



# Voice of the Mountains

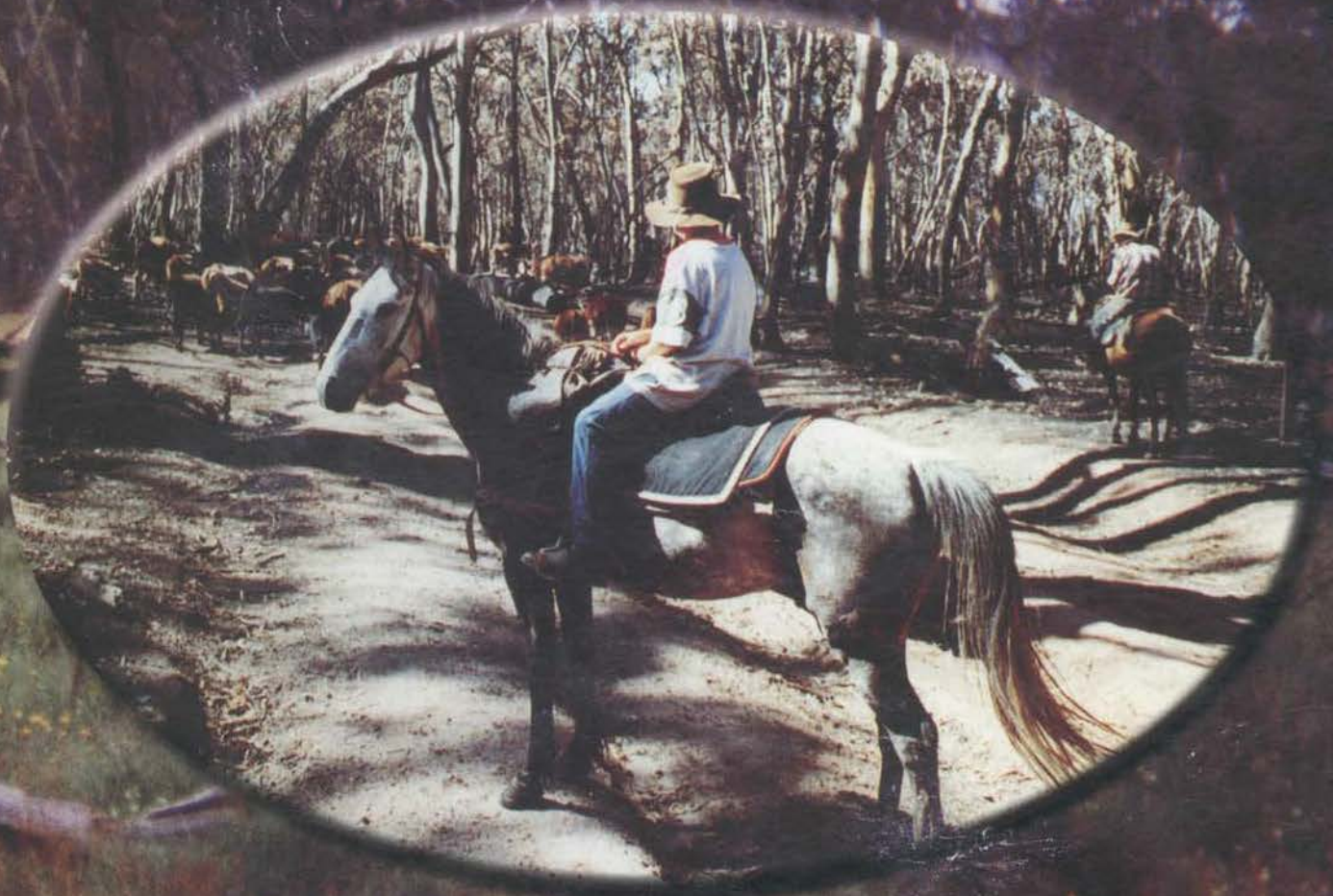
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Editorial Committee: Linda Barraclough, Debra Squires and Sue Silvers

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### COVER

Prolific regrowth at Holmes Plain, after the Caledonia fire, December 1998,  
with inset, Steven Higgins moving cattle after the fire, January 1998.

***Voice of the Mountains* wishes to express its appreciation to all contributors to this issue. Due to the large amount of important material relating to the Caledonia fire and the seven year grazing licences that we have received some of the articles of a historical nature and some poems have been held over.**

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Mountain Cattlemen - the name evokes a love affair with the mountains, a romance with the old ways, and a passion for maintaining a little bit of living history. We cannot ignore this feeling in the wider community, their empathy with our way of life is the key to continue our traditional ways. The continued support of the public is vital. As an organisation the cattlemen must foster this public support.

Our opponents, masters at living from the public purse, are pursuing a intense campaign to have cattle totally removed from the National Park. Cattle now graze on about 6% of the Alpine National Park, where once most of the forest and mountains was carrying cattle. So much of the country that used to be grazed is now a stagnant wasteland with a huge build-up of forest litter. The exclusion of fire has over time gradually rendered this former grazing country virtually worthless.

The Caledonia fire last year has been a mixed blessing. The fire appeared to totally decimate large areas of forest, however the recovery of the bush was amazing. Trees were beginning to regenerate by their various means and there was a sea of waist high grass, green and blowing in the wind. Holmes Plain, the site of a couple of Get Togethers many years ago, is a carpet of new growth. The fire on the grazed country was of much lower intensity and there has been a quick recovery.

It is these areas that Parks Victoria has excluded from grazing. Our members have been told they won't be allowed to return to their traditional grazing areas this season. We must be vigilant to ensure that Parks Victoria do not seize this opportunity to permanently withdraw cattle from the Snowy-Bennison area.

One of the great disasters of the fire was the loss of precious topsoil. Above the Caledonia River are vast tracts of ungrazed land. It is in these areas where the fire was most intense and where the saving rains washed away the topsoil, most of which ended up in the Macalister River as a thick brown sludge. The recovery of the grazed areas so quickly after the fire highlights the advantage of maintaining a short green sward of grass, the likes of which are only achieved by cattle grazing.

My thanks this year must go to Sue Silvers, our untiring Secretary; Linda Barraclough and Debbie Squires for producing this year's edition of *Voice of Mountains* and Pauline Venn for her efforts in the marketing of our Association. But the biggest thanks must go to you - our members, associates and supporters for continuing to have the Mountain Cattlemen a reality, not something from Australia's past.

*Harry Ryder*



Cattle on Bennison, on a patch of grazed, unburnt grassland, 4 January 1998.



Regrowth of the grasslands on the Cumming and Gell lease, December 1998.

# Caledonia Fire - The Aftermath

## Grazing Prohibited from Burnt Area

The first major bushfire in the Victorian Alpine area since 1939 raged out of control during the first days of January 1998. Over 35,000 hectares were burned and seven mountain cattlemen had their licensed grazing runs wholly or partially destroyed by the fire. Those who could manage to carry on did so. Following an appeal to Minister Marie Tehan, several licensees were permitted to see through the grazing season by putting their cattle into Bryces Paddock. The Association and cattlemen were told at the time that it would be unlikely that grazing would be permitted on the fire affected areas for the 1998/1999 season. The cattlemen adopted a 'wait and see' policy.

On 2 November 1998, an officer of Parks Victoria interviewed on a Gippsland radio station was recorded as saying that grazing would be off the Caledonia fire area.

Representatives of Parks Victoria, MCAV and the affected licensees carried out an inspection tour of the affected areas on 20 November 1998. The group inspected four areas. In two areas selected by Parks Victoria the re-growth was not as well advanced as in other areas. It was pointed out by the cattlemen that, although these areas were within the boundaries of a grazing licence, the cattle seldom went there, and consequently it can be assumed that the fire was hotter in these areas. In two sites inspected at the request of cattlemen - areas favoured by cattle - it was obvious that the fire had been severe, but the regrowth was coming back very strongly. One of the foresters remarked that the vegetation was in fact growing too quickly and strongly, and there was a possibility that this might prevent the establishment of the mountain ash seedlings.

It is understood that Parks Victoria have a responsibility to protect the conservation values of the Park. What happened seemed to particularly bother Parks Victoria was the fact that the 'mid

canopy' of vegetation had not returned. They seemed to consider that cattle would prevent that from happening. When the actual figures are considered, this concern would appear to be absurd. 22,000 hectares of Park grazed by cattle were affected by the fire. The number of cattle proposed to be put on these runs this summer? Five hundred. This amounts to one beast per 44 hectares - or one beast in over 100 acres.

At this inspection tour the cattlemen proposed a compromise. They suggested that only the five hundred cattle go up, but that they should go up to the runs later, and remain for a shorter period. Twelve weeks was put forward as a suggestion.

The answer: No grazing whatsoever on the burned areas this summer. A decision arrived at ten months earlier. So much for negotiation. So much for compromise. So much for co-operation. What a joke!

The Association, and the cattlemen affected by this decision, were surprised that the news was publicised on radio before MCAV, or any of the cattlemen, were notified.

Immediately the Association heard the news its representatives arranged to join the licensees for a further inspection. It was our pleasure that Mr David Treasure MP was able to attend.

This second inspection tour took place on Monday 14 December 1998. We returned to one of the areas previously inspected with Parks Victoria on 20th November. The development of the vegetation was extraordinary. Where, at the previous inspection, the growth did not quite reach to my knees, it was now up to my waist. The whole area looked magnificent, and the comment was passed that dairy cattle could run there. However the decision had been made, and even though it was an absurd decision, it had to stand.

Licensees were offered alternative grazing areas. The trouble was that there were all offered



Grasslands, Holmes Plain, December 1998

the same two areas. Not an alternative at all! Two licensees accepted alternative grazing areas. Another four had further inspections of their licence areas with Parks Victoria, but for nothing. So there will be no grazing this summer in the areas affected by the Caledonia fire.

Some food for thought. Wasted, unfortunately on Parks Victoria and Department of Natural Resources and Environment officers.

Reference is the Bogong High Plains. "The more likely major reason for the change in shrub herbage balance is the natural succession of heath shrubs since the last fire. Fire incidence is low in the alpine and subalpine lands, with a frequency of less than once every 50 years at any one place. The natural frequency can only be guessed at, because of the short term of record

keeping and the fire suppression policy in recent decades, but the area is thought to have all been burnt in 1939. (Carr 1977). We do not know the frequency of fires before 1939 or before settlement, but we could expect a greater frequency than under the current fire suppression policy. Despite the low frequency of fire the effect is nonetheless significant because of the slow rate of recovery of heath shrubs in this cold climate. Fire kills some species directly and reduces others to ground level, so that shrub cover is sharply reduced after even a low intensity fire, as found in the research by Leigh and others at Kiandra. In comparison, snowgrass recovers quickly. A vegetation measured by cover will thus evidence a gradual increase in shrubs relative to grasses and forbs over many years without fire....



Cattlemen with David Treasure, MLA, inspecting previously burnt grasslands, Holmes Plain, 14 December 1998.

Fire effects are likely to be complex, varying with both the intensity of the fire and the shrub species. Hot fires kill more shrubs than cold ones, but may also stimulate the germination of more hard-seeded species. Some species resprout readily from the base, whilst others depend on re-establishment from seed (Hodgkinson & Griffin 1982). Hence we cannot at this stage predict how individual shrub species will respond to fire, but we can say that the effects will be more significant and long-lasting.....

Information ... (more research) is important, not only for understanding changes on grazed lands, but for managing those changes on grazed and ungrazed lands alike. Where cattle are retained, a more comprehensive understanding is required to aid

management. Where cattle are excluded the same understanding is required for management, since changes will still occur ... ”

Dr A.D. Wilson. (1991) An Overview of the Impact of Grazing on the Alpine and Subalpine Lands of Victoria: with emphasis on future research needs.

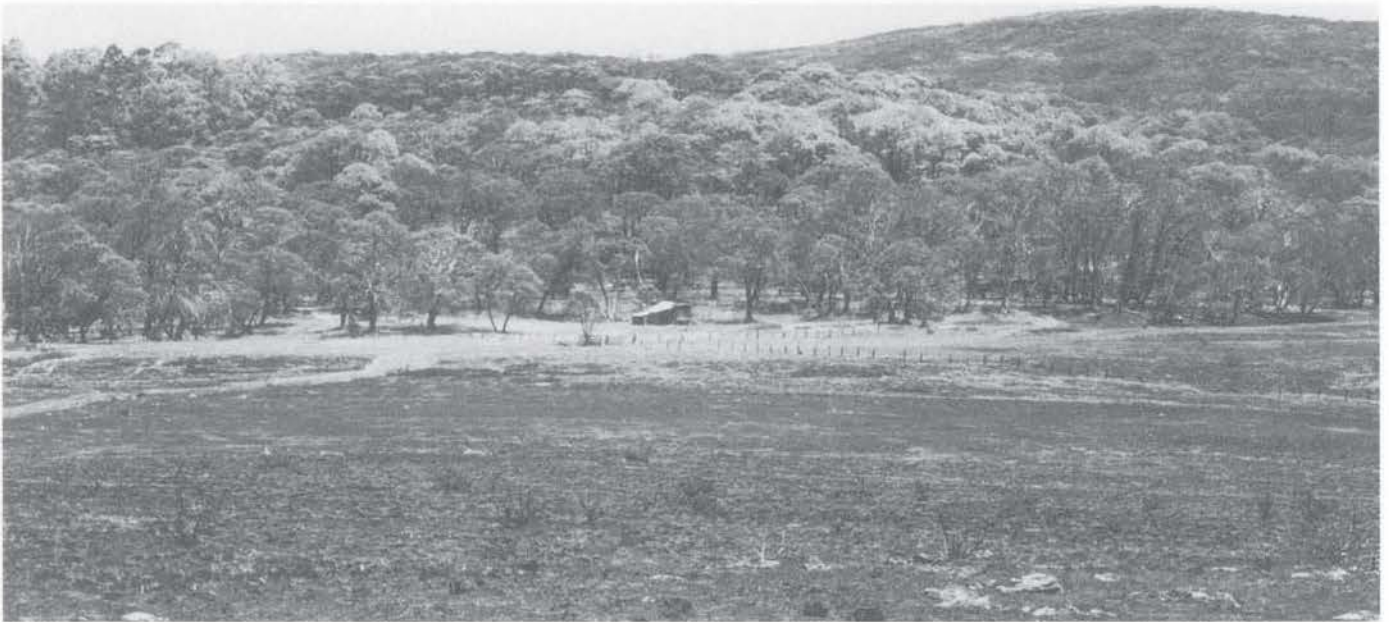
**With reference to the grazing licence areas affected by the Caledonia fire - was there any science? No, only a vegetation survey. Was there any knowledge at all of what the area looked like before the fire? No. Was there any thought given by Parks Victoria to management practices? No. Was there any sense of obligation to cattlemen who, three months previously had been granted a renewed seven year grazing licence? No. What was the answer? There wasn't one - just throw the cattle off.**



# Smoke on Tamboritha

## A Day-to-Day Account of the Caledonia Fires

*John Walker*



Burnt grassland, with Kellys/Chesters hut in the background, Holmes Plain, 4 January 1998.  
Large patches of snowgums behind the hut were also burnt.

As the Caledonia Fire approached Bennison, it came to the notice of a group staying at Kevin Higgins' huts on Bennison. The references here to 'Micks Hut' are to the hut formerly known as Kevin Higgins' hut, on the other side of the plain.

John Walker of Sale, who was staying with the group at Kevin's hut, a base for the rides Kevin operates, documented the time before and during the fire. An edited account appears below.

### **Wednesday 31 December 1997 (New Year's Eve)**

A chopper was buzzing about in the morning and Kevin asked 'What's that bastard up to?'. Walks replied that he didn't know, 'But it's not the Helicopter Ambulance'.

Kevin and everyone except Walks bundled into the troopy and went for a drive up to the top of Tamboritha about 5.45pm to see if they could see what was causing all the smoke. After a good feed it was decided not to travel down to Licola for New Year's Eve, but rather take another drive up to

Tamboritha to try and see where the fire was and to see the New Year's Eve in up there. Some stayed at the hut and some headed off up there.

The smoke on Tamboritha was too thick to see where or how far away the fire was, or in what direction it was going, but it was a good place to see in the New Year.

### **Thursday, 1st January 1998 (New Year's Day)**

Kevin and Murph drove up to Tamboritha again to check out the fire. Mela and Jess did a washing and shopping run to Licola and bought back supplies. They were allowed back up the road north of Licola later in the afternoon after being questioned by police at the Licola roadblock set up to stop people venturing into the fire area.

While they were gone, Kevin became a bit concerned about the fire, so everyone packed their gear into the cars just in case the fire did happen to head in the Bennison direction. The spouts on the bunkhouse were also cleaned out and all the rubbish, dead leaves etc raked from a round the walls. Kevin

did another fire reconnaissance run. The fire didn't seem to be getting much closer so all the gear was then unpacked from the vehicles. Cowboy headed for Heyfield at 4.30pm to let two riders know that their ride had to be cancelled.

### Friday, 2nd January (D Day)

Murph woke Kevin up at 6am, saying things didn't look too good. Everyone was out of bed early. There was a northerly wind blowing which had come up about 1am, and there appeared to be two main fires, one in the north-west and another north-east, which meant the fire was certain to come in the Bennison direction., although there had been no Police or DNRE personnel call in with any kind of warning.

It was decided to pack up all the gear (again) and move all the cars except the troopy to the greenest area of grass near the creek in the middle of the plain. Rob Greenaway's Fergie tractor was also taken down to the plain, along with all the important supplies (amongst them the eskies). Cowboy arrived back about 11am, having talked his way through the roadblock. Kevin told everyone

now was the time to decide whether to stay and try and stop the fire burning the hut or go, and this was a decision for each individual. Everyone decided to stay.

All the available water containers were filled, including the sinks in the hut, and the thirteen large steel containers used on the beach rides were filled and spaced along the north fence of the hut and bunkhouse. Several plastic containers of water were also put in the yards and saddle shed, along with billies and any other container that could be used for water.

Brian Higgins and Chris Spencer arrived shortly after 9am, followed by Anthony Higgins and Mark Taylor. Anthony said that a strike team of nine CFA tankers were on the way to help out at the huts, but were coming from South Gippsland and would not arrive until early afternoon. Brian, Chris, Anthony, Kevin, Melissa and Cowboy went out to muster as many cattle as possible to put in the hut paddock. Walks and Mark drove over to Sambain to see whether anyone was there and met Bill Cumming at the front gate, who called in for a while to see what the situation was with the cattle in the



Remains of the 'Thunderbox' at Kevin Higgins' hut, 3 January 1998.

area. No-one was at Sambain and all the gates were chained and padlocked, although people had been staying there for the past few days.

After mustering as many cattle as possible, it was evident that the fire was getting very close, so Anthony, Chris and Mark went around to Mick Higgin's hut, Faye, Jess and Claire went down to the creek (to mind the vehicles) and Brian went over to Sambain to cut the chains so that the tankers could get in when they arrived. Kevin and Murph also drove around to Mick's hut in the troopy and arrived back just as the first spot fire started about 30 metres into the bush, with another one half way up a tree about 100 metres away. Melissa and Michelle headed for the creek after taking a couple of photos.

Kevin quickly lit a back-burn along the north of the hut about ten metres from the back fence. Pete, Cowboy, Murph and Steve were at the hut and Mike and Walks went down to the shed/yards area. By this time spot fires were starting everywhere and the smoke had suddenly got too thick to breathe properly. Steve decided it was not a good place to be, so headed off for the creek but could not see through the smoke to work out where the cars and girls were. Walks left to follow Steve down to the creek, just as the old faithful thunderbox caught fire. A gap appeared in the smoke and Steve and Walks got down to the creek okay, but Walks had a bit of trouble getting back as the hut couldn't be seen through the smoke and spot fires were going on over most of the plain. The girls were particularly worried as they could hear yelling from the direction of the hut but couldn't see anything through the smoke and flames on the plain.

Back at the hut the main front had arrived. Kevin went to check the saddle shed and Cowboy was nowhere to be seen, but 'surfaced' later. Pete and Murph decided it was time to bolt, and tipped all the water containers onto the ground on the north side, but were unsure where to 'bolt to', because there was fire and smoke all round. Kevin came back to the hut and decided they should all get in the troopy ready to drive through the fence if necessary and head down the creek where the girls were. Leaking petrol from the troopy soon changed that plan. It had been filled with fuel whilst not on level ground and was leaking on flat ground due to a faulty petrol cap. Pete, Cowboy and Murph were as low as possible on the concrete verandah trying to get some good air when Walks got back as the

smoke was so thick it wasn't possible to breathe without coughing or dry-retching and everyone's nose was running like a tap. The firewood in the tank behind the store shed caught fire and flames were lapping the bottom of the shed. Although it was so hot the solder on the tank was melting, buckets of water managed to put it out. The back burn and water containers had stopped the main front from burning the hut, bunk house, toilet block and saddle shed, but the thunderbox was history by now and the stockyards were on fire.

Just as the main front passed Higgins Hut, the CFA strike team arrived, and dozens of spot fires were still burning along with about half the horse yards and most of the plain. Tankers were from Licola, Berrys Creek, Rawson, Loch, Tanjil, Leongatha, Moe South, Inverloch, Trida and Longwarry. They split into three groups, one each at Higgins Hut, Mick Higgins Hut and the Marist Brothers Hut (Sambain Chalet). Although the main front had already passed Higgins and Micks Hut, Sambain and most of the horse yards would have most certainly have gone up in smoke if they did not get there when they did. The tankers worked until about 8pm, putting out all the small fires in the bush and on the plain.

When Stewart Booth, the strike team leader, asked the girls if they would help out making some bread rolls, the answer was 'yes'. But there was a bit of hesitation when the quantity required was two hundred. However the production line went well and was done in no time at all. Later a cooked meal was made for 55 people using the food originally intended for the ride.

Over the period of the fire, so far, not a single vehicle from the Department of Natural Resources had been seen or heard from at Bennison., and an interview published on Monday in *The Age* with a DNRE spokesman said 'no private property was threatened or damaged'! It tried hard to rain that night and the drizzle was a welcome relief from the day that was.

### **Saturday, 3rd January**

The day dawned quiet and cool and the plains and bush were covered in a dense layer of fog and smoke. Brian decided not to go looking for cattle too early in the morning due to limited visibility ... even though mountain cattlemen never get lost, just

sometimes they don't know where they are! Groups went out later in the morning looking for cattle that might have survived or been injured in the fire. Anthony had to shoot one, its feet and udder burnt. A sambar stag had also been burnt and was dead at the fence about a kilometre from the front gate.

The Licola tanker visited, with Tern, Ash, Greg and Davo on board and topped up all the water tanks at the hut. Bill Cumming, Jeff and Brian Gell, Ralph Barraclough, Mick Higgins and his two sons also called in and a general discussion was held on what to do with the cattle since practically all the feed was burnt out. A decision had to be made quickly and there were really very few options. Ultimately, they were taken to Bryces Paddock.

Murph, Walks and Jess went for a walk to the spring 300 metres from the hut, which had now filled up again after being dried out by the fire the day before. The general opinion given to Kevin by them was that the poly pipe to the spring could be fixed by using approximately 350 joiners.

Most people had left by late afternoon, with Brian, Chris and Steve leaving about 7pm.

#### Sunday, 4th January

Walks and Murph drove down to Tamboritha Lookout to ring Brian and give him a weather report. There were two dozers, several vehicles and a couple of dozen DNRE men at the yards at Dingo

Hill Road.

Jess, Faye, Claire and Murph saddled up and went looking for any of Anthony's cattle at the foot of Mount Tamboritha/Dingo Hill Road area, but found none. A Sambar doe was found still alive, sitting down, obviously injured, but they had nothing with which to put it out of its misery.

Walks went over to Mick's hut to try and find one of Brian's dogs which was missing since yesterday. Cowboy left about 9.40am, and Kevin, Melissa and Ralph Barraclough went for a drive up to Wellington Plains in Ralph's Land Rover to see what sort of damage had been done in that area.

Brian's dog found its way back to the hut at 11am, and Jess rode out to take some photos as the day was much clearer than yesterday and it could not be seen just how much damage had been done and how lucky everyone was. Most people were back around 1.30pm and had hot dogs for lunch.

Around 3pm everyone left and Kevin made the comment that he was still not sure whether the eleven people who stayed at the hut with him were brave or just plain stupid. Those at Higgins Hut for the period of the fire were:

Kevin Higgins	Steven Higgins
John Walker	Melissa Grey
Jessica Bol	John Murphy
Faye Murphy	Peter Commerford
Claire Newhouse	Mike Dunn
Michelle Bain	
Paul 'Cowboy' O'Shea	



Moving the cattle to Bryces Paddock, 15 January 1998

# We Couldn't Take them Home to Paddocks Full of Dirt

*Steven Higgins*

**Steven Higgins from Glenmaggie is a fifth generation mountain cattleman, claiming descent through the Flanagans and Higgins of Crooked River. He was 12 years old at the time. Here is how he saw the Caledonia fire.**

## **Before the Fire**

Two weeks before the bush fire started, my Dad, younger brother and myself decided to travel to the Bennison Plains and check our cattle, which had been grazing there for a short time. Before we left my Dad decided we should take some salt blocks with us to lay out for the cattle. After we loaded five salt blocks onto the back of the Toyota we set off for Bennison. After travelling for an hour and a half we arrived at the front gate. We entered our property and soon saw the first mob of cattle.

Considering they had come to Bennison off drought country, they were in pretty good nick.

We kept on going and we soon arrived at one of the spots where we lay out salt blocks. We took three out of the boxes and started calling the cattle. They approached us cautiously and slowly started licking the salt blocks. They were shining! Dad was very pleased with the condition they were in. We observed the cattle for a further ten minutes before deciding to give them the other two salt blocks. After that we went four-wheel-driving looking for cattle. Having no luck, we set off for home.



Steven Higgins moving cattle to Bryces Paddock, 15 January 1998.

### **During the Fire**

The fire had been going for about two days but had not threatened our hut or property. But when I found out that the second front of the fire that was started by a spot fire was going to come straight over the top of our hut I had mixed emotions. In one way I was scared because I had seen what a fire can do to people and their property, but in another way I was excited because I had never experienced a fire before.

My Dad arrived that morning and quickly gathered five other people to saddle up some horses and go out into the bush looking for cattle to get them out of the path of the fire. While they were out looking for cattle we organised containers of water and placed them along the back of the hut ready to be tipped over. We also cleaned out all of the gutters and raked up leaves from around the buildings. Then we started moving the cars and valuables down to the greenest spot of grass down at the creek. After about half an hour of riding, the mustering group returned with about ninety percent of the cattle. They put the cattle into the hut paddock, with the horses they had been riding.

We had received word that there was a strike team consisting of nine fire tankers on their way up to put out the fires, the only thing was that they were coming from South Gippsland, which meant they would arrive later on that afternoon. The group of us decided to take matters into our own hands. We split up into three groups, one group consisting of the women, they would make their way down to the cars at the creek, where they would be safe. The second group consisting of five or six men who would travel over to Mick Higgins' hut to try and save it. The third group consisting of five or six men would stay and protect Higgins Hut and its surroundings. No sooner than the second group left, spot fires started appearing left, right and centre. As the smoke started to get thicker we found it hard to find clean air. Everyone got damp tea-towels and wrapped them around the front of their mouth. My uncle started back-burning about ten metres away from the hut, hoping it would reduce the power of the main front. When the fire got closer and the smoke got thicker I decided it wasn't a good place to be, so I decided to make my way down to the creek. I got through the fence only to find I couldn't see the cars through the smoke. Sensing my confusion, my uncle guided me down to the creek to safety.

I stayed down at the creek until I saw the blue and red lights flashing through the trees. The fire tankers! I made my way up to the hut, scanning the area to see in anything was damaged or burnt. Finding that nothing was damaged, I went up to the hut and started talking to the fire fighters, who had just arrived. They started putting out smouldering trees and logs. I knew then that everything would be fine.

But then I started thinking about what we were going to do about the cattle. All the feed had been burnt and we couldn't take them home to paddocks full of dirt. This was a problem that would have to be solved quickly.

### **After the Fire**

After the fire went through, my Dad and I went for a drive around the paddocks to see what sort of damage it did. We started down the old bush track, which would lead us to the second plain. We arrived there and went for a walk to survey the situation. We walked half of the way into the bush, which used to be as thick and rough as any other parts of the Bennison Plains. As soon as the fire had started, I think my father knew that the situation was not good, but seeing the bush in this state just rubbed salt into the already large proverbial wound in his side. As I looked around and saw the bush the way it was, many thoughts went flashing through my mind. Would the bush and the plains ever return to the state they were in before the fire front came through? And would the Parks allow us to run our beef cattle on our land in 1999?

### **Bryces**

Since the fires had destroyed all of our nice, green, luscious grass and it was only halfway through the season that our cattle were meant to be up here, we had to find a place for them to graze until the end of the season. Well, the decision had been made, the owners of the cattle wanted them to have three months eating the grass on the flat which Guys Hut had been built on. The only thing that was left to do was persuade Parks to let us run our mob up there. After a very long time of persuading the 'head honchos', they finally gave in. We were allowed to have the cattle graze there on two conditions: number one, that we fence off the remnant moss beds so that the cattle did not destroy



Holmes Plain Yards, with the flat and slope in the background burnt black, 15 January 1998.

them and, number two, we had to put a fence up around Guys Hut so the cattle would not ruin it in one way or another. We agreed to the terms, so the work began.

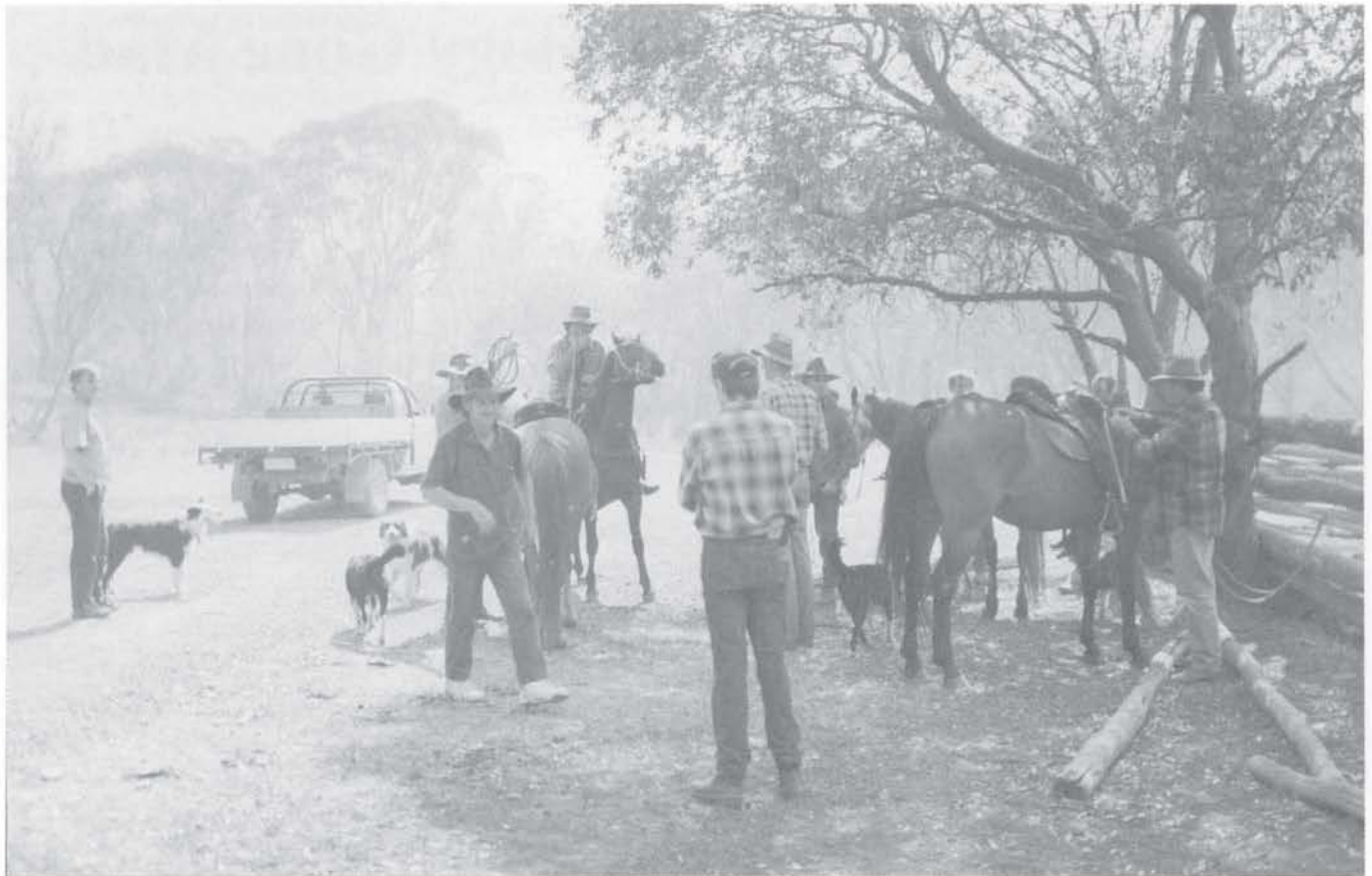
### **Fencing off the area**

Since the Mountain Cattlemen got the go-ahead to put our cattle up at Bryces, they had to fence off the area. We were to run a three wire electric fence around the grazing paddock. If we were going to do it ourselves it would take forever to do, so we called in some other mountain cattlemen to give us a hand. Harry Ryder (President of the Mountain Cattlemen's Association), his son Adam and some other men who I was not introduced to came. When they arrived we got to work. We worked from strainer to strainer, running the wires and clipping them onto the iron posts and then moving to the next one. We were split up into groups, so the work got done faster. By the end of the first day there was only a small amount of work to be done on the next day. We finished the fence in

the exact same manner we started it. After the job was done we thanked the men who helped us and made our way back to Higgins Hut, where we sat down to lunch. Now all that was left to do was to drive the cattle out there.

### **Droving the Cattle to Bryces**

Three days after we finished fencing off the area that our cattle were to go on, we started to drive them from my Dad's holding paddock at Bennison to the paddock that we had just fenced. We started at about one o'clock in the afternoon because it was not a very long trip to our destination, which was the old holding paddock on Holmes Plain. We mustered the mob which was made up of Higgins, Gell and Cumming cattle and started off on our short but tiring journey. We were making good time and by three thirty we were at Chesters gate, or what was left of it, which went into his paddock. When we were in Chesters paddock, we had to cross a series of marshy creeks, which were very hard to judge if there was solid ground on top or just weed. Crossing all of the marshes without any trouble at



Moving the cattle to Bryces Paddock, 15 January 1998.

all, we were only minutes away from the holding paddock. We reached Kellys Hut and had a look, because that was the first time that some of the people that were helping us had seen it. Finally, we reached the holding paddock, which hadn't been burnt, so the cattle had grass to chew on for the night. We turned the cattle out and unsaddled the horses. After giving them a drink we let them go as well. After we did everything, we travelled back to Higgins Hut, where we would stay the night.

### **The second day**

We decided to start early because it was a fairly long trip which was ahead of us and the fact it was meant to be very hot gave us extra motivation. We arrived at the paddock only to find that the cattle had gotten through the fences and were grazing on Holmes Plain! We quickly rounded them up and started up the plain. The cattle were very keen and full of energy because they were trotting along so fast it took three people at the front of them to hold them back.

By Eleven o'clock we were on the main road. We let them have a breather while we stood under the shade of a gum tree, giving our horses some nice, green, unburnt grass. We carried on and soon we reached the airstrip and spotted some of the helicopters that had been fighting the fire. We knew after we got over the last hill that it would not take long at all to get to Bryces because the cattle could sense that we were near our destination. We sent someone ahead to lay down the fence so that the cattle could walk over it into the paddock.

When the cattle got into their grazing area for the rest of the season, they split up into different mobs and started eating the rank but fattening snow grass which lay beneath them.

The last thing I would like to say is that at no time either before or when the fire front came through, did we have any warning or offer of help from the Parks or DNRE.



# Drought, Fire and Ideology Gone Mad

*W.L. (Bill) Cumming*



Vigorous grassland regrowth, Holmes Plain, December 1998

The year 1998 has been very tough for all who grazed cattle on the High Plains, particularly the first half of the year. Unfortunately those of us who grazed cattle on the Snowy and Bennison Plains, Mount Arbuckle and Mount Wellington areas suffered more than most.

We were already going through a very severe drought on the lower home properties and then to be burnt out on our mountain leases was the ultimate disaster.

I first received news of a fire burning in the Caledonia River area on New Year's Eve, Wednesday 31st December 1997, at 3pm, and contacted the DNRE at Heyfield. They seemed to think the fire could be controlled. By Thursday 1st January, it became obvious the fire was spreading and I received a phone call in the late afternoon from the DNRE informing me that the fire had spotted onto Mount Reynard. At 11pm that night the Heyfield police phoned to say that the area around Kellys Hut and McMichaels Hut was

burning and wanted to know if I had cattle in the area. There was little that could be done at that stage but an early start enabled me to arrive at Kellys Lane by 9am on Friday 2nd January.

It was possible to drive up to Kellys and McMichaels Huts and I was pleasantly surprised to find my cattle undamaged although the surrounding grass country was blackened.

The fire at this stage had again spotted, this time in the Arbuckle Junction area and was burning back towards our paddock along Shaws Creek. Driving back down Kellys Lane I found two or three small mobs of our cows and calves and was able to put them into our paddock where the grass was short and green along the creek. At this stage most of the area around was burning and I headed back to Higgins Hut and took refuge near the bridge. Those at Higgins Hut had worked hard to save the building, with the fire burning right up against the north wall of the hut.

Earlier that morning the Higgins brothers had mustered what cattle they could find from the area known as Back Creek and placed the cattle in their freehold paddock, an area kept well grazed. This no doubt saved most of their cattle.

Two hours after the fire had gone through I went back to our own paddock and was overjoyed to see most of the cattle I had put back in there were okay. There is no doubt that if Higgins' cattle and our cattle had not been shifted the losses would have been much heavier.

**Aerial photographs can show that where cattle had been constantly grazing the grassland, the severity of the fires was much less. This no doubt saved the cattle we had shifted.**

On Saturday 3rd, Parks Victoria arranged a meeting of cattlemen at Licola and we were told that all the cattle would have to be mustered off the burnt area and for us to find alternative grazing areas. A difficult task considering the drought conditions on our home properties. The option of selling the cattle was not possible as prices were at their lowest for many years.

We were also told at this meeting that it was most likely that cattle would not be allowed back for three years. We were naturally shocked at this comment, believing it would be very presumptuous to assume that the area would take that long to recover. We were desperate to find an area to place our cattle and approached Parks Victoria for permission to take cattle either out to the Howitt Plains or the Wonnangatta Valley, both areas being inside the National Park. Parks Victoria officers have made it quite clear to us that they would rather not have cattle in the Alpine National Park, the cattle are only being accommodated because of the Alpine National Park Act, which provides for grazing in certain areas within the park, so we were not very optimistic regarding our request. The answer was an emphatic NO, so we decided to lobby our local politicians for assistance. They were not able to reverse the decision and our situation was getting worse. We had naturally been seeking the help of our own MCAV, and we will be forever thankful that the Association wrote to the Minister reminding her of Government policy in respect of the former freehold of the Wonnangatta Station. The Management Plan for the area states that: "Cattle grazing could also reduce the fire hazard in this agricultural setting. However, under the National



Vigorous grassland regrowth, with burnt snowgums in the background, Holmes Plain, December 1998.

Parks (Alpine National Park) Act 1989, only the former freehold land may be grazed." Immediately Bryces Paddock came to mind, being part of the Wonnangatta Station property and owned by the Guy family for many years and later by the Gilder family from Glenfalloch.

The Minister then gave her consent for the use of Bryces Paddock. We were fortunate that the western and northern fences of the paddock were in good order, which meant only fencing the roadside and eastern side to hold the cattle. We were told that no cattle were to be allowed to stray outside the paddock.

On Tuesday the 13th of January, we began the fencing that was required, receiving great assistance from our president, Harry Ryder and friends, and also some cattlemen from Omeo and Benambra and some locals. By Thursday we had a mob mustered from off the burnt areas, and we walked 187 head over to place in the paddock. It was a marvellous effort, and the affected cattlemen sincerely thank all who helped. The cattle did well and remained in the paddock until the 23rd of March.



Long grass on the Cumming and Gell lease,  
14 December 1998.

Fortunately the winter rains came and for most the drought was just a bad memory, apart from the ongoing financial hardship.

As the grazing season for 1998/1999 approached, it became obvious that Parks Victoria was reluctant to allow grazing in the fire-affected areas. A meeting was arranged with them for the 20th of November and various sites that had been burnt were inspected. As there had not been any data prepared on these sites prior to the fire, it was hard to understand how comparisons could be made. My own observations have lead me to believe that the floristic display is better than before the fire. Areas not well grazed were being choked out by the snow grass, the fire opened up the snow grass, allowing the wild flowers to thrive. To our minds the recovery was excellent. However Parks Victoria was not convinced and we received a letter on the 11th of December stating that cattle grazing will not be allowed within the burnt area of the Alpine National Park this season. A number of alternative areas were put to us and two of the cattlemen reluctantly accepted these proposed areas. That still left approximately 150 head that would normally

be grazed in the High Plains without an option.

The cattlemen again inspected the burnt area on the 14th of December, accompanied by David Treasure MLA for East Gippsland. We were all amazed at the improvement in the cover, particularly on the open country. David's words were, 'You could milk dairy cows up here'.

Another meeting was arranged with Parks Victoria's officers for an inspection, and this took place on the 16th of December. At this meeting we suggested that cattle could be contained within a fenced area on the least affected burnt sections. These were the areas mentioned earlier that had not been so severely burnt. The numbers of cattle that could be grazed would be considerably less than normal, seasonal conditions in the past had taken care of that.

At this stage we are still waiting for a response to our compromise. In the meantime, the grass on the High Plains continues to grow.

I have been involved with a few bureaucratic/political decisions that have disappointed me, such as the Land Conservation Council's decision to increase the Alpine Park's area and the recent shire council amalgamations. However this decision not to allow grazing in the Alpine Park this season 'takes the cake'.

Colin Thompson has a song that goes:

Up on the Alpine Ranges,  
Where a man stands tall and free,  
For a century and a half the cattle,  
Have roamed there wild and free.

A final verse could be:

Now the greenies and the parkies,  
Have said we cannot go,  
To our beloved mountains  
to watch the poddies grow.  
The grass is green, the water clean,  
And yet we stay at home,  
Cause some idealistic parkie,  
Has said the cattle may cause harm.

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# Renewal of Seven Year Alpine Park Grazing Licences

## A Report into the Renewal Negotiations

The first seven year Alpine Park grazing licence was issued in August 1991 and so came up for renewal in August 1998. During the period from September 1997 (when negotiations commenced) until May 1998 Parks Victoria adopted a hard-fisted, intolerant and biased approach. It was clear that there was a determined attempt to implement an agenda other than renewal of grazing licences. That this was being done under the guise of a 'review of the licence clauses' was reprehensible. The absolute waste of time and money involved (not only for the MCAV, but Parks Victoria as well) in spinning out to nine months what was ultimately achieved in under eight weeks should never have been allowed to happen. Until eight weeks prior to the agreement on licence conditions Parks Victoria had demanded extraordinary changes to licence conditions, and to withdrawal of licence areas. Suddenly, with eight weeks to go and after MCAV representatives met with politicians at Parliament House, Parks Victoria representatives stated that all the licences would be renewed, no licence areas would be withdrawn, and stock allocations would remain as before.

From the beginning, MCAV had rejected attempts by Parks Victoria to substantially change or alter the original licence document, it rejected Parks Victoria's proposals to withdraw areas of the southern Bogong High Plains from grazing (in one instance 80% of the licensees' grazing area); it rejected Parks Victoria's plans to test theories in licences, grazing areas when there were ample areas of ungrazed land available for this type of experimental research, and it refused to accept a 600% increase in the licence fee.

### THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Summer grazing has been a continuous activity in the Victorian high country for over 150 years, and in the case of the Bogong High Plains, since 1835. The cattle are taken to the runs in December and are mustered in late March or early

April. Generally the grazing season encompasses 16 weeks.

Over the decades grazing has been excluded from various parts of the alpine area for the protection of sensitive areas, to provide sections of National Park free from cattle grazing, and for the development of ski resorts.

Areas set aside for grazing to continue are on the southern end of the Bogong High Plains, the Dargo High Plains, areas out of Mansfield including Mount Lovick and part of The Bluff, and other areas near Omeo.

**In 1989 the Victorian Parliament passed legislation to create the Alpine National park. This was done subject to the continuance of grazing and for security of tenure for the licensees.**

One of the major principles of the new seven year licences was that they should be renewable. The reason for this being that the Government promised for the first time, security of tenure for the licensees. At the time the legislation was enacted the then Minister for Conservation stated:

"... the licences will be renewable. The Government does not intend to issue licences for seven years and then indicate that that is the end of them ..."

(Mrs K. Setches.  
Hansard 4/5/89 Legislative Assembly)

In 1989 an Alpine Grazing Working Group was established to discuss and formulate the seven year grazing licence document. This group consisted of members of the Mountain Cattlemen's Association and the then Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands.

Seven year grazing licences for areas of the Victorian Alpine National park were issued in August, 1991.

Clause 27 in the current licence document states:

“27. This licence will be renewable to the licensee, subject to good performance as determined by the Minister.”

## THE LICENCE DOCUMENT

There are some 54 members of the MCAV holding Alpine Park grazing licences.

The terms of the licence document were negotiated over a period of almost two years and since its issue in 1991 has proved to be a competent document to deal with any and all issues relating to grazing in the Victorian high country. The licence document is based on the legislated Agreement for the Provisions for Grazing Licences in the Alpine National park. This Agreement and the general licence conditions are also set out in the Management Plans for the four units of the Alpine National park. It gives the following rights to the Department of Natural Resources and Environment:

- \* to collect licence fees;
- \* to set the number of stock to be run on the licence area;
- \* to deal with stock management;
- \* to attend to matters relating to any hut or huts on the licence area;
- \* to protect areas of special conservation significance;
- \* to be properly indemnified against public liability claims;
- \* to resolve disputes in regard to any terms and conditions;
- \* to cancel the licences if the licensee does not comply with licence conditions.

The licensee has rights to:

- \* graze cattle on the licence area;
- \* to use a firearm in the Park in an emergency situation;
- \* to take dogs and horses into the Park and to use vehicle tracks not usually available to members of the public;
- \* to have the first right of call on a hut whilst engaged in duties connected to grazing;

- \* to be able to transfer the licence to another person or company after a recommendation by the Alpine Advisory Committee
- \* to have the licence renewed subject to good performance.

## LICENCE RENEWAL NEGOTIATIONS

Negotiations for the renewal of the Alpine Park licences commenced on 11th September 1997 on the following specific issues:

1. **Stocking rates.** Parks Victoria stated that they wished to minimise the impact of cattle, to manage for sustainability, and to keep the licensed areas in a stable condition ‘so that it does not continue to degrade’.

*MCAV strongly disputed that there has been any ‘degradation’ to the licensed grazing areas. In fact studies by Dr Harm Van Rees in the 1980s clearly show that the environment on the Bogong High Plains is stable. This stability was confirmed by the Opas Panel finding in 1991.*

*MCAV argued that cattle numbers were set at a responsible and sustainable level prior to the original licences being issued. In fact there are now fewer cattle grazing in the high country than ever before.*

*Furthermore, research carried out by Warwick Papst, proves that there has been no change in the stability of the study area. Warwick Papst advised parks Victoria and MCAV at a meeting on 7th May 1998 that:*

*‘The condition of the grassland site monitored at Mt Fainter varied over time (as was the case at other grazed sites on the Bogong High Plains) but no statistically significant trends were detected. The variability in condition could be related to seasonal conditions, but this relationship has not been tested. The data was in computer files at La Trobe University. Mr Papst said that 1-3% bare ground or poor cover could be expected in a natural setting. He said that at the Fainter site the amount of bare ground and loose litter was greater than 5%. At the heathland herbfield sites monitored at Mt Fainter, there was no detectable trend over time in vegetation condition.’*

*These statements do not correspond with a report provided to the Department for Natural Resources and Environment entitled "The impact of Cattle Grazing on Alpine and Subalpine Plant Communities of the Bogong High Plains", by R.J. Williams, W.A. Papst and C.H. Wahren. June 1997".*

**Current situation:** *Stocking rates are set at a sustainable level. Parks Victoria has now agreed there will be no reduction in stock allocations.*

**2. Existing licence boundaries.** Parks Victoria stated that they wished to review existing boundaries to better line up with the area of the licence on which the cattle actually graze.

**Current situation:** *There has been no further mention of this issue by Parks Victoria during negotiations, which seems to confirm the boundaries, as set in the current licences, are correct.*

**3. Stock identification.** Parks Victoria claimed its staff were having difficulty identifying stock on the runs, and it was claimed that ear tags would be the system used rather than the current ear marking and branding.

*MCAV provides a diagram of ear marks to Parks Victoria and this method has proved satisfactory for at least 30 or more years.*

*MCAV has pointed out that the only other method of stock identification is the use of ear tags. There are problems with this method. Firstly, the tags do not stay in the ear in bush situations, and the colours fade and can become difficult to distinguish when subject to periods of strong sunlight.*

*In any case the MCAV is aware that a new system for compulsory machine readable tags for all Victorian cattle is a distinct possibility in the near future.*

**Current situation:** *Parks Victoria and MCAV have agreed that the present system of ear marking should continue.*

**4. Stock ownership.** Parks Victoria states that only stock owned by the licensee should be grazed in the licence area.

**Current situation:** *MCAV agreed. This is the case at the present time. However it has always been a fact that cattle will stray from one licence area to another. Licensees will always make every reasonable effort to keep their cattle on their licensed area. Straying cattle are an unavoidable circumstance where there are no fences dividing the licence areas. The Department has always acknowledged this position. MCAV agreed to the licences being altered to state that a licensee shall respond promptly to requests or directions by the Regional Manager or his nominee to remove stock from any area where they should not be.*

*At the instigation of the MCAV and in order to assist Parks Victoria's need to streamline its administration, it was agreed that licensees would notify the Regional Manager within 21 days of stock being released into the Park. An account for the full allocation would be sent unless a lesser number of stock was sent to the run. A contact number would be forwarded, with the account, for the licensee to notify the number of stock not accounted for after muster at the end of the grazing season. Initially Parks Victoria required that notification would be within seven days. MCAV pointed out that in many cases cattle went up to the licence areas in mid to late December, and that a seven day period would be likely to conflict with holiday periods.*

**5. Public liability.** Parks Victoria wish to increase the amount of public liability insurance carried by the licensees from the current \$1,000,000 and to ensure that the Crown is indemnified against any loss.

**Current situation:** *MCAV agrees that the current level is too low, and suggested a level of \$5,000,000. A policy of insurance is to be developed in respect of the indemnity requirements, and licensees whose current Insurer is unable or unwilling to provide the cover may take part in the Policy to be arranged by Parks Victoria's Insurance Brokers.*

**6. Mount Fainter. Bogong High Plains.** Parks Victoria stated that it intended to

remove cattle grazing from this area in order to 'allow the country to recover from damage due to cattle'. Parks Victoria proposed that 80% of the grazing run be fenced off to exclude cattle and that the stock allocation be reduced from 213 head to 13 head.

*This area is licensed to the Hicks family - Mrs Rose Hicks (widow of the late W. Hicks), and her sons Barry, Jack and Stuart. The stock allocation for the run is 213 head divided between the licensees.*

*These licensees took a voluntary reduction of 15% in their stock allocation in 1991 in order to accommodate phased out licensees from the northern end of the Bogong High Plains.*

*MCAV stated that this is an area set aside for licensed grazing. Over 30 years ago a fire access road was put in by the Department, causing continuing runoff of silt. However there has been no deterioration in the condition of the area since that time. The road was closed by the Department with no maintenance done on it to prevent further silt washing down the slope. There has been little maintenance done on the road from the time of its construction to the present. MCAV rejects any claims that there is damage caused to this area by cattle.*

*Parks Victoria's proposal to reduce the area of the run by 80% and the stock allocation by 213 to 13 would clearly have made this run totally unviable, and closed down the Hicks family's long tradition of high country grazing. The flow-on affect to the four low country farming operations would have been a disaster.*

**Current situation:** *MCAV rejects that cattle have 'damaged' this area. Parks Victoria has agreed to drop its proposal to exclude cattle from the grazing licence area and reduce the stock allocation. The licensee and Parks Victoria will discuss ways to protect a creek on the stock route to the licence area.*

### **7. Middle Creek. Bogong High Plains.**

Parks Victoria proposed to fence this area to exclude cattle for the purpose of 'protecting snow patch communities', and to 'restore a mossbed to its 1835 pre-grazing condition'. The area to be fenced would have

been approximately 6 hectares and would have meant a stock reduction for the licensee.

*This is part of the area leased to Mr Tony Fitzgerald.*

*This licensee formerly grazed an area on the northern end of the Bogong High Plains. When his grazing area was phased out in 1991 he was relocated to the southern end of the Plains. In order to achieve this the licensee had to reduce his former stock allocation by 30%. Any further stock reductions would make this licensee's operation unviable.*

*The reason for the exclusion is that Parks Victoria wish to reinstate a mossbed at the head of the creek burned out in the 1939 bushfire. Following the fire, and over time, the mossbed has re-established itself and a healthy bog community, some 100 metres further downstream. Parks Victoria are encouraging research into mossbeds, and an attempt was made to replant a mossbed at nearby Cope Creek. That attempt failed.*

*To re-establish the mossbed at Middle Creek it is proposed to place straw batters across the headwaters area. This is experimental research. However if the experiment is successful the dynamics of the water flow will be significantly altered and may mean the decline of the robust bog community downstream.*

**Current situation:** *MCAV believes that if Parks Victoria wishes to support experimental research to prove or disprove theories, then it has ample opportunity to do so in areas where cattle grazing has been excluded, such as the northern end of the Bogong High Plains, Mount Nelse, Mount Bogong and Mount Spion Kopje.*

*MCAV also states that bushfire is a natural phenomenon in the Australian environment, and should be accepted as such. It is not always possible, or even practical to re-establish areas changed by fire.*

*Parks Victoria has agreed to drop its proposal to totally fence out this particular licence area and reduce the licensee's stock allocation. Some minor fencing may be*



*required to protect the proposed research, but this will be discussed with the licensee and there will be no reduction in his stock allocation.*

### **8. Youngs Top. Snow Patches. Bogong High Plains.**

Parks Victoria propose to fence approximately 40 hectares to include snow patches in order to 'restore them to their pre-grazing condition'. 'Pre-grazing in this context means pre-1835.

*This is part of an area licensed to Mr Harry Ryder.*

*This licensee has already taken a reduction of 15% in his stock allocation in 1991 in order to accommodate phased-out licensees from the northern end of the Bogong High Plains.*

*Although Parks Victoria refer to this area as Youngs Top, the correct name is 'Wild Horse Top' for the obvious reason that it is, and always has been, frequented by significant numbers of wild horses.*

*MCAV states that it is impossible to know what condition this area was in at the time of European settlement, since no record exists to describe it.*

*It is pointed out that cattle do not favour this area and are rarely seen there. Wild horses frequent the area in significant numbers. Photographs show an abundance of horse dung over a period of eight months of the year. At a recent inspection (April 1998) carried out by members of MCAV, Mr W. Papst and members of Parliament, numerous brumbies were seen.*

**Current situation:** *MCAV argues that if this type of experimental research is to take place, then areas excluded from grazing such as Mount Nelse should be used. The largest areas of snow patch on the Bogong High Plains occur at Mount Nelse. Other extensive areas of snow patch occur on Mount Hotham, Mount Spion Kopje and Mount Bogong. These areas have been excluded from grazing for seven years, in some cases for longer.*

*Parks Victoria has agreed to re-examine the area with the licensee to see whether there is a better option for fencing out the section*

*they would like to research without impacting too heavily on the grazing area. There is to be no reduction in the licensee's stock allocation.*

**9. Cobungra Station.** Parks Victoria want to remove some of this area from grazing as it states there is a problem with cattle wandering into the Mount Hotham resort, and also onto the Great Alpine Road.

*MCAV suggested that a grid across the road, the cost of which to be contributed to by Parks Victoria, the licensee and Mount Hotham management, would eliminate the problem. This proposal was not looked upon favourably by Parks Victoria.*

**Current situation:** *Parks Victoria have not followed this issue any further during negotiations.*

**10. Protection of significant conservation areas.** It was claimed by Parks Victoria that cattle were getting into the exclusion plots on the Bogong High Plains, and this was unacceptable.

Parks Victoria also claim that cattle are entering unfenced Reference Areas, although no examples were given.

*MCAV pointed out that a simple management procedure following winter was to repair the fenced plots.*

*In respect of Reference Areas no management practices can be offered as no sites were identified.*

**11. Licence fees.** Parks Victoria requested MCAV agreement that the then current review with the Valuer General and the Victorian Farmers Federation (Crown land Rental Sub-Committee), into licence fees for unused roads and water frontages be widened to include alpine grazing fees. MCAV would not be involved in the negotiations which were to be carried out by the VFF and Valuer General.

*MCAV agreed to this proposition.*

*The current fee is \$4.00 per adult equivalent per season (16 weeks).*

*The issue of review of the licence fee was handled in a most extraordinary manner by Parks Victoria.*

*Parks Victoria presented the Valuer General with a brief to review the licence fee. This brief has been kept secret from the VFF, although it is believed that the review was to be based on a system of commercial agistment. Commercial agistment cannot be compared with alpine grazing.*

*Parks Victoria carried out inspection tours of grazing areas with members of the Valuer General's staff. These inspections took place prior to the start of the 1997/98 grazing season. No licensees or members of the MCAV were invited to attend the inspections with the exception of the Mansfield area.*

*MCAV in conjunction with the VFF had one meeting with the Valuer General's office on 18th March 1988. At this meeting the senior officer of the Valuer General made the statement that: "They want you out of the Alpine Park".*

*At a meeting at Bright on 27th March 1998 members of MCAV were told by Parks Victoria in the presence of the Valuer General's officers that a figure of \$24.00 per adult per season had been recommended. This is an increase of 600% from the current figure of \$4.00 per beast per season. The figure of \$24.00 had been based on a commercial agistment rate, and contained a 50% reduction for management costs associated with high country grazing. This 50% reduction was an arbitrary figure. The management costs were not recorded.*

*Parks Victoria refused a request from the VFF for a copy of the brief to review fees, and VFF has also been refused a copy of the Valuer General's response to parks Victoria, described as 'Response to the brief sent to the Valuer General' and contained in a letter from Mt Phil Moden to Mr Geoff Vincent (Regional Manager Victoria East) dated 26th March 1998.*

*The VFF objected strongly to this unreasonable increase of 600% to the grazing licence fee. Both the VFF and MCAV are concerned at the way the figure may have been reached.*

*MCAV rejected this massive increase to the grazing licence fee, and expressed doubts*

*as to the method used to obtain it. MCAV also complained that there had been no proper negotiation undertaken by Parks Victoria and the VFF, despite the VFF's requests for information and an opportunity to discuss the issue.*

*MCAV sought a reduction in the grazing licence fee due to the fact that the cattle industry was severely depressed. Cattle prices were down by 25-30% on those current in 1989 when the present fee of \$4.00 was struck. Severe drought conditions across Victoria will also impact on the cattle industry in the future.*

*Parks Victoria continued negotiation with the VFF.*

**Current situation:** *Parks Victoria and the VFF finally came to the following agreement in relation to alpine grazing fees:*

*The price to be paid is:*

*Current price \$4.00*

*1998/99 \$4.33*

*1999/2000 \$4.66*

*2000/2001 \$5.00*

*From 2000/2001 onwards the fee shall be set on the basis of a 45% discount to the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Crown Land rental rates for the lowest carrying capacity land (less than 2.5 dse/ha). The alpine grazing licence fees will then be adjusted in accordance with changes to this rate. This review will be undertaken on a three yearly basis.*

#### **Minimum Licence Fee**

*At the second last meeting between MCAV and Parks Victoria, 12th June 1998, Parks Victoria introduced a new proposition, being a minimum fee of a suggested \$100 for licences with low Alpine park allocations. On examination of the cases quoted by Parks Victoria it became clear that in all cases relating to members of the MCAV, the Alpine Park licence areas were contiguous with bush grazing licences held by the licensee. MCAV argued that in these cases the licensees could not be held accountable for the fact that Parks Victoria had been split off from the Department of Natural*

Resources which managed the bush grazing licences.

MCAV argued that any suggested minimum fee should have formed part of the negotiations between Parks Victoria and the VFF Crown Land Rental Sub-Committee, and therefore MCAV rejected the proposal.

**Current situation:** *MCAV believes that there will be a minimum fee set for very low stock allocations, nine head or less, and with no other licensed area. This will not affect any of its members.*

## **12. Unauthorised use of dogs and horses within the Park**

Parks Victoria complained that people were riding in the Park, often with dogs, and when challenged by Rangers, are told that they are working for mountain cattlemen.

**Current situation:** *MCAV suggested the following wording be added to the current licence document:*

*"The licensee will notify the Regional Manager or his delegate of the names and duties of employees or agents acting on the licensee's behalf if those employees or agents are not accompanied by the licensee and they will be either:*

- a) using vehicles on a MVO track;*
- b) using cattle dogs;*
- c) carrying a fire, and/or*
- d) riding in areas where horse riding is not normally permitted."*

*Parks Victoria have accepted the MCAV proposal.*

**13. Weeds.** Parks Victoria is concerned that weeds may invade the licence areas, and wanted to quarantine the cattle prior to them entering the run, and for the licensee to be responsible for weeds on stock routes etc.

*Weed infestation on runs is insignificant.*

*MCAV is very conscious of the need to prevent weeds from invading the grazing licence areas. MCAV is concerned that attempts to make licensees responsible for areas outside their licence areas is not legally enforceable.*

*MCAV has initiated a weed spraying program with the support of Parks Victoria. Licensees from each Branch of the Association have identified weeds on routes to the runs and have undertaken spraying with chemicals provided by Parks Victoria. This program will be an ongoing one.*

*MCAV notes that Parks Victoria totally ignore the fact that the majority of weeds are spread by means other than cattle. The most effective weed spreaders are logging and road making machinery. Other agents are vehicles, hikers, and native and feral birds and animals.*

**Current situation:** *MCAV will continue its Landcare approach to weeds on roads and stock routes. It has also agreed to the following clause to be inserted in the licence:*

*"The licensee will take such measures as are determined by the Regional manager to protect the Alpine National park from the introduction or spread, as a result of the grazing operation, of any exotic plant species, pathogen or other agent which could have a significant impact on the environmental values of the Park."*

**14. Licence Transfer.** Parks Victoria had stated that it will only issue a licence to a single entity (such as a company or a partnership), not to multiple persons. If there are a number of persons operating under the licence then:

1. They must be members of a mountain cattleman family, and
2. A breach of licence condition by one member of the licensee group will result in cancellation of the licence for all parties.

Parks Victoria proposed that two forms of licence transfer fee should apply. These were an administrative fee to cover costs of transfer, and another transfer fee determined by the Valuer General to be paid whenever a licence transfers for profit to any party other than the immediate family of the licensee (parent, child, brother, sister).

*MCAV was concerned that is licences were*

*to be transferred to a member of a mountain cattleman family only, that it would be elitist and against Government competition policy. MCAV believes that any person approved by the Alpine Advisory Committee and recommended to the Minister should be able to hold an alpine grazing licence. This is currently the case, and MCAV would like to see this practice continued.*

*MCAV did not support the application of a licence transfer fee. This proposal goes against the spirit in which the Agreement for Grazing in the National Park and the licence document were drawn up. Apart from being an unfair impost it would have created more paperwork and red tape than would be justified on the financial return to the Department.*

*MCAV argued against the proposal of a single entity.*

**Current situation:** *Parks Victoria has dropped the concept of transferring licences only to members of a mountain cattleman family, licence transfer fees and single entity.*

**15. Licence renewal.** The current licence states (Clause 27)

“This licence will be renewable to the licensee, subject to good performance as determined by the Minister.”

Parks Victoria required the words - “Subject to Government policy with respect to alpine grazing” precede this clause.

*MCAV argued that it would not accept the additional wording because the grazing licence areas and the practice of alpine grazing is protected by legislation - National Parks (Alpine National Park) Act 1989. An amendment to the Act to withdraw grazing areas would be required for grazing to cease.*

*Parks Victoria have agreed that this is the case.*

**16. Licence cancellation.** Parks Victoria have agreed to insert into this clause the requirement for Parks Victoria to give a licensee written notice of non-compliance with any licence clause, and that the licensee will then have reasonable opportunity to respond.

Parks Victoria initially stated that they proposed to make modifications and additions to the new Alpine Park licences for the purposes of improving the management of grazing activities within the Park from land and conservation management perspectives.

The response from the MCAV was that the current licence document has been well demonstrated as a competent document throughout the past seven years. During this period Parks Victoria has never approached the MCAV, or licensees with any complains of difficulties associated with land and conservation management perspectives. Nor has Parks Victoria approached MCAV or individual licensees with any proposals for improvement of the current management techniques. At no time during the period of the current licence had the licensees of the area proposed for protection been contacted by Parks Victoria. If Parks Victoria considered the areas of Mount Fainter, Middle Creek or Wild Horse Top needed improvement in management techniques, why was this not raised? In the past where issues have arisen, and they have been few in number and minor in magnitude, these have been resolved on the ground to the satisfaction, we believe, of all parties.

MCAV believes that the covert agenda of some Parks Victoria officers was to take the opportunity of the renewal of licence process for the maximum possible reduction of grazing licence areas. It is interesting to note that this assumption on the part of MCAV has been supported by the sometimes indiscreet remarks of some Parks Victoria staff.

MCAV emphatically disputes that there has been any deterioration in the condition of the grazing licence areas, including the southern end of the Bogong High Plains since the current licences were issued in 1991. In fact, parks Victoria was unable to show any research to prove their claim that ‘cattle are damaging’ these licensed grazing areas.

The seven year Alpine Park grazing licences were renewed on 14th August 1998 and will continue until the end of the 2004/2005 grazing season.

## *Gordon's Song*

Ask farmers and the children of farmers  
to carry him here to his final rest,  
kiss his withered head, hang his hat up on a post.  
Lay out the hero's bed, pay honour to a hill-farmer's boast:  
the clan of Gordon's house mustering for his praise.

All across the town,  
even the dogs are talking: Gordon's gone,  
that lovely sheep-dog man  
with his ready grin and friendly pat,  
he's gone. Now willow rivers weep,  
horses bolt the valley's length,  
granites tilt into tears, now Gordon's asleep.

Yet his echo still lives above the ground.  
Someone down there, somewhere, is still  
splitting kindling for the fire, feeding dogs from  
a clanking bucket, bringing the cows up the lane  
or singing in the milk-shed,  
saddling a rough-haired horse, banging  
the drafting gate on a fat ram's nose,  
squeaking the lid of a tin  
of Dr Pat's Irish Mixture.

You could spread his tent from Dellicknora to Big-Hill's  
swell, from the Kongwak floodbank to the steep knolls  
of Ranceby, from mountain gums down to Cochranes Road grasses  
across streets of Traralgon, and Korumburra houses,  
keep naming his farms and homes and towns  
in your mind, tracing out his itinerant songlines.

Mollie, he's climbed his last hill today  
to make sacred a length of Dargo clay  
and watch over the river, wear clouds for a hat.  
No more collie dogs, shearing shed, swing bridge, jerky tractor,  
no more sunshine snoozes on Willow Farm riverflat,  
no time to weigh elements up against a single human factor  
or squiz tomorrow's weather. Just time  
to shut the last shed gate.

Death's like life, Mum,  
God needs to make room  
for the two of you: flint and spark,  
lightning and lightning rod,  
bacon and tea, leather and woodfire,  
piano and voice, fencepost and fencewire.  
You see, Dad,  
how our love for you is a knot  
we won't untie.

So let's remember  
not the wheezy whisper of his last years  
but a young man's voice climbing the air  
of a church roof or eisteddfod hall,  
resonant as rock crystal,  
solid and liquid as river quartz,  
claiming our hearts, claiming its own,  
deepening, strengthening  
in its baritone.

And now you can see him clearly  
over the corner of a hill,  
walking upright, oilskins flapping,  
cloud-hatted, one crazy dog is leaping  
around his boots, the other rocketing  
out wide away back, and you want  
to call out: "Home's back down that way ... "

But he cannot hear,  
he needs soul enough to spare  
for his final leaving, he is walking  
out into his open country,  
he is heading up beyond the spur.

*Paul Hutchison*

in memory of Eric Gordon Hutchison  
22 January 1921 - 8 January 1998



### ***Norma Kathleen Commins***

Norma was born on 7 May 1924 and passed away suddenly on 12 March 1998 following a cardiac arrest on her 49th wedding anniversary. Her early years as Norma Dale were spent in the Melbourne suburbs of Hawthorn and Kew until her mother died in 1935. Then at the age eleven she moved with her aunt to Ensay to housekeep for her aunt's bachelor cousin. This change of environment brought her under the tutelage of a very able and industrious grazier who did not believe in reading books or any recreation while there was work that could be done. As a consequence of this her school days were over and life became a constant mix of all round stockwork, housework, gardening and general rousabout work. Fortunately there was never a lazy bone in her body and she loved caring for animals, growing plants and observing all creatures and the ways of Nature.

Norma enjoyed company and it is rather sad that she was unable to take part in sporting activities like tennis and netball and other social activities that most other young people were able to enjoy. In 1949 Norma married Jim Commins and her daily round of much to do continued and she enjoyed nothing more than mustering and helping take cattle to or from Nuniong. When managing cattle or sheep her understanding and judgment was better than many stockmen. All the time she was involved in any such activities the catering had to be seen to be believed. Norma had many skills and during the first year of her marriage she helped to skin and stretch the skins of more than 6,000 rabbits. While never overly self assured, Norma could write long and well written letters that would outshine the efforts of many with much more formal education. She always enjoyed social outings where there was music and was a good ballroom dancer.

Sadly, during the last six years of her life she was most severely handicapped by a massive stroke. While she persevered most valiantly to overcome the disability, she could never walk again properly and one arm was left quite useless. After a lifetime of caring for everyone and everything about her, Norma is remembered by her many friends and grateful family for her quiet and ladylike manner.

The Association would like to place on record the debt it owes Norma Commins for her unfailing support

of Jim during the formative years of the MCAV. Jim was away from home 'fighting for the cause' more than he was home yet Norma kept everything running smoothly in his absence. We extend our sincere sympathies to Jim, Anne and John, Bruce and Kate, Chris and Jeanette on the passing of their highly respected wife, mother and mother in law.

### ***Mary Margaret Fitzgerald***

Margaret Evans was born in Ballina, Mayo, Ireland in 1910 and came to Victoria with her mother and stepfather when she was 18 years old. Her two older brothers had already established themselves on a dairy farm at Port Fairy before the rest of the family followed. A short time later Margaret went into nursing, training and serving at Ballarat and around Warrnambool. She was called upon to special care a family friend, Olive Lumsden (later Leitch) at Omeo and hence came to Omeo. Once her work with the Lumsden family was finished she stayed and nursed at the Omeo Hospital before returning to the Western District. Mervyn Pearson who was on the Hospital Committee of Management approached her to return to Omeo and take on the position of matron which she did for some years.

Margaret met D'arcy Fitzgerald during this time at Omeo and they later married at Ballarat during the war years. They returned to Omeo and established their home at 'Home Vale' the family property. Before their children Laurie, Barry and Barbara arrived Margaret rode to the high plains, but once the children arrived she took on the role of home support to the Fitzgerald family. Margaret attended her first Get Together more than twenty years ago and was intensely proud of the Fitzgerald family association with the heritage of the high country.

Margaret died at Omeo on 25 January 1998 and was buried with her husband D'arcy who had predeceased her in 1979. Barry and his wife Rosemary have continued on at 'Home Vale' since then. Sincere sympathy is extended to her family - Laurie and Bob, Barry and Rosemary, Barbara and George and grandchildren Kerrie, Wayne, Dale, Sam, Jason, Stefcia, D'arcy and Duncan.

The MCAV was shocked when two fine young riders were killed as a result of their horses falling during a bush racing event at Dinner Plain on 25 January 1998.

### ***Sharon Alice Pendergast***

Sharon was born at Omeo on 19 November 1967 to Ray and Pat Carey and it very quickly became obvious in her younger years that she had passion for horses and Nature in general. Her formative years were spent at Ensay where she attended school, the local brownie pack and competed in the junior netball competition.

While attending the 1985 Get Together at Junction Plain she met Garth and Nola Pendergast's son Gary and they married two years later, in October 1987 making their home at Benambra. Sharon was active in the community and participated in many different community activities including netball, darts, tennis and badminton for the Benambra teams while continuing to win countless ribbons in show riding events. Although she was more comfortable with horses she soon became competent with tractors and motorbikes as she and Gary worked to build their life together. Devising improvements to make life easier in future was one of the challenges she enjoyed. It was while Sharon was working at Dinner Plain in 1991 that she met Simone Jewson and they remained good friends. Sharon enjoyed her position of Secretary with the Hinnomunjie Racing Club and the Omeo High Country Roundup.

It was also in 1991 that Sharon discovered mountain racing and this became her main recreational activity. She loved the bush, the camping and the camaraderie of the mountain racing fraternity. She loved the horses, the speed and the ability to test her skill against others. She took particular pride in training her horses and her experience and skill as a rider soon saw her competing successfully on the mountain racing circuit. In the 1992/93 season she won the overall sprint rider of the year and the highlight of the season was winning the Ladies Cup at Marlo when riding 'Black Jack'. Sharon described the best day she ever had was during the 1995/96 season at Wandin when she won the Open Race - again on 'Black Jack'.

On 1 August 1996, Gary and Sharon's daughter Brooke was born and so a new phase began in Sharon's life. Sharon proved to be a capable, caring and loving mother though she was still one to do things 'her way'. At 14 months old, Brooke was out on the horse with Mum helping her muster cows.

Sharon wasn't one to miss out and was back on the racing circuit the following season and in 1996/97 was equal runner-up Lady Rider of the Year with 'Black

Jack' named as equal horse of the year. This was a matter of great pride and achievement for Sharon. The 1997/98 season was shaping up to be just as successful for Sharon. At the MCAV Get Together at Rose River Sharon and 'Black Jack' placed second in the Cattlemen's Cup to Rick Hodge. This is the highest placement for a women rider in this event since its inception. Sharon was thrilled. On Saturday 24 January, Sharon and 'Zoe' placed third in the Hotham Dash and on Sunday she and 'Zoe' won the sprint. Tragically, while competing on 'Black Jack' just one hour later her life abruptly ended.

The tragic accident at Dinner Plain has had an obvious effect on Sharon's family and Gary now raises Brooke with their support. It has also robbed the tight-knit community of Benambra of a valued and respected member. Sharon will be remembered for many things but mostly for her enthusiasm, adept and competent work nature, her compassion, energy and dogged determination. The Association will miss her enthusiasm and the competitive streak that was evident as she competed at the Get Togethers and extends its sympathy to her family.

### ***Simone Jewson***

Simone Jewson, like Sharon, was passionate about her horses and bush racing. She loved the high country often finding solace in the bush while on rides and enjoyed the simple lifestyle and people in her social circle. Simone was an experienced rider, having come through the pony club ranks as a youngster, and in her twenty seven years had developed a respect and affinity for horses. It was in 1991 while Sharon was working a Dinner Plain that the two girls met and became good friends with their like interests of the bush, horses and riding. It is ironic that it was the two friends who collided with the tree at Dinner Plain. Simone died three days after the accident in the Alfred Hospital, Melbourne. In an interview after Simone's death, Simone's father, Colin Jewson, said that at least Simone died doing something she loved and that that was of some comfort to the family. Our sympathies are extended to the Jewson family.

The editorial committee would also like to note the passing of Jim Angus, a retired grazier from Ensay, who died on 1 September 1997. Jim was not a member of the Association however his contribution of knowledge, photographs and support, particularly in relation to the production of *Voice of the Mountains*, is very much missed.



# 1998 Get Together 'Rose River'

The 1998 Get Together was held at Hoskings property 'Rose Valley' on the 10th and 11th January 1998. The Get Together was organised by the MCAV North-East Branch and they did a wonderful job. Thanks and congratulations to each and everyone whose efforts contributed to the success.

'Rose Valley' was a perfect Get Together site, on the banks of the Rose River near Whitfield. Unfortunately the drought, which cast its shadow over most of north-eastern Victoria during 1997/98 also had an effect on the Rose River. It had mostly ceased to flow, which was a great disappointment, but an unavoidable circumstance of Mother Nature.

It is now history that on New Year's Eve 1997/98, a major bushfire broke out in the Alpine National park and burned out of control for several days. This had the effect of stopping many of our Gippsland members and supporters from attending the Get Together, as they were still on fire watch, and many were involved with their local CFA Brigades in fighting the fire.



However it was a critical time for the mountain cattlemen. It was as, if not more, critical as the time of the ride to Parliament House and the Nunawading by-election period of 1984 and 1985. The Alpine Park licences were coming under review, and the Association was fighting to keep the cattlemen in the mountains. We were also fighting to stop any cutback of grazing areas and cattle numbers. We called for as many of our supporters as possible to attend the Get Together with the purpose of sending a powerful message back to Government that support for Alpine grazing was stronger than ever.

Once again the Association received tremendous support from its major sponsor - Mazda (Vic) and we thank them for their continuing generosity.

The horse racing thrilled the crowd, especially Rick Hodge's marvellous win in the Mountain Cattlemen's Cup. Melissa Connley and Luke Mitchell had their usual battle to take out the Junior Cup - this year Melissa was the winner.

We take this opportunity to thank everybody who took part, and congratulate the lucky winners in all events.

## RESULTS

### *Cattlemen's Cup*

- 1st Rick Hodge on 'Harry' from Buchan (Gippsland Branch)
- 2nd Sharon Pendergast on 'Black Jack' from Benambra (Omeo Branch)
- 3rd Tim Faithfull on 'Chance' from Omeo (Omeo Branch)

### *Junior Cattlemen's Cup*

- 1st Melissa Connley on 'Jodie' from Omeo (Omeo Branch)
- 2nd Luke Mitchell on 'Cool Chance' from Stratford (Gippsland Branch)

### *Associates' Dash*

- 1st Shelley Hall on 'Pretty Woman' from Kiewa (NE Branch)
- 2nd Sharon Pendergast on 'Zoe' from Benambra (Omeo Branch)
- 3rd Barbie Cooper on 'Kiewa' from Tawonga (NE Branch)



**Cattlemen's Cut Out**

- 1st Tony Kirk on 'Banjo' from Myrtleford (NE Branch)
- 2nd Frank Ryan on 'Creamy' from Cheshunt (NE Branch)
- 3rd Chris Stoney on 'Snowgum' from Mansfield (Mansfield Branch)

**Open Sprint**

- 1st Norm Loy on 'Zac' from Lavington
- 2nd Sharon Pendergast on 'Zoe' from Benambra
- 3rd Barbie Cooper on 'Kiewa' from Tawonga

**Open Race**

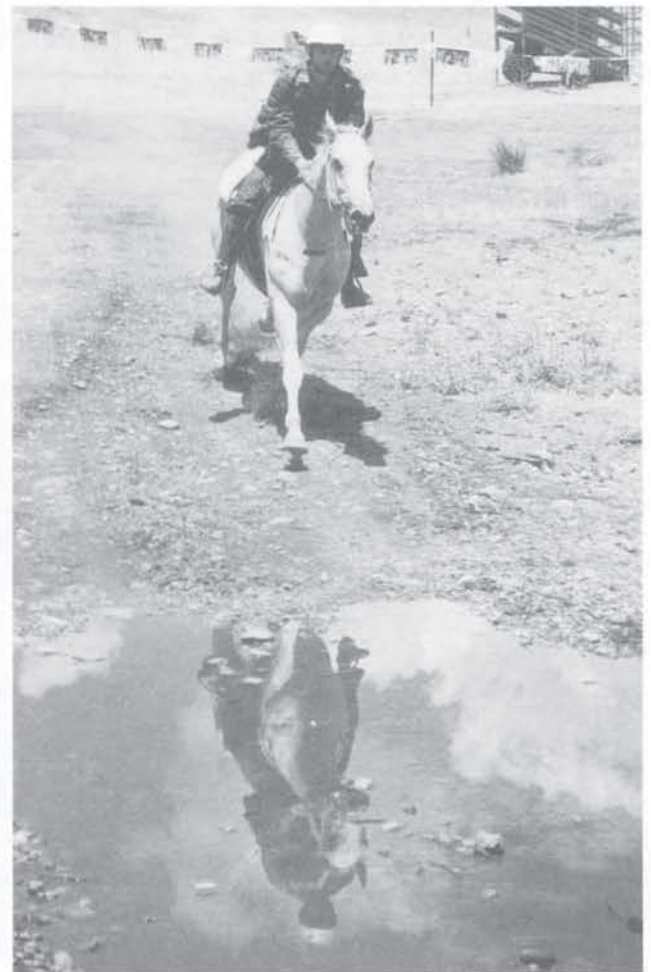
- 1st Wayne Glennie on 'Nightmare' from Kilsyth
- 2nd Steve Fulton on 'Torie' from Glenrowan
- 3rd Barbie Cooper on 'Highlander' from Tawonga

**Relay Race**

- 1st 'Get Staffed' - Chris Stoney, Rachel Parsons, Dave Stoney & Kate Kendal
- 2nd 'Mansfield Maniacs' - Andrew Parsons, Iona McGregor, Andy Hermiston & Fiona Lower.
- 3rd 'McCormack Challengers' - Bruce McCormack, Tony Reardon, John Walker & Greg Millot.

**Packhorse Race**

- 1st Neville Wright on 'Captain' packing 'Wally'.
- 2nd Jim Kielly on 'Pretty Star' packing 'Mrs Ed'
- 3rd Noel Graham on 'Dallas' packing 'Ghost'



**Walking Race**

- 1st Chris Stoney on 'Snowgum'  
from Mansfield
- 2nd Rhonda McCormack on 'Blondie'  
from Mansfield
- 3rd Rachel Parsons on 'Messmate'

**Cattledog Trial**

- 1st Frank Ryan from Cheshunt with 'Boots'
- 2nd Tim Brown from Bright with 'Bert'
- 3rd Graham Hughes from Whitfield with  
'Rippley'

**Dog High Jump (Open)**

- 1st Grant Hossack with 'Bandit'
- 2nd Gavin Kennedy with 'Bess'
- 3rd Sharon Pemberton with 'Gidget'

**Dog High Jump (Working Dog)**

- 1st Rachel Smith with 'Dougle'
- 2nd John Meaney with 'T-Rex'
- 3rd Derick Gibb with 'Banjo'

**Haystacking**

Jay Taylor and Mathew Watson  
from Garfield.

**Tug-A-War**

Mens - Mitta Mongrels  
Womens - Tarra Tuggers

**Juvenile Whipcracking**

- 1st Brandon Spencer from Whitfield
- 2nd Joanne Resuggan from Wangaratta
- 3rd Brent Hughes from Pakenham

**Junior Whipcracking**

- 1st Jarrod Fulton from Glenrowan
- 2nd Diana Hurley from Dargo
- 3rd Alisha Stevens from Benambra

**Ladies Whipcracking**

- 1st Diana Hurley from Dargo
- 2nd Alisha Stevens from Benambra
- 3rd Rosemary Hurley from Dargo

**Open Whipcracking**

- 1st Jack Cross from Wollongong
- 2nd Diana Hurley from Dargo
- 3rd Jarrod Fulton from Glenrowan

**Run-A-Muck Cup**

Just Pasture Syndicate

**Don Kneebone Mountain Heritage Award:**

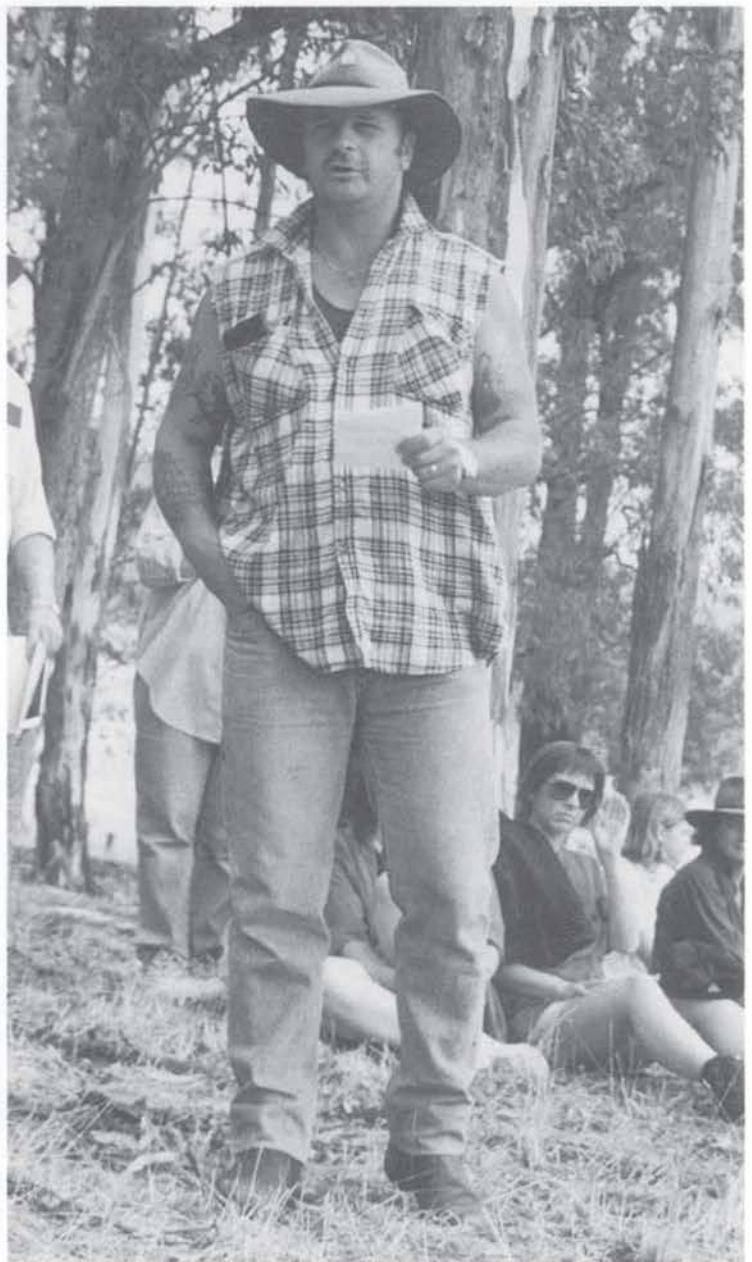
Dennis Carstairs

**Bush Minstrel:**

Rick Hodge

**Bush Laureate:**

Dorothy B. Watt - 'The Phantom Cattlemen'





**1998  
Get Together  
'Rose River'**



## *Bark Hut Ballad*

The hut was made of round bush poles and faced with sheets of bark,  
And here the weary travellers foregathered just at dark;  
The fire lit, the billy filled with water from the creek,  
Soon up the chimney red flames roared and inside spread the reek

Of well-oiled saddles, steaming clothes and boiling salted meat,  
The billy bubbling for the tea, a welcome source of heat.  
The horses fed and sheltered near, the riders could relax  
As warmth began to penetrate and ease their aching backs.

The builders used the creek bed mud to safeguard chimney flues,  
For chimneys too were built of wood - they had naught else to use.  
They roofed the hut with flat bark sheets, with bush poles laid crosswise  
Above the bark, to hold it down, well laced with greenhide ties.

More mud was used to seal the cracks wherever draughts sneaked in  
And recently some old bark roofs have been replaced with tin.  
The cattlemen built many huts for shelter in bad weather,  
A refuge when the need arose - a place to stay together.

A sudden storm, a pea-soup fog or maybe sleet and hail  
And sometimes heavy falls of snow were followed by a gale.  
Then drifts of snow would pile up high - too high for man or beast  
And shelter was imperative, to say the very least.

With only what was near to hand those huts rose, one by one,  
A place to shelter overnight or till the storm was done;  
And as the mountain cattlemen sat warm and snug inside  
Old tales were told and yarns were spun around that rough fireside.

Though those who built and used those huts are mostly dead and gone,  
Tales of their toil and fortitude in legends will live on.  
The mountain views, the alpine flowers, the space and freedom there  
Moved many men to poetry, their awe-struck moods to share.

Those days are gone and only live in books and memory  
But those who travel in the hills will feel their history.  
The spirits of those cattlemen will always roam at will  
Across those plains they loved so well, until all life is still.

*Dorothy B. Watt*

Congratulations to  
MCAV member Ron Connley  
on winning the  
Man from Snowy River Award  
at Corryong last year.  
Congratulations  
also to his daughter, Sarah,  
who finished not far behind Ron.



# DISCOVER THE TREASURES OF THE HIGH COUNTRY

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HIGH PLAINS DROVING



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**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**

## *The Legend Toland Whip*

I was thirteen years of age  
When this man walked up to me,  
And handed me, a homemade whip  
I was happy as could be.  
Dad said, "Now you treasure that",  
"Bill Toland whips, fall true",  
"Keep it greased, with Coachaline"  
"It will last a lifetime through."

Now Bill came from out "The Gibbo"  
In his younger day,  
Then moved onto a property  
Just out Cobungra way.  
Trapping vermin for likelihood  
Throughout depression years,  
And took his part of breeding stock  
With blood, sweat and tears.

Bill Toland was a quiet man  
No nonsense did he take,  
He was known by mountain cattlemen  
For the whips he used to make.  
A bushman of the high country  
A craftsman of renown,  
His name is still remembered  
Up in this Alpine town.

His work became a household name  
He'd plait, and twist, then flip,  
As he sat upon his plaiters clamp  
And made the legend Toland whip.  
This whip was made with rawhide  
Where he sliced it into strands,  
Then plaited four, six or eight  
With sturdy wrinkled hands.

Now Bill has gone departed  
Back in nineteen eighty nine,  
And left a trademark behind him  
Of leatherwork so fine.  
But his mates who still remember  
None will ever quip,  
the pride among their stockmans gear  
Is the "Legend Toland Whip".

*Johnny Faithfull*





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## *Brenda of the A.V.O.*

I had sent to her an e-mail  
As I would to any female  
'Direct to where I met her  
Near the Thomson years ago.  
She was nursing when I knew her  
But I sent the message to her  
Just on spec addressed as follows  
Brenda of the A.V.O.

And the answer came directed  
In a form most unexpected  
And I think the same was written with a  
pen-nib dipped in ink.  
Twas a mate of hers who wrote it  
And verbatim I will quote it  
Brenda's gone to Bairnsdale droving  
And we don't know what to think.

In her moleskins, oh so slender  
Visions came to me of Brenda  
Gone a droving up the Mitchell  
Where the Gippsland drovers go.  
With the cattle slowly plodding  
Brenda rides behind them nodding  
For the drover's life has problems  
That town girls never know.

With her stock horse to assist her  
Brenda cultivates each blister  
As she whistles to her busy dog  
And curses dust and flies.  
While the foothills ever beckon  
She will tail the herd and reckon  
That the rain might stay away  
That night she sleeps beneath the skies.

I'm commuting from my crowded little suburb  
Where a measly strip of parkland  
Gives hints of glorious freedom to my dog.  
And the traffic fumes and smells borne  
By the winds all over Melbourne  
Hover o'er the city centre  
Like a sickly yellow fog.

And instead of dogs and cattle  
I can hear the office prattle  
As they talk of footy tipping  
Or contemplate some work.  
While they jockey for advancement  
And salary enhancement  
As they butter up the manager  
For every little perk.

So no matter where they send her  
I think I'd like to swap with Brenda  
Like to take a turn at droving  
Where the Gippsland drovers go  
While she took my place and suffered  
The commuter's daily buffet  
But I doubt she'd suit the city

Brenda of the A.V.O.

*John Morrissey*  
(With apologies to A.B. Patterson)

A.V.O. = Australian Valuers Office

# MCAV Photographic Competition 1998

The quality of the photographs entered in the MCAV Photographic Competition continues to amaze the judges and 1998 has been no exception. Thanks are extended to Caroline Hill for organising the 1998 competition when Don Porter was away in India.

First prize was awarded to Jacqui Cook from Benambra for her photograph 'Happy Cattlemen' and she was highly commended for 'Identity'. Sharon Smith's 'Frank's Creamy at Fitzgeralds Hut' and Colleen Hurley's photograph of her daughter Diana were also highly commended.



Miss Diana Hurley of Hillside and Dargo : *Colleen Hurley*



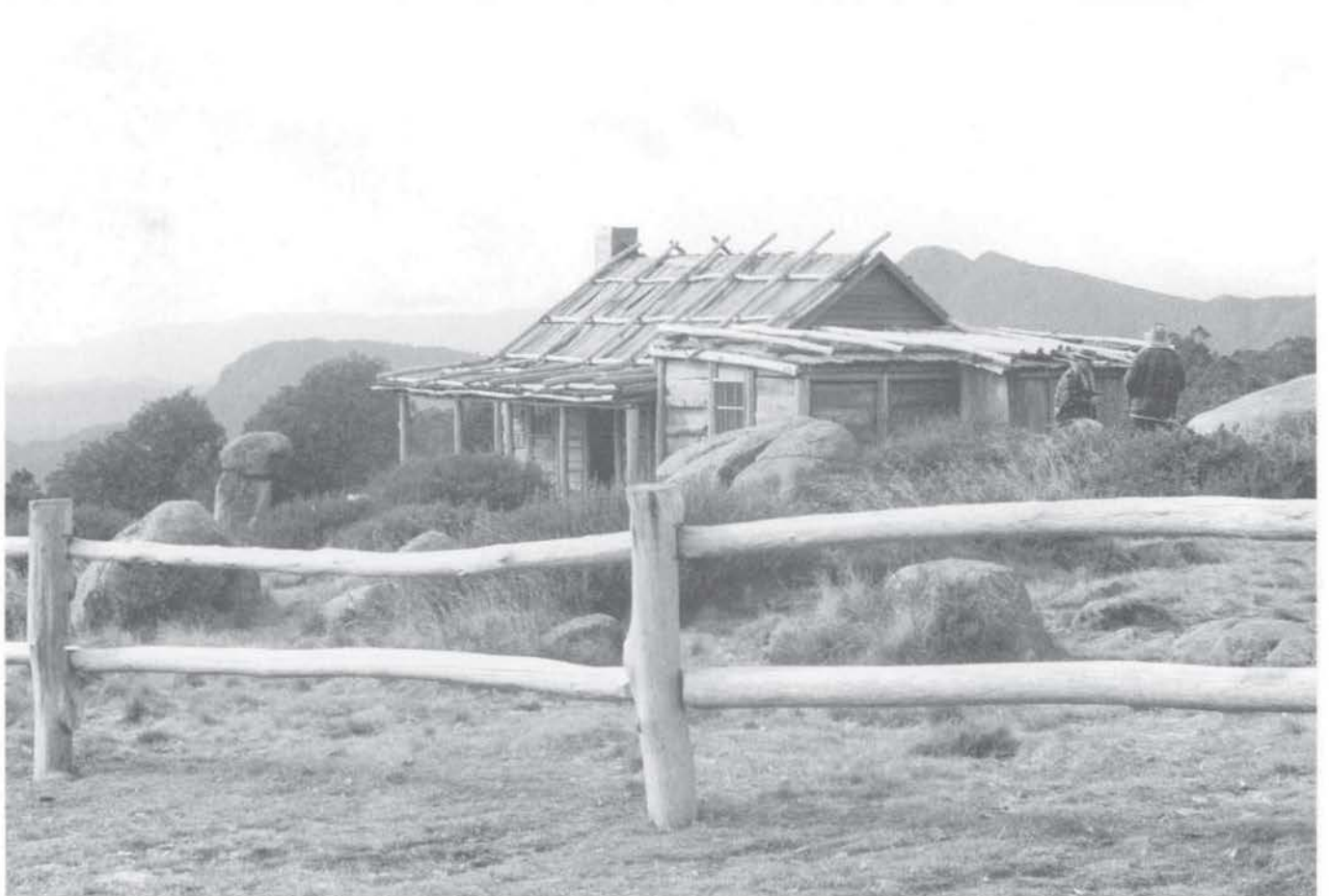
Happy Cattlemen : *Jacqui Cook*



Identity : *Jacqui Cook*



Heritage : *Sue Beeton*



Craigs : *Jacqui Cook*



Young Cowboys : *Jacqui Cook*



Frank's Creamy at Fitzgeralds Hut : *Sharon Smith*

## Bogong Jack's

We were camped one night at Bogong Jack's  
(We were droving cattle to the Plains)  
The mob had bedded down for the night  
And the horses were in hobble chains.

The dogs were curled up in some place warm  
And we'd all retired for the night  
When the cattle in terror, rushed round the yard  
Frightened by a fearful sight.

You may not believe my story  
But I hope you'll think it a fact  
Sitting there on the stockyard rail  
Was the Ghost of Bogong Jack.

Bogong Jack, they tell me  
Was a horse thief of great renown  
And for many years the men in blue,  
Tried to track him down.

But Bogong Jack was elusive  
And all their efforts failed  
He had no use for the hangman's rope  
And he had no plans for jail.

With a string of stolen horses  
And another to carry his pack  
He'd flee towards the ranges  
Up the Old Tawonga track.

There he'd camp in the woolly-butts  
'Til the law was hot on his trail.  
Then he'd head out over the mountaintops  
And down into New South Wales.

Once there, he'd sell his ill-gotten gains  
To some poor unsuspecting swain.  
Then he'd steal from several stations  
And head over the mountains again.

There's been much conjecture about Bogong Jack  
But it's been written with paper and pen  
That around the 1850s  
His escapades came to an end.

Some say he died near Bendigo  
Others think he perished near Fainter  
And while the stories say that his name was  
Payne  
Some folks swear it was Paynter.

But when the stockmen built a hut  
And called it Bogong Jack's  
His spirit rose from wherever it was  
And quickly hurried back.

And soon it took up residence  
But not being one to share  
It always vacates the premises  
When a human being is there.

So while we mortals were fast asleep  
And the moon in the sky was pale  
The Ghost of Bogong Jack  
Sat there on the stockyard rail.

*Muriel Howman (nee Edmondson)*



## *Common Sense*

I'm sick to death of city folk  
who rant and rave and banter.  
They couldn't sit a horse at trot  
far less a bloody canter.

They'd make the rules, the bloody fools  
for places they've not been.  
A mountain creek or lofty peak  
they've probably never seen.

And the suited mugs in Canberra,  
they really are a farce.  
They wouldn't know a dingo's track  
if it bit 'em on the arse.

Yet still they come here saying  
this place we'll surely spoil.  
The fact that it's still beautiful  
is a result of the cattleman's toil.

So keep your green ideals my friend  
and put your mind at rest.  
No mountain man could ever harm  
the place that he loves best.

*Rod Poulton*





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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 2ND OCTOBER 1998.**

**PRESENT:**

Harry Ryder, Sue Silvers, Annie Whittam, Pauline Venn, Roger Hollis, Natasha Mansfield, Ron Briggs, Jim Commins, Brian Higgins, Stuart Hicks, Bill Cumming, Clive Hodge, Jeffrey Gell, Graham Connley, Frank Ryan, Vince Phelan, Neville Wright, David Treasure, Chris Stoney, John Ryan, Terry Murphy, Ben Treasure, Don Lawson and Rachel Parsons.

The Chairman Harry Ryder welcomed all members and associate members and opened the meeting at 11.00am.

**APOLOGIES** were received from Keith Whittam, Wendy Symons, Jean Marrow, Lou Lieberman, Bill Crump, Peter Monds, John Rogers, Kevin Kelly, Simon Turner and John Cook.

**MINUTES** of the previous Annual General Meeting of the Association as printed in Voice of the Mountains No.21 of 1998 and circulated to all members and associate members were confirmed on the motion of Jim Commins, seconded Brian Higgins.

*Carried.*

**PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS**

It has been a difficult twelve months for all concerned in the cattle industry with three years of depressed prices and a drought thrown in on top. It is a testament to the durability of people in the hardest hit areas that they are still going.

It has been a very busy year for the executive of your Association. After about seven years of discussions with the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, we finally saw the issuing of seven year bush grazing licences.

The renewal of the seven year alpine grazing licences was also a major milestone. This was achieved after twelve months of meetings with Parks Victoria. This was a most frustrating process with meetings initially being scheduled monthly, but this was increased to weekly in the final month in an attempt to get all matters concluded by the due date.

Initially, Parks Victoria wanted to make radical alterations to the licence, impose massive price increases and exclude cattle from further vast areas of the Bogong High Plains. At this stage we considered it important to seek support from Members of Parliament to help rein in these bureaucrats who were clearly running away with the process, with little regard to Government policy. To this end we sought meetings with Bill Baxter and Tony Plowman. A meeting was then arranged for us at Parliament House. We put our concerns regarding the licence renewals to an assembled group of Government members (with about 17 members in total supportive of our cause). Pat McNamara attended, and following the meeting summoned his chief of staff, Mike Taylor, to Parliament House where we again put our case regarding licence renewals.

A trip to the North-East by the Premier Jeff Kennett gave me the opportunity at a Liberal Party breakfast in Bright, to ask him whether his Government would support the cattlemen in having their grazing licences renewed. His answer was quite positive, although containing qualifications. The local paper reported that Mr Kennett had promised 'that mountain cattlemen would have nothing to worry about'.

At the next meeting with Parks Victoria, a perceptible softening of attitude was noticeable with Parks Victoria staff making the statement that licences would be renewed with no reduction in stock numbers. There were still a number of

conditions, however, that still had to be worked through.

Another activity during the year has been the development of the North-East Benalla Mansfield Forest Management Plan. For twelve months I have attended the meetings and only now has the process reached the point where maps of old growth forest, fauna habitat etc are available for discussion. There is the potential for some headaches in respect to continued grazing in this process.

In conjunction with the Forest management Plan/RFA process, is the Social Assessment and the Inventory of Community Heritage Places for each region. In the North-East quite a bit of effort has been put into recording the stock routes (both past and present) and having them included in the documentation. Much of this work has already been done around the mountains, but it is important that it be recorded in the study. I would like to thank my wife Sue for the many hours put into this.

The Association was represented at the Royal Society symposium on Ecological Sustainability in the Victorian Alps, and also at the Alpine Ecology course which is conducted each year. Both of these events were a focal point for those who will oppose cattle grazing to their last breath. It is important to make the effort to attend to keep abreast of what is being said about grazing. These are the forums where Parks Victoria staff are bombarded by the green element and continue to receive inspiration in their push to have grazing removed from the alpine areas.

The fires on Bennison Plains had a dramatic effect. All the feed was burnt. This led to an appeal to the Minister for Conservation and Land Management, Mrs Marie Tehan, to allow cattle to go to the northern end of the Park (temporarily) for relief from the feed shortage following the fire. Bearing in mind that the home properties of the run holders were in the grip of the worst drought for many years, taking the cattle home was not an option. Mr Phillip Davis made the first appeal to the Minister. This however was unsuccessful as Parks Victoria bureaucrats had briefed the Minister to the effect that it was inappropriate to have grazing in this section of the Park. Parks Victoria's immediate reaction was to request that cattle be removed from the burnt country to prevent damage. (This scenario was spoken of at the Royal Society

symposium where the science was all related to sheep grazing in Kosciusko).

Sue Silvers spent some considerable time on this matter and in the process discovered that the Management Plan for the Wonnangatta-Moroka section of the Alpine National Park clearly stated that cattle could be used as a management tool to reduce fuel on the former freehold land of Wonnangatta.

This led to another approach to the Minister and the outcome of this was that the Minister instructed Parks Victoria staff to inspect Bryces Paddock with cattlemen with a view to using it for grazing for the rest of the season.

This was a considerable rebuke for Parks Victoria bureaucrats, who had initially counselled the Minister against such a move.

This year saw the beginning of the cattlemen's weed initiative with projects being undertaken by both the Omeo Branch, and the North-East Branch. The Omeo Branch project near McNamaras Hut was shot by cameraman Tony Tynan (known to the Association for the documentary on grazing which he made in the early 1980s). Footage will be included in a video being produced for the Kiewa Catchment Landcare Group to be released in the near future and will be used extensively around the region to promote the Landcare movement. It is vital to have this weed initiative continue with all branches doing at least one substantial project per year.

In the lobbying which was done during the year over licence renewals and in talking to school groups, the feedback I have received on our weed initiative has been immensely positive. When talking to politicians and school groups the weeds initiative is perceived as cattlemen putting something back into the country. As one Liberal Party member said to me 'it would make it much easier to convince the Party to support you when there is something like this happening'. The Association needs to get some more runs on the board on weeds, and then go hard to get some substantial publicity.

Our support base is diverse and we need to capitalise on it to have our profile constantly in the eye of the public. Motions of support were passed

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at the conferences of the National Party and the Victorian Farmers Federation. To get a similar motion through the Liberal Party would re-affirm the Government's support for us. The Labor Party would indeed be another challenge. They will not always be the Opposition.

We need to use every available means to have our cause explained to the general public. Interaction with tourists, addressing interest groups, providing information to school groups are just some of the ways that each and every cattleman can help their own cause.

The danger that we as mountain cattlemen face is that we are likely to become complacent because we have been issued with another seven year licence. The support base which was built up in the late 1980s does not just go on for ever. Faces in Parliament change, other issues come along, so we cannot afford to just stay in the hills with our cattle. If we are to preserve this way of life we must actively take our message to the city.

The President thanked the members of the Central Council, the secretary, Pauline Venn and Annie Whittam for their support during the year.

## **SECRETARY/TREASURER'S REPORT**

This is my 13th annual report. I will be brief because Harry Ryder has reported fully to you on the Association's activities during the year. In respect to the renewal of the Alpine Park licences I will only add that the battle was very hard fought, make no mistake about that. There were times when we believed that the odds were stacked too high, and we contemplated losing significant grazing areas, having stock numbers reduced to unsustainable levels, and fees increased by 600%. Without our friends in Parliament House, and the Victorian Farmers Federation, the outcome would have been very different. The Association has always known that the best lobbyists are the individuals who know the issue, and this has proved true again. At Parliament House and again during all the negotiations with parks Victoria, Harry Ryder and Stuart Hicks brought their special knowledge of the issues forward. Both were very strong in their arguments and tenacious in establishing and holding

the Association's policy and principles. Members of the Association can be very proud of them both, and all members owe them a debt of gratitude.

Membership of the Association remains steady. On advice we introduced an invoice system to collect subscriptions. In the case of associate members this has been very successful with only a handful of fees outstanding. Many of the full members have had acute financial difficulties associated with falling markets, drought, fire, and then flood. Some subscription fees therefore remain unpaid for one, or in some cases all, of the above reasons.

The Central Council has met four times during the year. This is the usual pattern for the number of Council meetings, and should not be a particularly demanding task for Council delegates. The topics discussed were the renewal of the Alpine Park grazing licences, the seven year bush grazing licences, the weed initiative, and the Get-Together. The bush grazing licences issued during the year. After the long battle it was almost an anti-climax. There are a few small issues to be tidied up but the amount of work involved with the Alpine Park renewals has meant that these have had to be deferred.

The North-East Branch hosted the annual Get Together at Rose River in January in hot weather, the threat of fire, and in the middle of the drought. Enormous odds. It was a most successful Get Together despite a drop in numbers due in the main to the fire position. Get Togethers are becoming increasingly expensive to run, and other funding sources for the Association need to be explored.

During the year I attended meetings of the Public Land Council of Victoria as the Association's representative. The Public Land Council supported the cattlemen in the licence renewal issue by writing a strong letter of support to Minister Tehan pointing out the membership of the Council was some 60,000, all endorsing the renewal of the grazing licences. The issue being worked on by the Public Land Council with most relevance to the Association is the question of Bushalert (which can be compared in some ways with Neighbourhood Watch). The Bushalert proposal is strongly supported by Government and Police and has now been given the go-ahead and will be re-launched. Bushalert will mean that bush users will be able to

report unacceptable behaviour that has probably, up to now, gone unreported. This should eventually result in bush users feeling more secure on remote areas of public land.

I represented the Association at the Alpine Advisory Committee's only meeting during the year. The items on the agenda concerning the Association were licence transfers. An item to discuss transferring licences to a single entity was removed from the agenda as being inappropriate for discussion in that forum. There has been some criticism of the Alpine Advisory Committee since it was discovered at the time of the grazing licence renewals, that some recommendations made by the Committee had not been referred to the Minister, and indeed were still sitting in the files. This is most unsatisfactory, and will be brought up at the next Committee meeting.

I present the financial statements for the year ended 30th June 1998 to the members. Members will note there was an operating deficit for the year which can be directly related to the increased costs. This situation occurred once before at the time the Park licences were being negotiated in the early 1990s, and in both cases has been due to the amount of necessary time and work undertaken on behalf of the members of the Association. The Association's financial situation is fundamentally sound and it is anticipated that the level of outgoings will be lower in the 1998/1999 financial year.

I wish to thank Harry Ryder and members of the Central Council for their support over the past twelve months.

## MARKETING REPORT

It is with much pleasure that I table my first report as the Marketing Officer.

Gross sales from the 1998 Rose River Get Together were \$11,918 with a net profit of \$7,809.45. Attendance numbers were down by approximately 500 on last year with a lot of our Gippsland regulars forced to stay home to see out the fires which ravaged that part of the state. Overall a good result.

Sales since the 1998 Get Together have been trickling in, with regulars such as Mansfield retailer, Robyn Noonan, making her annual purchases, and

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others who did not make it to the Get Together ensuring their port collection remains intact. No effort has been made to generate sales through retail outlets due to my time predominantly being spent on settling into the new role. The revamped mail order form was sent out in the last Newsletter, and orders from that exercise have been pleasing and continue to come in.

A selected stock range was sent to Omeo in January, and the Bright Autumn Festival. Thanks to Simon Turner, and to Sue Ryder for organising these events.

After receiving a request from associate member John Ryan, the Association banner will be flown at the Kilmore Show on October 18th. A marketing marquee will be set up and a selected range of merchandise offered for sale. It should be noted that any requests for MCAV presence at special events are welcome and will be considered based on the exposure it will give the Association as well as the cost.

This year I have been requesting quotes from a range of promotional suppliers for new products tested at Rose River with much success. The new products for 1999 will include stylish embroidered peak caps available in three colours, and hopefully high country sports socks and the return of the singlet.

Stock levels would appear adequate leading up to the 1999 Get Together with care being taken not to have surplus levels of the regular items such as windcheaters and t-shirts.

Harry Ryder's photograph depicting a muster in the snow which the Association reproduced on an A3 size colour sheet was a popular sale item. A laminated version will be considered for the 1999 Get Together.

A review of the cost and recommended retail prices of all Association merchandise has revealed that current mark up levels are very low and prices in general have not increased over five years. Most members would be aware that the profit from merchandise sales contributes substantially to the annual income of the Association. It is for this reason that effective from 1st January 1999 most retail items will increase in price.

Fry's Hut at Sheeppark Flat is the 1999 Get Together feature for both the collectors port, and the 30th Anniversary Get Together shirts. I would like to thank Don Porter for his on-going support of the Association in making himself available to do the artwork between travels to other continents.

I would also like to thank those generous people who gave time to help out in the marketing tent at Rose River, and to Fred Pascale who did a wonderful job with the display setup. Many thanks also to Peter and Judy McCormack for their efforts in towing the marketing caravan to and from the Get Together site, and wherever else I needed it.

Finally, I would like to thank my cousin Jeannine-Rene Bonney for her continuous support for me in this role and for making herself available to arrange stock orders and deliver artwork to locations not convenient for me, and for also being my right hand at the last two Get Togethers. Thank you.

#### **SETTING OF FEES**

Moved Chris Stoney, seconded Frank Ryan that there be no change to either the full member of

associate member subscriptions for the coming year.

*Carried.*

#### **FIXING OF HONORARIUMS**

Moved Bill Cumming, seconded Brian Higgins that the honorarium for the President be \$3,000 plus expenses.

*Carried.*

Moved Chris Stoney, seconded Ron Briggs, that the honorarium for the Vice President be \$1,000 plus expenses.

*Carried.*

Moved Clive Hodge, seconded Rusty Connley, that the honorarium for the Special Projects Officer be \$1,000 plus expenses.

*Carried.*

Moved Jim Commins, seconded Brian Higgins, that the honorarium for the Secretary/Treasurer be \$20,000 plus expenses.

*Carried.*

Moved Brian Higgins, seconded Rusty Connley that the honorarium for the Marketing Officer be \$1,000 plus expenses.

*Carried.*

Mr Clay Manners, Policy Director of the Victorian Farmers Federation addressed the members and associate members on the history and negotiations conducted by the Victorian Farmers federation Crown Land Rental Committee in respect of the fee struck for the Alpine Park grazing licences. Mr Manners described the process from the beginning, when the Valuer General was asked to negotiate a licence fee to the final negotiations between Parks Victoria and his Committee. In the end the licence fee had come down from \$24 to \$4.33 for the coming season (98/99) and was then to rise to \$5.00 during the following two grazing seasons. The grazing licence fee will then be subject to further review.

The Chairman thanked Mr Manners for the work done by the Crown Land Rentals Committee and for the realistic figure which had been the final negotiated outcome.

## **ELECTION OF OFFICER BEARERS**

Mr David Treasure MP took the Chair for the election of officer bearers. He declared all positions vacant and offered congratulations to the outgoing officer bearers for the achievements and hard work over the previous year.

**President:** Harry Ryder, nominated by John Ryan, was elected. Harry Ryder accepted the nomination on the provision that it would be for the coming 12 months only.

**Vice President:** Stuart Hicks, nominated by Graham Connley. Stuart Hicks accepted the nomination on the proviso that it would be for the coming 12 months only. He expressed the view that there should be new officer bearers coming forward each year. Stuart Hicks was elected.

**Special Projects Officer:** Jim Commins nominated by Brian Higgins, was elected.

**Secretary/Treasurer:** Sue Silvers nominated by Roger Hollis, was elected.

**Marketing Officer:** Pauline Venn nominated by Chris Stoney, was elected.

## **APPOINTMENT OF AUDITOR**

Mr Bill Crump, nominated by Annie Whittam, was appointed auditor for the coming year.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

Jim Commins expressed concern that some recommendations of the Alpine Advisory Committee had not been put forward to the Minister. He recalled problems with the previous Alpine Advisory Committee which was, he believed, selective in the minuting of meetings.

Mr David Treasure noted the address given by Mr Clay Manners, and congratulated Jim Commins who was part of the Victorian Farmers Federation Crown Land Rentals Committee involved in negotiating the licence fee. He noted that the Association had worked closely with the VFF and recommended this continuous affiliation, as the VFF was the peak farming body in Victoria, and Governments recognised peak bodies.

Mr Treasure spoke of the separation of Parks Victoria from the Department of Natural Resources and Environment.

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 12.05pm

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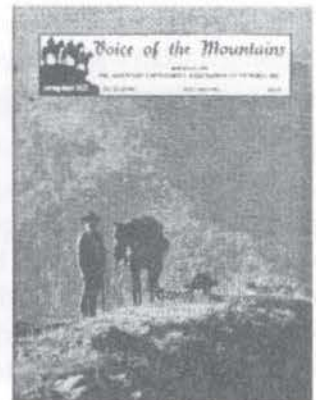
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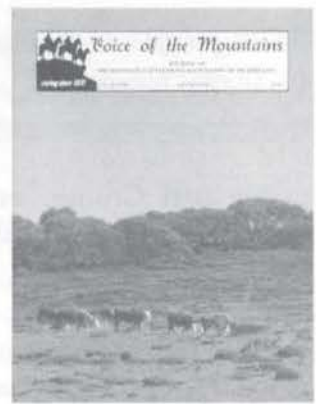
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The Committee of *Voice of the Mountains* would like to thank everyone for the support received this year, including the timely assistance of Rowena Turner, Dennis McNamara, Alma Angus, Brian Higgins, LVFS, Dr Peter Clarke, Doug Treasure, Don Porter, Neil Cox, Rosemary Fitzgerald, Jim Commins, Ailsa Barraclough and Harold Coverdale.

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

*Voice* is yet again thankful for the support of the 'Anapaks' who give their time freely every year to ensure that *Voice* is complete for the Association.

We are also very thankful that the staff at E-Gee Printers come back from their Christmas break so refreshed and re-juvenated that they can deal with the insane deadlines we place upon them.

We are extremely appreciative of their support.

