are more than willing to share the shelter. Please keep this in mind if you camp in a cattleman's hut.

Mountain cattlemen are allowed by law to bring their working dogs in the Alpine National Park. They are also permitted to use tracks which are designated 'Management Vehicles Only' (MVO).

If you are using a cattleman's hut, please replace the firewood. Please also do not remove any tools from the hut, or damage the log book. Log books are often valuable if it is necessary to search from somebody lost in the vicinity.

Cattle are taken up to the high country in December and are brought down in April. Enjoy the spectacle but be careful on alpine roads and tracks around these times. Cattle do not have very good road sense.

Amazingly, some people try to muster cattle on the high plains. This is a really dangerous thing to do and can result in cattle being driven off their

designated area. This causes confusion and a lot of hard work all round.

Other dopey things that people try to do include trying to catch young calves to ride them and some calling out 'salt', as cattlemen do to call up their own cattle.

- You will sometimes see convoys of **FWDs** in the bush. Usually these are club trips and, despite the number, they will be taking every precaution not to damage the environment. Some clubs limit the number of vehicles in convoys to ensure that they do not damage tracks.

The FWD clubs have system of 'Trackwatch' which monitors the condition of tracks. If you see something that should be reported - damaged tracks, fallen trees etc. - report this to DNRE but also report it to the Victoria Association of Four Wheel Drive Clubs on 9857 5209.

Don't drive where you are likely to leave great deep ruts in soggy ground. If the ground dries out with these ruts intact it makes later passage very difficult. Also it is like leaving a calling card that says vehicle users are irresponsible and should be banned from sensitive areas.

- A major disease problem in forests today is **cinnamon fungus** (*Phytophthora cinnamomi*) which causes dieback in many species of trees. You should wash your vehicles before moving from an infected area into a clean area. You will know an infected area by the appearance of dead or dying trees. In particular, clods of mud should be removed from the wheel arches. A very effective way of washing vehicles in the bush is to use an old fire extinguisher that can be pumped up to provide pressure to fire a water jet. Actually, miners are required by law to clean their vehicles before they leave an area.

- When crossing streams FWDers should minimise the extent of the disturbance to the water to avoid upsetting any **fishermen** downstream.

• **Logging** equipment is valuable not just to the logging industry. Logging equipment such as bulldozers is often part of the first strike capability in fire fighting. It is too valuable for all concerned for it to be damaged. If you see anything suspicious in the vicinity of logging equipment, note registration numbers and report this to the police at the first opportunity.

• Two of the simplest items of Bushlore are often the most readily forgotten are, .... er .... um What are they? (See the next page)

• **Recreational deer hunting** is one of the most popular activities in Victoria's eastern highlands over the winter months. Deer hunting is also permitted in some National Parks, including the Alpine National Park, from mid February to mid December.

Sambar deer have been present in Victoria's highlands for around 150 years. A mature stag may weigh up to 300 kg and stand 120 cm tall at the shoulder. His antlers may grow to over 75 cm in length.

Hunting sambar by stalking (walking quietly through the bush) is by far the most popular form of hunting although some hunters choose to use scent trailing hounds to track deer through the bush. The use of hounds is not permitted in National or State Parks.

Deer hunting is a low-profile activity in that hunters are usually alone and deep in the bush. Occasionally you might see a hound team having a break by the side of the road, but it is illegal to use a firearm on public roads. This includes 4WD tracks. It is also illegal for hunters to prevent access to other bush users. The use of spotlights to hunt deer is also illegal and is considered highly unethical.

Occasionally, scent trailing hounds get lost while hunting. These hounds (beagles and foxhounds etc) cannot survive in the bush and will invariably find their way to a camp or town. The hounds are not dangerous, but almost always hungry! On one occasion, a DNRE employee found that two lost hounds had jumped into the back of his ute. They had looks on their faces that said, 'G'day Boss, wouldn't have a feed would you?' By law, hounds must wear a collar carrying details of, and contact

numbers for, the owner. If you find a lost hound, the owner would really appreciate a call from you. Some country centres such as Dargo, Licola and Rawson also have kennel facilities where you can leave lost hounds for collection by the owner.

As sambar are hard to hunt, shots are rarely fired. The average deerhunter fires only 2-3 shots per year and hunters who takes one deer a year are generally well satisfied with their efforts.

• You will occasionally come across **mining exploration** in the bush. Exploration is not mining. It is subject to conditions which ensure good environmental management.

Any disturbed land must be rehabilitated. A condition of every Exploration licence is that satisfactory rehabilitation work will be carried out either progressively or at the end of the operation. The explorer must lodge a bond with the Government. The bond is refunded after the Government has determined that the rehabilitation has been completed and is likely to be successful. Bonds can be held for up to six years after the licence ceases to exist.

Information on exploration is obtainable from the Victorian Chamber of Mines or the Department of Natural Resources and Environment.

For every 1,000 prospects investigated, about 100 are followed up, some 10 are subjected to detailed examination and one becomes a commercial mine. Exploring for minerals in the one place on several occasions is often needed to find a mineable deposit.

A person with a Miner's Right can prospect and fossick for minerals on certain categories of Crown land using hand held equipment. They can not start a mine. If they want to start a mine, they must get a Mining Licence which involves a planning permit or an Environmental Effects Statement.

• **Trail bikes** can be used in parks and forests but only on roads open to the public. The rider must be fully licensed and the vehicle fully road registered and roadworthy. No vehicle may be used off formed roads. Normal road rules apply in parks and forests. (Trail Bike Riding Code, DNRE)

•If you see **nuisance or illegal behaviour**, report this to police at the earliest opportunity. The PLCV is seeking to have the existing Bush Alert program enhanced into a 'neighbourhood watch' type of operation which will make reporting easier.

Illegal or troublesome behaviour by any person should be reported to the authorities as soon as possible. Record date, time, location and details of vehicles (including make, colour and registration number) and give these details to the police, national parks ranger or a fisheries and wildlife officer.

•**More information?** Most organisations involved in the use of public land for recreational or commercial purposes have a wealth of information. Some contact numbers are listed below.

•**The answers.** Ask permission and shut the gate.

This material was prepared by the Public Land Council of Victoria. The members of the PLCV are Australian Deer Association Inc. (9427 1967), Mountain Cattlemens' Association of Victoria (03 5775 1600), Victoria Association of Four Wheel Drive Clubs (9857 5209), Victorian Association of Forest Industries (9662 1444), Victorian Chamber of Mines Inc. (9629 1851), Victorian Farmers Federation (9207 5555), Victorian Recreational Fishing Peak Body (9412 7689) and the Victorian Ski Association (9650 7270).

The Public Land Council of Victoria can be contacted on 9429 2327, at PO Box 83, Burnley, Vic 3121 or at <http://www.vicnet.net.au/plcvic/> on the Internet.

All members of the Public Land Council of Victoria support the concept of multiple land use. Each member supports the rights of other people and organisations to use public land in an environmentally sustainable and responsible manner. This means that other people you see in the bush, who you think might be competing with you for space on public land, are actually fighting to maintain your access as well as their own.

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# Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act Out of Control and Needing Review.

## How a mining company spent \$22,600 finding out what the Scientific Advisory Committee failed to thoroughly check

At the 1989 panel hearing in the first Fosterville Environmental Effects Statement, a representative of an ecological lobby group, referred to a discovery of a bullant known as *Myrmecia* sp.17 in the area of the Rehe's pit at the northern end of the Fosterville site. To quote from the panel report:

*'It was indicated that Ms Barnett had discovered its presence 20 years ago at Bacchus Marsh and at that stage it was not known on any other site. Since then sites have been found in Queensland and New South Wales. More recently findings have been in Wellsford State Forest (2 sites) and one at Fosterville...'*

Listing as a rare and threatened species under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act was granted in 1991. In its final recommendation for listing under the Act, the Scientific Advisory Committee found that:

*'... the taxon is known from very few sites which are isolated from each other, thus making the species vulnerable from local extinction. ... The species is threatened by mining ... and recreation activities, which remove vegetation and cause soil compaction. Mining is an immediate threat to one population, and recreation an immediate threat to another. In the long term, all other populations are prone to the future threat of strip mining which destroys all ground flora and fauna.*

*The species has been recorded in only five sites in Victoria, despite deliberate searches in likely areas. The SAC accepted the expert opinion, stated in the nomination, that it is unlikely that other sites will be discovered.*

*The data presented on distribution and abundance are the result of comprehensive surveys and provide clear and strong evidence that the taxon is rare in terms of abundance and distribution.'*

In 1996, in the course of undertaking the Flora and Fauna surveys for the second EES, the presence

of the same bullant was noted within the proposed tailings dam site to the west of the current mining lease.

After discussion with members of the then Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the mining company engaged Dr John Wainer of the Museum of Victoria to undertake an investigation into *Myrmecia* sp. 17 to determine its distribution, biology and ecology. This research was to assess the effects of mining activities on *Myrmecia* sp. 17 occurring in areas adjacent to mining operations, and to assess the ability of the bullant to recolonize disturbed sites.

This work was undertaken between late March and late May 1996 at a cost, to the company, of **\$22,600.**

Across Victoria, Dr Wainer found populations of *Myrmecia* sp. 17 in **17 state forest, four flora, and/or fauna reserves, two historic reserves, two state parks, one area of private property, and one road verge.** This indicated that the species is far more widely abundant than originally thought.

However, despite these findings, the bullant remains listed as a rare and threatened species. No action statement has been prepared to assist in its conservation.

Indications from Department of Natural Resources and Environment are that this will not provide any impediment to the development of a tailings dam. However, there is an expectation that the company will fund further research into relocation of nests during construction and recolonisation during the site rehabilitation phase.

Insects and micro organisms generally could represent a considerable problem because knowledge on the distribution of a large number of species is probably quite limited. The research to investigate distribution is expensive and time consuming. Generally this would not be affordable by individual mining companies.

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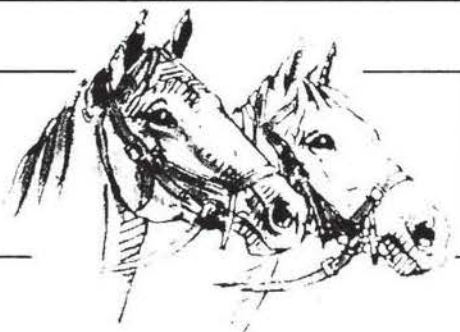
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# Around the Traps

## Cobungra Station Sold

Cobungra Station, near Omeo, has been in existence since about 1841 and in the early years it changed size and owners frequently. In 1898 Richard Riggall purchased Cobungra and ran the property until his death in 1919. The Naughtons then took over the property, expanding the size when the opportunity arose to purchase neighbouring freehold. About 1960 Cobungra was again sold to the Richardson family who have held it until this year. Don Richardson was active in the formation of the MCAV. The new owners of Cobungra are BCR Financial Services Pty Ltd, a tourism and venture capital group.

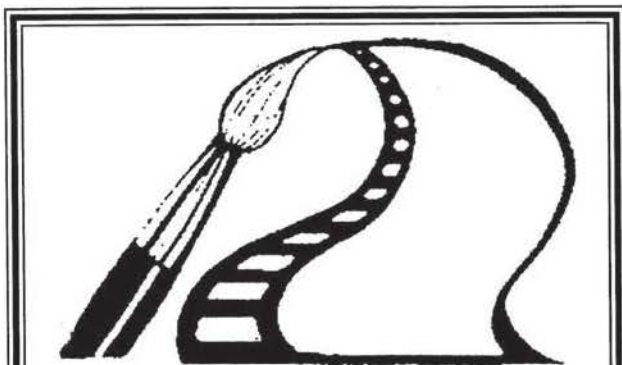
During the last seventy years Cobungra has gained a reputation for producing fine Hereford stock being one of the oldest Hereford cattle studs. With over 40,000 hectares freehold and leasehold the station has been one of Victoria's largest working cattle stations.

BCR plan to develop the summer potential of Cobungra with the company's existing alpine resort interests at Mount Hotham, Falls Creek, Dinner and Horsehair Plains and target the international eco-tourist and skiing. One wonders if the tourist will see mountain cattlemen still riding at Cobungra Station?

## Photograph Followup

In last year's *Voice of the Mountains*, no. 20, a number of photographs from the collection of Harry Struss were reproduced on pages 11 to 14. We are grateful to Norm McCallum of Benambra, 'Buff' Rogers of Black Mountain, Mrs Marion Hair of Maffra and Stephen Dempsey of Maffra, for the following identifications.

The cattleman on p.11 is Ernest McCallum, who was guide on the trip to the Tin Mines, just over the border in New South Wales. The first photograph on p.12 is McCallums hut on the family freehold at Meringo, which still stands. The one immediately under it is Summers Hut, at the marble mine. The hut immediately below that is the old Quambat hut. The walkers and packhorses on the top right hand column of page 12 are at Quambat flat and the river crossing at the bottom is possibly at the crossing on Limestone River. The hut on top left of p.13 is Ropers first hut below Horsehair Bend on Frying Pan Spur, near Falls Creek. It was burnt in the 1939 fires. The buildings top right are the Tin Mine buildings, just over the New South Wales border from The Limestone. Two of these are still standing.



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# 1997 MCAV Photographic Competition

The following pages include a sample of the photographs entered in the 1997 MCAV Photographic Competition.





Top left: Yards photographed in the snow by  
Kylie Higgins.

Bottom left: Winner of the 'Portrait' section was  
Carolyn Hill.

Above: Winner of the 'Open' section was Nicole  
Emanuel with her photograph  
'Morning Campfire'.

Right: Winner of the 'Horse and Rider' section was  
Christine Hammond.







Winner of the 'History of the High County' section was Brenda Luke from Cowes with a set of four portraits of 'Pete, Tommy, Ron and Rusty'

## Mates

'Tis of a great mate that I write, he taught me so much of  
life.

He was a tall upstanding gentleman, and his smile, well  
... so bright.

A young rider in the Light Horse during the War,  
he could sit a horse like no other I have ever seen.  
His gentle way while handling horses left me in awe.  
Even gentling the headstrong filly that was so fizzy and  
green,

I watched and I listened as he showed me the way it  
was done,  
from quiet whispers to firmness, he had a special way  
with horses, they and he were one.

His knowledge and wisdom I have now to pass on.  
He showed me his way .... the way it should be done.  
He came from poor hard times, down Mt Best way  
and he told me tales that he loved to share.  
Sometimes on his porch, with beer in hand;  
sometimes on horseback while mustering the common land.

He was hardworking, wise, honest and true.  
Riding many miles together ... we made a good pair  
whether on horseback or jogging along in the cart,  
we shared so many laughs together, how can I be blue?

Consideration, and a deal came to the fore,  
when off this green broken bay I was thrown.  
Fred took reins in hand and said 'Girly, be sure,  
I'll swap you that bay for my Jimmy that you love to ride,  
I can't see you hurt again, I'll ride the boy until he has  
grown, he'll take it all in his stride.'

We made the swamp, I getting the better deal.  
I took Jimmy, his trusty stock pony, broken to saddle  
and cart,

Fred took the bay, a good horse but too good for me.  
Jimmy ... well, he had the best nature and kindest heart.  
Fred never was one to be beaten at any game,  
let alone a horse that no other could tame.

He taught me to harness Jimmy and to Lake  
Moodemere we would go.  
A picnic, a brew and a chat; just three mates.  
Sometimes, to the pub at Rutherglen or Corowa for a blow,  
or a race home along the river tracks where the old  
Murray does flow.

Who had the fastest horse?, we often put them to the test,  
don't let Fred know, but my Jimmy was the best!

I would watch quietly while he would harness a new  
horse,  
never rushed, always careful, everything in its place.  
Many bush skills I learned, from fencing to working with  
cattle,  
but of course, when my turn came to put his lessons to  
work,  
he always had a grin on his face.

Never one for the finer things in life, no complaints,  
just copped his lot.  
Lived a simple, uncomplicated life, that is all he knew.  
Had not time for fast talkers or 'shifty ones',  
he couldn't stand their rot!

He often talked of the mountains he knew, returning there  
but once.  
'Motor travel is not my way' is all I got from him.  
I would ask 'why did you come to live on the flat land?'  
I was told with eyes that faded to dim,  
'I had a family to rear ... and needed a hand.'

A special man of few words, but knowledge he had  
plenty.  
We worked together quietly, always without a fuss,  
I could see a side to this man that not many could.  
To him, gossip or a lie spoken would only return a hush.

When the time was right, and travelling I wanted to try,  
it was Ned, his faithful cattle dog, to me he gave.  
'Trust him, he'll look after you, on him you can rely'  
Ned was my mate for many years after, faithfully  
following Jimmy on the bush tracks,  
These three mates, in this lifetime, I shall no longer see ...  
Sometimes it is good to remember and look back.

Now as I ride my new horse Jack, I am never alone  
and think of my three mates as I look back.  
Their spirits live on, a little of each I can feel in my  
horse.

And Fred still watches and guides me ... of course.  
Later, as age crept on, he said 'its a bugger to get old'  
That is something Fred, Ned and Jimmy knew.  
But their spirits live on in my heart ... I bid them Adieu.

To my three mates ... I love you.

*Ruth E. Manning*



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# MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE MOUNTAIN CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA INCORPORATED HELD AT THE VICTORIAN FARMERS' FEDERATION, 24 COLLINS STREET, MELBOURNE ON FRIDAY THE 26TH SEPTEMBER 1997.

**PRESENT:** Harry Ryder, Sue Silvers, Jim Commins, Ron Briggs, Frank Ryan, Dick Chester, Bill Crump, Barry Hicks, Natasha Mansfield, Fay Hicks, Simon Turner, Rusty Connley, L. Oliver, Wendy Symons, Peter Monds, Brian Higgins, Roger Hollis, Kevin Kelly, Ruth Manning, Pauline Venn, Ross Brown, John Rogers, Janine Cooper, Peter McCormack, J. Ryan, Steve Ware, Ros Andrews, John Andrews, Chris Stoney, Mick Jordan, John Cook, Danny Cook, Jack Hicks, Stuart Hicks and Ben Treasure.

The Chairman, Harry Ryder opened the meeting at 11.00 a.m. and extended a warm welcome to all members and associate members present.

**APOLOGIES** were received from David Perrin, Lou Lieberman, David Treasure, Don and Carol Richardson, Doug Treasure, Tim Barker, Mary Goldsworthy, Dave Manning, Jean Morrow, Keith and Annie Whittam, Keith and Morva Rule and Cora Davey.

**MINUTES** of the previous Annual General Meeting of the Association as printed in Voice of the Mountains, No. 20 of 1997 as circulated to all members and associate members be confirmed by motion of Peter McCormack, seconded Jim Commins.

## **PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS**

This has been a year of behind the scenes work for your Executive.

I managed to attend all Branch AGMs and found that to be very worthwhile. It is a great opportunity to catch up with members who aren't delegates to Central Council.

On public land any long term security can only come from having community acceptance of what we do. This is something we as an organisation must never lose sight of when plotting our future course.

Over the past twelve months there has been much negotiating with Department (NRE) staff in relation to conditions for seven year bush grazing licences and other matters.

This is all vital activity but I feel it is critical not to rely just on the bureaucratic negotiations but to ensure that we do maintain a very public face. Whilst we have public support we will get a hearing from the Government, but the moment they feel we have lost our popularity the end will be nigh.

In the next twelve months we will be facing a number of other serious issues. The major one currently being discussed will be the renewal of the seven year Alpine grazing licence. This has the potential to cause as much headache as anything we have had to face in the past. The Department has indicated that it wants to discuss almost every issue on the licence.

The Regional Forest Agreements and the associated Forest Management Plan have potential to impact considerably on bush grazing and everyone will need to be vigilant when the plans are discussed in each area. They will require members to write submissions responding to proposals.

Over the next twelve months we face perhaps the most crucial time since the inception of the Association.

As a group we have compromised more than enough over the years and there is no more room for further compromise. I want to take this opportunity to urge all members to become active and not to leave the job to the regular few.

The Omeo Branch ran an excellent Get Together at Gibbo Park this year and all members who were involved are to be congratulated on the success of the weekend. The program was great with many events that invited crowd participation as well as the regular horse events. The Cattlemen's Cut-out event was tremendous. It captures a bit of the everyday work of the cattlemen and puts it on display for the public to enjoy. I would like to see this event continued at future Get Togethers. The weekend had a great atmosphere. Also special thanks to Pauline Venn and Janine Bonney for their very dedicated

effort in the Marketing Tent, which was such a financial success.

Special thanks must go to Linda Barraclough and Debbie Squires for their enormous effort every year in producing *Voice of the Mountains* and also in organising the Don Kneebone Heritage Award.

Our gratitude must also go to Don Porter for his regular efforts with the photo competition and work on the port label. Without support like this the Get Together and the Association would be very much diminished.

The Association is also immensely appreciative of Annie Whittam's untiring efforts in doing all the mailouts.

Another special mention must go to Bruce McCormack, Chris Stoney and Terry Murphy for all the time and effort they put into talking to school groups that request speakers up at Mansfield.

Lastly, another big thanks to our hardworking Secretary Sue Silvers, who gives our organisation its very professional touch and who strikes fear into the heart of the bureaucracy.

Mr Ryder also mentioned the loss to the Central Council of the Vice President Mark Coleman during the year. Mark had taken a position in the Northern Territory.

Mr Ryder also congratulated Jim Commins who had won the Farm Invention of the Year at the Henty Field Day.

### **SECRETARY-TREASURER'S REPORT**

This will be the 12th annual report I have presented to members and associate members of the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria Incorporated, and once again I must report to you that the major concern over the past twelve months has been the lack of progress in obtaining the seven year bush grazing licences.

In my report for 1995/1996 I stated that these licences would issue on 1st October 1996. This statement was made as a result of a promise by the Department of Natural Resources and Environment. The promise was broken, and the licences have not yet issued. The facts are as follows:

When the licences did not issue in October 1996 the Association again contacted the Department of Natural Resources and Environment. After a deal of passing the parcel, the Minister informed the Association by letter to contact the

Manager of the Forests Section. This was done, and a meeting was set up to take place in Mansfield in early December. This meeting was a talk-fest, with the only outcome being an agreement that the licences would issue by end March. Numerous letters to the Department failed to rouse a response. The Association then contacted David Treasure and Graeme Stoney, and a meeting was held in Melbourne with the Hon. Phillip Davis MLC, Parliamentary Secretary DNRE in early March. It was at this meeting that we learned that the file had not even been touched since the previous December. At the request of Mr Davis negotiations opened on special conditions and guidelines, and were concluded in early April to the satisfaction of both parties. These agreed conditions were approved by the Minister, and the Association was informed by letters at end June and early July. Another meeting was then held in Mansfield to clear up minor matters in the licence document, and the Department officer informed us that the licences would be issued 'by the end of the month'. That was July. Then the Department flung a bombshell in the works by claiming that the clauses relating to the transferability and renewability were contrary to the Forest Act, and would have to be withdrawn from the licence. By this time we were feeling a little punch-drunk, but grimly battling on. The Forest Act does not prevent transferability at all, and the Act is silent on the subject of the renewal of grazing licences. We resolved the transferability clause. On the subject of renewability, however, the Department has shut the door. It will not include any form of wording acceptable to the Association. Furthermore, and at the risk of causing members and associates to fall about laughing, the Department wishes to put in a clause the wording of which will 'mention the fact that the Department will enter into "meaningful negotiations" with MCAV in respect of any further licence'. Makes you wonder, doesn't it. To this point we have been conducting 'meaningful negotiations' with DNRE for six years. So you will excuse me for taking a cynical view. We have, on your behalf, refused to adopt any 'meaningful negotiation' clauses.

There are a couple of interesting twists to all of this. One is that, as you are aware, various Department officers are forever talking about a 'body of scientific evidence' (and the words are theirs), in respect to the damage cattle do by trampling. In this

case trampling regeneration seedlings. DNRE was put on the spot, and had to produce this 'body'. It consists, you may be interested to hear, of one research document which clearly demonstrates that the percentage of mortality of regeneration seedlings directly attributable to cattle and horses is less than 1 percent. A list of logging coupes supposedly damaged by cattle grazing, which DNRE has promised to supply to the Association is not yet forthcoming. Despite repeated requests. We are rapidly coming to the conclusion that there is no list because there is no damage caused by cattle.

We have not, and do not intend to give up on this. A meeting has been arranged in October, and we still have hope that this will be the final and deciding meeting, and that there will be a successful outcome.

As your President has told you, the next twelve months will involve a great deal of work and a great deal of talking with Parks Victoria regarding the renewal of the seven year Alpine Park licences. The Association has been given a list of issues to be reviewed and they are: Stocking rates; existing licence boundaries; areas they claim demonstrate continuing damage caused by cattle; protection of significant conservation areas; fees; stock identification (they suggested tail tags for this one. To read a tail tag, provided it had remained attached to the beast, a Ranger would have to stand directly behind the beast and hold the tail in his hand. Perhaps we should agree to this proposal?); stock ownership; dogs and horses; public liability; weeds, licence transfers; and lapsed licences. The more serious issues are stocking rates, supposed cattle damage, and fees. The other issues will surely be resolved by using common sense.

A word of caution here. Now is not the time to be airing disagreements and old grievances in public. This is a time for strong solidarity amongst members. If disagreements are taken to Parks Victoria to be resolved, they will not even make the slightest attempt to do so. What they will do, however, is use the issue to make further rules which will ultimately lead to cutting back that particular stocking rate, and to ultimately remove that area from grazing. Parks Victoria are looking for every possible reason to further limit grazing in the Victorian High Country, and particularly within the Alpine National park. We have already seen evidence in our preliminary discussion with them. So beware.

Members will be aware that the local advisory committees which consisted of local DNRE staff and Rangers, and Cattlemen were disbanded some time ago. The Association has spoken to Bob Jones, Chief Ranger Alpine Area about this, and it was seen to be a very backward step in the resolution of local issues. Bob Jones believes that the local committees are very important and should continue on an informal basis. Two Branches have kept the practice going - North East and Mansfield. On Bob's advice, I have written to Omeo and Gippsland with the names of people to contact with a view to getting those committees working again.

We now come to another long drawn out issue - travelling livestock on Victorian roads. This is another matter that we thought resolved after a tremendous amount of work done largely by Mary Goldsworthy and Alan Brewer from 1995 onwards. The Minister for Roads and Ports has now advised the Association that he will be extending the date for implementation of the new Traffic Regulations until February 1999. At that time the following regulations will become law:

Uniformity of signs. The Association had pushed for a yellow sign with black silhouette. The Minister advises that these are warning signs with no regulatory significance. New South Wales has given regulatory significance to the Australian Standard yellow and black sign, but Victoria will opt for a white sign with black silhouette - and New South Wales will be asked to adopt the Victorian regulatory sign, and Standards Australia will be asked to add it to the standard.

MCAV had worked well with the Victorian Farmers Federation and the Municipal Association to provide for exemptions from the need to obtain permits when moving stock to high country runs and back home again. This was done by the simple method of definitions and exemptions. The Government, however, finds itself unable to influence individual municipalities or shires. So, whilst there is a 'model local law', there is no method to make sure that it is adopted. Hence, for example, in Delatite Shire, a new local law has been drafted which is a hotch-potch of ideas, and Mansfield Branch has had to make a submission to include definitions

and exemptions, as well as having to try and solve a raft of other problems. This will need careful watching by all members in all localities, as local shires seek to implement their own ideas on travelling stock within their areas. Once again the simple idea of uniformity has flown out the window.

The one issue embraced by the Minister for Roads and Ports is the inclusion of material on drivers' obligations when encountering stock on roads in the *Victorian Traffic Handbook*.

I fail to understand Government. It seems that every Department is singing a different song, and believes that all the others should join *them*. Nobody seems to be prepared to work with the other fellow. It's every man for himself and blow the poor old tax paying public. I often find myself wondering just who is steering the ship? Whoever it is is perfectly invisible, I can assure you of that.

On a brighter note I am please to report that the MCAV school information booklet is now on the Net. The address is <http://www.vicnet.net.au/mcavic/>. The difference this has made to answering requests for school information is invaluable. I would like to thank Tim Barker of the Policy Consultants for undertaking this work for us, and getting it up and running. Our school information is now readily available to both students and teachers alike, and has saved a lot of work, a lot of printing, and a lot of postage.

The Association decided, last year, to conduct a survey about the Get Togethers, and forms were handed out to all who attended at Gibbo Park in January, and then were posted to all members and associate members with the July Newsletter. To date I have had 95 returned, and they are still coming in in dribs and drabs. A very clear response showed that the Get Togethers were considered good value for money, there were many comments that there should be more heritage type displays, the facilities were considered pretty good. One of the most interesting results was that people who attended were evenly divided between having read about the Get Together in the Newsletters - obviously members and associates, and others who had heard about it by word of mouth - obviously not members or associates. It would be nice to think that we could

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increase the associate membership significantly by persuading the latter group to join up during the event. Another result of the survey clearly showed that people did not like standing around in the hot sun waiting for events to start. There were many comments that events should start on time, and anybody who was not ready should miss out.

It was a very good exercise to conduct. A great many of the suggestions were good ones, and I am sure will be taken up. The Association would like to thank all those who took the time to fill in the form and return it.

I have been the Association's representative on the Alpine Advisory Committee. I have to report that the Minister has not asked the Committee to meet this year. A meeting is scheduled, however, for October.

The Public Land Council of Victoria meets regularly during the year. Heather Mitchell, who was its first President, and remained in that position for

ten years, resigned this year and will be sadly missed. However Heather Mitchell is to be asked to become Patron of the Council. The new President is Mr Ian Hamilton from the Victorian Association of Four Wheel Drive Clubs. We all look forward to working with him.

Last year the Association had a problem with the marketing division, and it was decided not to appoint a marketing officer for the year, but bring the marketing back to the central office to be sorted out, so to speak. This has been done, and it has been pleasing that a small loss last year has been turned around to a reasonable profit this year. This has been achieved, in the main, by careful buying and by very thorough and responsible stocktaking. Harry Ryder has thanked Pauline Venn and Janine Bonney for taking on the marketing responsibility for the Gibbo Park Get Together, and I would like to add the Association's thanks to his. We must not forget, either, all those who assist with the marketing over the weekend. Without that assistance, the whole job would be unworkable. I recommend that the Association appoint a Marketing Officer this year, and that the systems put in place for stocktaking and recording sales and purchases be carried forward.

As Treasurer I would like members to know that the Association is in good shape financially, with a small profit made this year. The financial statements are presented to members for consideration and acceptance.

Moved Peter Monds seconded Jim Commins that the Secretary's report be received and that the financial statements for the year 1996/1997 be accepted. *Carried.*

### **SETTING OF FEES**

Moved John Rogers seconded Ross Brown that there be no change to either the full member or associate member subscriptions for the coming year.

*Carried.*

### **FIXING OF HONORARIUMS**

On the recommendation of Harry Ryder, it was moved Jim Commins, seconded Kevin Kelly, that there be no positions for Executive Officer and Chairman for the coming year. *Carried.*

Moved Ross Brown, seconded Brian Higgins, that there be no position of 2nd Vice President for the coming year. *Carried.*

Moved Jim Commins, seconded Kevin Kelly, that the honorarium for the President be \$3,000 plus expenses. *Carried.*

Moved Jim Commins, seconded Kevin Kelly, that the honorarium for the Vice President be \$1,000 plus expenses. *Carried.*

Moved John Rogers, seconded Simon Turner, that the honorarium for the Special Projects Officer be \$1,000 plus expenses. *Carried.*

Moved Peter McCormack, seconded Ruth Manning, that the honorarium for the Secretary/Treasurer be \$20,000 plus expenses. *Carried.*

Moved Peter McCormack, seconded Rusty Connley, that the honorarium for the Marketing Officer be \$1,000 plus expenses. *Carried.*

### **ELECTION OF OFFICE BEARERS**

Harry Ryder declared all positions vacant, and asked Bill Crump to take the Chair for the purposes of electing office bearers.

**President:** Harry Ryder, nominated by John Ryan, was elected.

**Vice President:** Stuart Hicks, nominated by Rusty Connley, was elected.

**Special Projects Officer:** Jim Commins, nominated by Kevin Kelly, was elected.

**Secretary/Treasurer:** Sue Silvers, nominated by Peter Monds, was elected.

**Marketing Officer:** Pauline Venn, nominated by Sue Silvers, was elected.

Harry Ryder congratulated all incoming office bearers.

### **APPOINTMENT OF AUDITOR:**

Mr Bill Crump was appointed auditor of the Association for the coming year.

### **OTHER BUSINESS**

Ron Briggs requested a copy of the Get Together Survey Results mentioned in the Secretary's report.

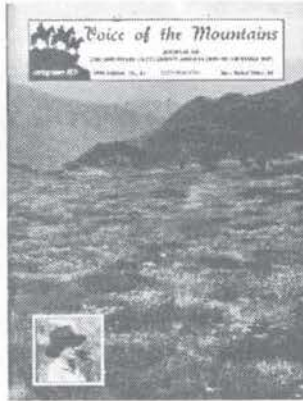
There being no further business, the Chairman declared the meeting closed at 12 noon.



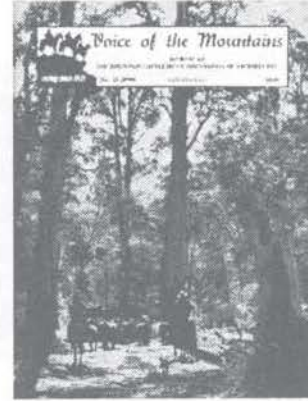
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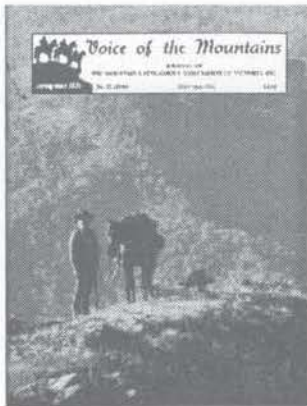
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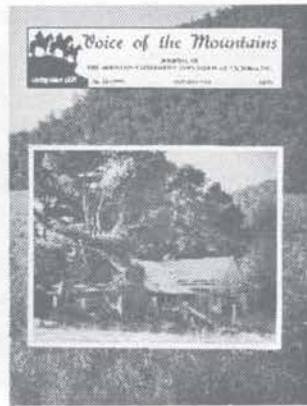
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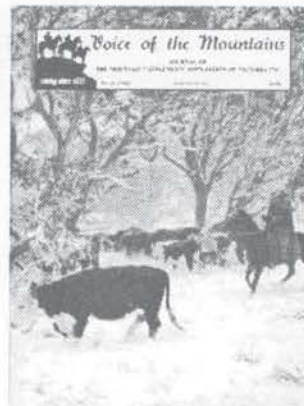
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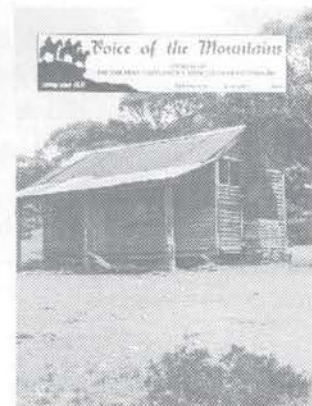
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The Committee of *Voice of the Mountains* would like to thank everyone for the support received this year, including Sue and Harry Ryder who helped fill the pages.

We also appreciate the timely assistance of Dorothy Watt, Marion Hair, Rowena Turner, Bob Elliott, Glenn and Vicki Phillips, Lorna Macfarlane and Harold Coverdale.

Poems, stories and photos suitable for *Voice* are always welcome.

*Voice* owes a great deal to two groups of people, as without them there would not have been a *Voice of the Mountains* for 1998. The 'Anapaks' are a group of MCAV supporters, who have never been to a Get-Together, yet each year they make themselves available to collate all the pages of *Voice*. We are also very thankful that there are pages printed for them to collate. E-Gee Printers get more tolerant as the deadline becomes more insane with each passing year. We are extremely appreciative of the support of the 'Anapaks' and E-Gee's staff and we thank all for their patience and tolerance.

