

Voice of the Mountains

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THE MOUNTAIN CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA INC.

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Editorial Committee: Linda Barraclough, Debra Squires and Sue Silvers

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COVER

Looking south from the Mount Hotham Road, two years ago,
when the Caledonia fires were burning. (*Leanne Hodge*)

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President's Message 2000

Welcome to the new Millennium, and to another century of Alpine and Bush grazing.

Along with other user groups of the Alps, we are consistently fending off criticism from single minded minority groups who seem to require this Public asset to be theirs entirely.

If we continue to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to caring for the high country and encouraging others to do the same, this will not go unnoticed by the wider community who support us year in and year out.

Fire is still a major issue to be addressed in regard to Alpine and Bush management. This single issue is, and will continue to be of impact in further use and management of the area.

Through the Association's Weeds Initiative Program we are continuing to aid in prevention the establishment and further spread of noxious weeds encroaching upon Public land.

For the continued success of this Association, we need to rely upon the support and encouragement given by the community. It is to these people that we say 'Thank You', and in particular, to our Associate members. Their commitment and dedication is an inspiration to us all.

I would also like to thank the tireless team of Editors: Linda Barraclough, Debbie Squires and Sue Silvers who work against all odds to put this publication together.

Also to Sue Silvers for yet another inspiring effort over the past twelve months, with this being Sue's fourteenth year as our Secretary. Thank you.

Simon Turner

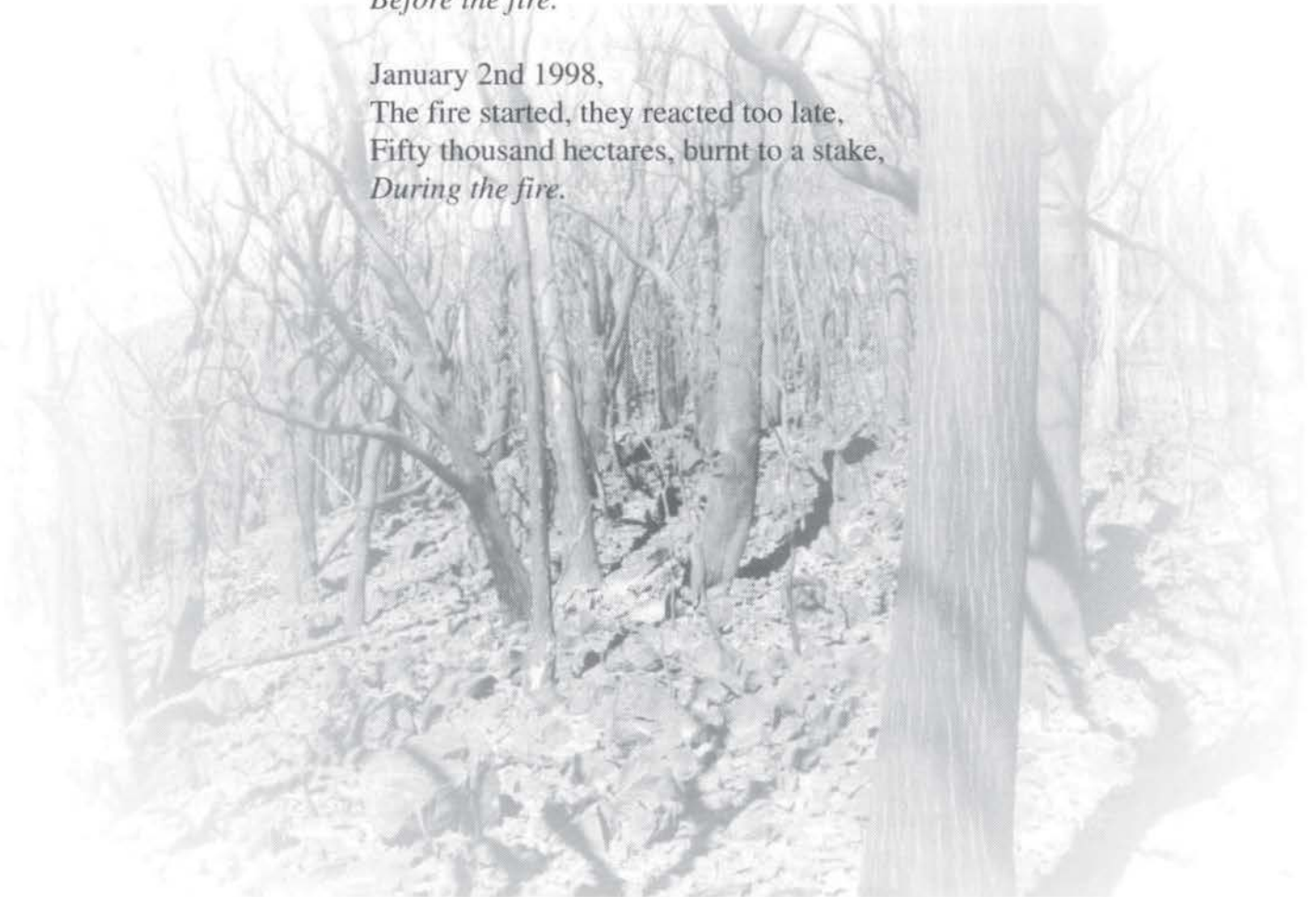
The Fire

Caledonia, Bennison, Wellington, Guy's,
Tourists and cattle, and four-wheel drives,
Generations of cattlemen toiled for their lives,
Before the fire.

The birds, the fish, the moss and the spiders,
Bush walkers, motor bikes, any outsiders,
Harmony everywhere - horse trail riders,
Before the fire.

Deer, 'roos, wombats, rabbits and foxes,
Loggers, Parkies, hunters with dog-boxes,
Fishermen, water (no chemical toxins),
Before the fire.

January 2nd 1998,
The fire started, they reacted too late,
Fifty thousand hectares, burnt to a stake,
During the fire.



The Fire

'Rehabilitate', they said, 'no cattle here'.
The cattle stayed out - it cost them dear,
Regrowth's now good, it's rested a year,
After the fire.

All are now back in the high country air,
Back to the norm - no grudges to bear,
Cattle and cattlemen - only ones not there,
After the fire.

Decisions by Pollies and Parkies with perks,
The fires been - now the knee jerks,
Tradition's forgotten, that really irks!
After the fire.

Uni. Degrees, soft seats, good salaries for sure,
The Pollies and Parkies deciding the score,
A pity they didn't think a bit more,
Before the fire.

John Walker

Take Heed from the Past and Learn for the Future

Brian Higgins

How many times have we heard it is only a fool that does not learn from mistakes, but this is what appears to be happening again after the Caledonia fire. It is now over 60 years since the devastating fires of 1939 covered much of the State. Little appears to have been taken on board to prevent the fuel build up that lead to this and the Caledonia disaster.

The main brunt of the blame for the 1939 fires was laid on the settlers, miners and graziers. The settlers and graziers were the very people complaining to the Stretton Royal Commission. They had no trouble with bush fires until the restrictions on burning arrived with the Forests Commission.

The criticism of forest management has not started just recently. Over 100 years ago Alfred Howitt was concerned about changes he was seeing, following the breakdown of the **'annual' burning by Aboriginal people**. Here is part of what Howitt had to say in the *Journal of The Royal Society of Victoria* in 1890. The emphasis in these extracts, and those that follow, is mine.

The influence of settlement on the Eucalyptus forests has not been confined to the settlements upon lands devoted now to agriculture or pasturage, or by the earlier occupation by a mining population.

Before this the gaminivorous marsupials had been so few in comparative number, that they could not materially effect the annual crop of grass which covered the country, and which was more or less burnt off by aborigines, either accidentally or intentionally, when travelling, or for the purpose of hunting game.

The annual bushfires tended to keep the forests open, and to prevent the open country from being overgrown, for they not only consumed much of the

standing or fallen timber, but in great measure destroyed the seedlings which had sprung up since former conflagrations. The results were twofold. Young seedlings had now a chance of life, and a severe check was removed from insect pests. (RSV 1890, p109)

*In the upper valley of the Moroka River, which takes its rise at Mount Wellington, I have noticed that the forests are encroaching very greatly upon such open plains as occur in the valley. I observed one range, upon which stood scattered gigantic trees of *E. Sieberiana* (Silvertop), now all dead, while a forest of young trees of the same species, all of the same approximate age, which may probably be twelve years, growing so densely that it would not be easy to force a passage through on horseback. Again at the Caledonia River as at the Moroka, the ranges are in many parts quite overgrown with forests not more than twenty years old. The valleys of the Wellington and Macallister Rivers also afford most instructive examples of the manner in which the Eucalyptus forests have increased in the mountains of Gippsland since the country was settled. (RSV 1890, p.110)*

During the 1939 fires, 71 lives were lost, 69 sawmills were burned, millions of acres of fine forests of almost incalculable value were destroyed or badly damaged and townships were obliterated in a few minutes. The Stretton Royal Commission looked into this fire and was scathing in its criticism of forest management. Much of this criticism is just as applicable now as it was then. The following are extracts from transcripts of witnesses to the 1939 Royal Commission.

Harry Lewis Treasure from the Dargo High



Country that will be a long time recovering - Charlie's Country near Tarli Karng, January 1998

Plains was not happy about being burnt out for the third time.

We had a hard fight to save the buildings. Eight men worked hard all day and we finished up the day with hardly a man able to see, we were blinded with smoke. (Stretton Royal Commission Transcripts, p 1174)

I have been there for 60 years, practically all my life, and I have a good idea of the conditions and of what has happened there.

We have been burnt out in 1918, in 1926, and in these fires. Prior to that we never had a bad fire. I do not say that there were not fires that killed a small patch of timber in little places. Prior to 1918, before there was much restriction on the lighting of fires, that country was populated with miners, diggers, fossicking along the rivers for gold.

There were up to 100 diggers working along the Dargo River and each man had his hut. They had no fear of ever

being burnt out and they never were burnt out. If they had been there during the recent fires, not only would their houses have been burnt, but (the) men themselves would have been burnt to death.

In those days there were no restrictions on the lighting of fires and yet the travellers, tourists, etc. were safe. The country was burned regularly whenever it would burn and that stopped any fires from getting hold and going a long way. If one man happened to light a fire in one location it could not get far because it would run into burnt ground. That was all right. No timber was destroyed.

Later on the restrictions were imposed and in 1918 I suppose there was a lot of debris, bracken, leaves and undergrowth that had been hoarded up in the bush, I think a fire started in February over the other side of the dividing range. It came through our country and killed thousands of acres of beautiful woolly butt timber. We were lucky with our cattle but it burned down a lot of our fences.

We had no more fires from then until 1926, when another one occurred under similar conditions. There was a heavy fire in February, which killed more valuable timber, and almost exterminated the woolly butt on the northern side of the range, leaving it on the south side, where it was more shady. After these fires the woolly butt trees died. Once they are burnt they will never sucker, but a new lot will come up from seed. I know of places where a light fire has thinned out the young seedlings and the forest has been remodelled. It is there again but if another severe fire goes through the young seedlings, before they grow to about 15 years of age and shed more seed, the woolly butt in that area will be exterminated for all time.

There has been practically no fire there since 1926. Odd patches may have been burnt here and there, but there had been very few. We had no fire until last January. In our area [of] approximately 100,000 acres, hardly a tree was left living on the other side of the spurs and ranges except in very small patches, where there had been a fire within the last two or three years. (SRCT, pp 1175 and 1176)

I think we were lucky in this fire on the Dargo Plains last January, but had we been down on the runs or on the river. I do not think we would have lived. I do not see how a man could have escaped. There is not a living tree left along the Dargo River for 60 miles, and all the logs and debris washed up by the water is scorched right out.

With reference to erosion, I think the mountain country is lucky this year. Erosion is bad after heavy rains. It washes the soft soil down into the rivers. Had we got heavy thunder storms after the January fire, the valleys would have been practically filled up. However rain came down very steadily and nothing worth speaking of it was washed away.

There is little or no erosion after a light burn, but it is different with heavy fires such as we have had. They not only

burnt the debris and wood on and above the surface, but they burnt into the soil itself. There are acres of ground that have been burnt right down to the grass roots and if we get heavy rain on top of that, it will cause much erosion. Luckily, we did not have it this year. (SRCT, p 1177)

It is my belief that the longer we hoard up debris to be burnt, the worse our situation is going to be (SRCT, p.1179)

Harry Treasure was quite satisfied at the time that lightning lit any amount of fires. This suggestion was strongly refuted by the Forests Commission up until around 1965. On 7 February 1965, a fire was started by lightning in New Place Creek, north of Briagolong. Over the next month another fire from Glenmaggie, linked up with this burning out over half a million hectares. From this period on, cattlemen ceased to be blamed for starting most bushfires.

William Francis Lovick of Mansfield held 54,000 acres of Crown Forest lease in the area from the top of Mount Howitt to Mount Clear and the Jamieson and Howqua Rivers. He had been there from 1910 up until 1936, when he stopped grazing. He considered it was not safe to have 500 or 600 head of cattle in the mountains, as in a year like 1939 the lease would be burnt out. He said it was the common view of every experienced man in the mountains through Gippsland and the North East, that the condition of the forests was too dangerous to hold a lease. Lovick advocated going back to the cattleman's methods that were in use prior to 1926.

*We do not advocate and have never practiced burning the whole forest at once, either in autumn, the spring or any other time. We practiced burning a proportion of each run, each autumn. On a 10,000 acre run we might burn 3,000 acres, and the next year 1,500 acres, depending on the season and conditions. The area would not burn in the following year. **In that way we always had the country practically safe**, and the proof is that we never burned anybody out and never lost any lives. ... A man simply burned on his own run, but all his neighbours were doing the same. (SRCT, p.695)*



Just one example of erosion following the fires: Stirrup Iron Creek, a tributary of the Caledonia, December 1999

We burned for 25 to 30 years. We were told by the Forests Commission that we were ruining the forests, but this year three mills have been put into the country that was said to be ruined, and they have 50 years timber to cut.

*The fires [of the cattlemen] would certainly ruin odd saplings but not many. ... It would only amount to a natural thinning. ... It would not matter. **The fires that have gone through the forests this year have ruined more timber in two hours than all the cattle men of the east ruined in 50 years.** (SRCT, p.696)*

The Forests Commission has fallen down on the job in this year, at any rate. If I had a manager and he had three bad crashes in 13 years, I think I would sack him. (SRCT, p. 697)

I am not there now, I have no axe to grind. ... I loved those mountains as a boy and I have been in them ever since. I have travelled more than most men, and I still love them, and it hurts me to see them ruined. ... I have no cattle. There may be a

stray bullock there, but I am not worried about it. I have nothing to worry about, but I do not want the mountains to be ruined. Any Walking Club member in Melbourne can tell you that I am a lover of those mountains. (SRCT, p.698 and 699)

Sometimes you could burn with safety in the middle of March and sometimes you had to wait until the middle of April. ... If the autumn was wet early, there would be a fair amount of dry weather later, and that would be a beautiful time to burn. The fire would run in the lower country, and everything would be safe as a church. (SRCT, p.699 and 700)

William Lovick said he had seen a fire start after a lightning flash, he also said they kept the country safe and protected the lot from fire.

John Dennis [Jack] Guy of Dargo held a lease on Mount Howitt and started off by telling the inquiry when he would burn on the high country:

*I would say up until October in most years, after the snow. A lot depends on the season. ... The only feed we have left is in the patches that we burnt in October. **That saved the big fire going over the lot.*** (SRCT, p.1188)

He said they would not light a fire that would be dangerous to anyone. They were practical men who had been in that country all their lives.

Gavan Michael [Kevin] Molphy of Glenmaggie, had leases in Mount Useful and Mount Selma areas, described how he survived the fire in the bush:

We were up there, I think on Tuesday when the fire came through. We got in a patch of mountain ash that had been burned last October, and waited until the fire went past us. The fire never touched that patch at all. (SRCT, p.1187)

It was very hot. As far as we could see, the fire on the tops of the trees seemed to be hundreds of feet ahead of the fire. ... That was on Wednesday, two days before Black Friday. ... It was very choppy wind up there, the wind came from the gullies. The wind was strong enough on that day, but nothing like the wind on Friday. (SRCT, p.1188)

Most bush people remember Judge Stretton's report for three things: attributing the clean forest floor to the absence of fire before European settlement, failure to blame lightening for starting many fires and putting fuel reduction solely in the hands of the Forest Commission who mostly failed dismally to do the job. There is however another side of the good judge's report that is not quoted by environmentalists, alpine ecologists and Parks Victoria, that we should take seriously. Here are some extracts:

... to expose and scotch the foolish enmities which mar the management of the forests by public departments who being our servants, have become so much our masters that in some respects they loose sight of our interests in the promotion of their mutual animosities.

No person or department can be allowed to use the forest in such a way as to create a state of danger for others. (Stretton Royal Commission Report, p.7)

*The rest can be set down to its failure to recognise until recently a truth which is universal, namely, **that fire prevention must be the paramount consideration of the forester.*** (SRCR, p.15)

Controlled burning. This consists of strip and patch burning. The amount of this burning which was done was ridiculously inadequate.

It was apparent during the course of the Inquiry that the Commission's officers had not considered the question of their duty to protect the adjacent land holder. (SRCR, p.16)

It has been found that the [Forests] Commission has been too closely pre-occupied with questions of revenue production to the comparative exclusion of considerations of reclamation and rehabilitation. Both reclamation and rehabilitation of forests bear a close relationship to the question of prevention of fire and protection of life and property. (SRCR, p.29)

According to the Forestry Authorities of the world the first consideration of the forester is, or ought to be, the prevention and suppression of fire. (SRCR, p.30)

Burning. It has already been recommended that the Forests Commission must recognise the necessity of protective burning in its areas. It is not suggested the practice be followed in mountain ash country, except to a small extent, where necessity demands that it should be done. In all other parts where less valuable timber, less susceptible to fire, occurs, this method of prevention of outbreak and spread cannot, either in public or private interest, be ignored. (SRCR, p.31)

Before the flood that followed the 1939 fire, old timers describe the Macalister River as being about a third the size it is now, with gentle banks and virtually no erosion. Stretton was critical of erosion.

From the types of erosion, disastrous siltation occurs, the eroded matter being



Trial plot, leasehold, Bennison Plains, December 1999

carried in suspension and precipitated when the speed of water is reduced. After the fires of January 1939, rich river flats were buried to a depth of several feet beneath deposited silt of inferior quality. (SRCR, p.28)

The Melbourne Board of Works came in for special attention for the way it managed Melbourne catchments.

Thus the water supply authority has in many instances, in furtherance of it's desire to give full supply of uncontaminated water, allowed its area to become a menace to the rest of the forest. (SRCR, p.10)

The difference in substance between the methods of these two bodies is that the Board refuses to use burning as a general protective method. It is long established by foresters in other parts of the world that in conditions such as exist in many parts of the Board's areas - burning is the only effective safeguard. (SRCR, p.14)

Erosion and water quality following the Caledonia fire has caused considerably community

concern, with regular mud-flows down the Macalister River, over the last three summers. It would appear Parks Victoria have spent more time and money closing roads hiding the problem, than addressing it. Little appears to have been learnt from the destruction caused to Charlie's Country and the Caledonia Valley.

Most people who have been associated with the mountains consider another fire like 1939 or 1851 is inevitable with present management practices. Many of us are amazed it has not already happened.

Gippsland would be in a serious position if this occurred again, from more than the fire. The *Gippsland Comprehensive Regional Assessment* for the Regional Forests Agreement has some concerning information relating to water supplies after fires destroy large areas of Ash (Woolly Butt) forests.

The ash-type forests yield 70 to 80 per cent of Melbourne's water, and therefore most catchment research has concentrated on the ash forests. (Gippsland Comprehensive Regional Assessment, p.108)

As the forest regenerates, water yield decreases to a minimum of about half the

original yields at 20-30 years, and then steadily increases to pre fire yields at around 150 years. (CRA, p.110, based on research after the 1939 fires by Kuczera 1985)

The 1939 fire was after about 25 years fuel build-up. Most Melbourne catchments now have 60 years. If the Ash Wednesday fire had started at Cockatoo another two and a half hours earlier, Melbourne's catchments would now be producing far less water.

We have seen first hand just what happens to gullies, streams and rivers from erosion following a hot fire. The Macalister River is showing no sign of stabilising in most areas from the 1939 flood.

The problems are not going to go away in the Caledonia valley. Many water courses and gullies have severely eroded channels with near-vertical sides. As the banks are undercut, they are falling in, with landslides developing in some places. The problems could be expected to decline over the next five years, as vegetation growth slows runoff from thunderstorms. However, like the Macalister, it is unlikely it will go away. Neglecting to learn a lesson from what has happened in the Caledonia valley

could have dire consequences for Melbourne's water supplies.

If, due to excessive fuel build-up, Melbourne's catchments were burnt out by a big, hot fire, they would have to build dams on the Aberfeldy and Macalister Rivers, just to make up for the shortfall. This would have local irrigators competing with Melbourne for water. Most people would be excluded from a large area of mountains, similar to the Thomson catchment

It was interesting to note the private land on the Bennison Plains managed using traditional burning and grazing, survived the Caledonia fire remarkably well. Much of this land was not burnt at all. Three weeks after the fire, the burnt areas were a sea of green with fresh grass shooting.

Parks Victoria have not been able to substantiate claims that big hot fires are natural, as opposed to the cool burning of the Aboriginal people and cattlemen. There needs to be a full and open public inquiry into park and forest management before any more of the Victorian environment is seriously damaged by the people charged with looking after it.



Grass and Billy Buttons on the freehold area that had a long history of grazing, December 1999.

Caledonia Fire Aftermath

Invited to the Party but not into the Park

In early November 1999, mountain cattlemen were warned that the Bracks Labor Government had policies in respect to the Alpine National park which would have an effect on mountain grazing. In fact the policy states: "Labor will improve and extend the Alpine National Park by ... Enforcing environmental conditions on grazing licences, and examining ways to remove all grazing from the Park ..."

One month later MCAV was informed that cattle would be excluded from the Caledonia fire affected area for the 1999/2000 grazing season. Two years after the fire had taken place.

Media Release 9 December 1999

Secretary of the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria, Mrs Sue Silvers, has condemned a Government decision to exclude cattle grazing in the Alpine National park, north-east of Licola.

"This decision is threatening the financial viability of mountain cattlemen who hold grazing licences, which are protected by legislation.

"It has clearly been made in line with Australian Labor Party policy, which aims at increasing environmental considerations on grazing licences.

"This policy states that the ALP will examine ways to remove all grazing from the Park", Mrs Silvers said.

"Eight weeks ago when parliament was opened, we were told that Victoria faced 'a new era of compassionate politics'.

"Now we have this decision, which will have an appalling effect on the grazing licence holders and on the rural community which the Government promised it would support.

"The Government also embraced the Independents' Charter, part of which involved looking after rural Victoria", Mrs Silvers said.

Mrs Silvers said one of the mountain cattlemen affected by the ban was in his 80s.

"I find it very distressing that he will have to endure another season of economic uncertainty and face the possibility that he may not again be able to graze his cattle in the Alpine park. This is certainly

not compassionate politics.

"This decision could also be the death-knell for another licence holder, placing the viability of his home farm in jeopardy.

"The stupidity of this decision is that other bush runs have been open for grazing since November 15, and one run borders a road, with the Alpine Park on the other side.

"I believe the report of the expert panel on which Parks Victoria has based its decision is being used by the Government as an excuse to exclude grazing from the Alpine Park.

"It is disappointing that bureaucrats in air-conditioned offices in Melbourne are making decisions that have such a devastating economic and social consequence on rural Victoria," Mrs Silvers said.

Mr Brian Higgins, one of the mountain cattlemen whose cattle are banned from the Alpine National Park, said the only documentation provided to licence holders had been a summary of a survey made by Parks Victoria in October 1999.

"We have not been given access to the last two surveys which have been done".

"Mountain cattlemen have been hit hard by drought, flood and fire. We were just getting back on our feet, and now this decision puts us in diabolical trouble", he said.

Mr Bill Cumming said the decision to close the park also effectively closed adjoining leases in forest areas, compounding the problems being faced by mountain cattlemen who had no other alternative areas on which to graze their cattle.

Media Release 13 December 1999

No Christmas Joy for Mountain Cattlemen

Mountain cattlemen have described an invitation from the Minister for Environment and Conservation, Ms Sheryl Garbutt, MP, to attend a pre-Christmas party as “a further heartless slap in the face”.

Secretary of the Mountain Cattlemen’s Association of Victoria, Mrs Sue Silvers, said the Minister’s invitation expressed the wish that the function would “provide an opportunity for us to meet and share in a celebration of the newly-elected Bracks Labor Government and build our relationships for the future”.

“The invitation expresses best wishes for Christmas, but there will be no joy for the seven mountain cattlemen who face severe financial hardship over the ban on putting their cattle on the runs this summer,” Mrs Silvers said.

Last week, the State Government announced that cattle would be excluded from grazing in the Alpine National Park, north-east of Licola.

“Another year of extreme drought is causing untold distress in East Gippsland - a fact that the Minister seems to disregard as she prepares to celebrate the coming festive season.

“It appears that she has already forgotten the Bracks Labor Government’s promises of support for rural Victorians.

“Just when support and assistance is urgently needed, the Minister has turned her back on the mountain cattlemen, and then, as a further insult, she invites those most needing her support to attend a party in Melbourne,” Mrs Silvers said.

The Bracks Labor Government has failed its first test of its election promise to look after rural Victorians, by refusing to accept the recommendations of its Alpine Advisory Committee. The committee has strongly recommended to Minister Garbutt that an independent panel of five be appointed representing a broad section of both the rural and scientific communities with expertise in grazing. The Minister has failed to accept this recommendation and has, instead, appointed a panel of two scientists. The Mountain cattlemen believe this may lead to greater weight being placed on scientific surveys which the cattlemen say are based on theory, and are flawed in other respects. No practical experience will be brought to bear on the panel’s decision.

At the time of going to press the MCAV is considering its position.

Media Release 14 December 1999

Call to Review Grazing Ban

The Mountain Cattlemen’s Association of Victoria has called for the appointment of an independent panel to resolve a dispute between Parks Victoria and cattlemen, which has led to the banning of grazing in the Alpine National Park, north-east of Licola.

Association Secretary, Mrs Sue Silvers, said today that cattlemen have asked the Minister for Environment and Conservation, Ms Sheryl Garbutt MP, to convene the panel.

“We have been informed today by Parks Victoria that the scientific review report and the October vegetation survey do not, at present, exist in written form. We have also asked for the names of the scientists who produced the report, but this information has also been denied us”, Mrs Silvers said.

“The written reports will be available to us next week. We were told that a summary of the reports was shown to us by way of overheads at a meeting in Bairnsdale at the end of November. We were shown the overheads, but disputed some of the information presented. In one case Parks Victoria agreed that one issue was only theory.

“We need written copies of the two reports on which the decision to ban cattle from the grazing runs has based as a matter of urgency. Until we receive these written reports we must question the validity of the science upon which the decision was made.

“The Minister’s decision was made too hastily, and on questionable evidence”, Mrs Silvers said.

“We cannot help but come to a conclusion that the motivation for the ban on cattle was political, and not for any other reason. These radical green policies are being re-cycled from the early 1980s, and have no bearing on current conditions. They should be dropped by the Bracks government”, Mrs Silvers said.



Craig Ingram, Bill Cumming and Doug Treasure, Bennison Plains, December 1999.



Bill Cumming, Craig Ingram, Doug Treasure and Brian Higgins, Bennison Plains, December 1999.

On the weekend of 4 and 5 December 1999, the newly elected member for Gippsland East, Craig Ingram, spent two days inspecting the grazing areas affected by the Caledonia fire. Three local cattlemen showed Craig a cross section of the burnt area and there is no doubt he was impressed by the recovery of the area following the fire. Unfortunately Parks Victoria choose to ignore Craig's support. The Mountain Cattlemen are still battling to overturn Parks' decision.

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Cattlemen of the Bennison Plains

Linda Barraclough

The Bennison Plains, just past Mount Tamboritha first began to be grazed by Richard Bennison, a businessman from Sale, in the drought years of 1860. In 1861 he also took out a licence for the Mount Wellington run. When he advertised the run for sale in 1869 it was carrying three thousand SHEEP!

The four families operating from there today have links back to the earliest settlers at Glenmaggie, and have all been operating there for several generations.



Jack Doherty (usually known as Jack Dockerty) with Mick Higgins at Holme's Plain yards in the 1950s. (*Linda Barraclough*)

The Higgins family

The modern name most associated with the Bennison Plains is the Higgins family, but it appears the freehold there was first taken up by Hannah Flannagan, who married Michael Higgins from Talbotville at Omeo in 1879. Hannah and Michael Higgins lived in Talbotville, and their children born there included Myles Michael (1880-1923, m. Mary

Alice McCarthy 1881-1976), Mary (b.1882, m. James Kane), James (1884-1945), Patrick (1886-1953), William (b.1888), Michael Joseph (b.1890, mar. Mary Veronica Kelly), Thomas Joseph (1892-1968, mar Ethel Williams), Kathleen (b.1895, mar Thomas Hurley) and John Cornelius (b.1899, mar. Lily Kelly).

Hannah Higgins died in 1902 aged 43 and Michael in 1925 aged 78. Both are buried in the

Stratford (Nuntin) Cemetery beside their son Myles and his wife, and Hannah's parents James and Mary Ann Flannagan.

In the next generation, Mick and Jack carried on the freehold on Bennison. Their wives were both sisters of Jimmy Kelly, who operated from his hut at Holmes Plain, and all three Kellys traced their beginnings at Glenmaggie back to the Garvey family, who took up land in the first round of selections at Glenmaggie in 1870-1871. In turn, the freehold at Bennison went to Mick's son Kevin Snr and Jack (JC)'s grandson Kevin Jr, son of JC's son Jack.

Jack Jnr, whose base was at Glencairn, died at a very early age, and his sons Brian, Anthony and Kevin all took over various parcels of Higgins land in due time. Kevin is often called "Young" Kevin, to distinguish him from Mick's son Kevin. He currently operates the Snowy Range Horseback Tours from his accommodation there, and *Voice of the Mountains* no.22 carried a dramatic account of the group that faced the January 1998 Caledonia fire there.

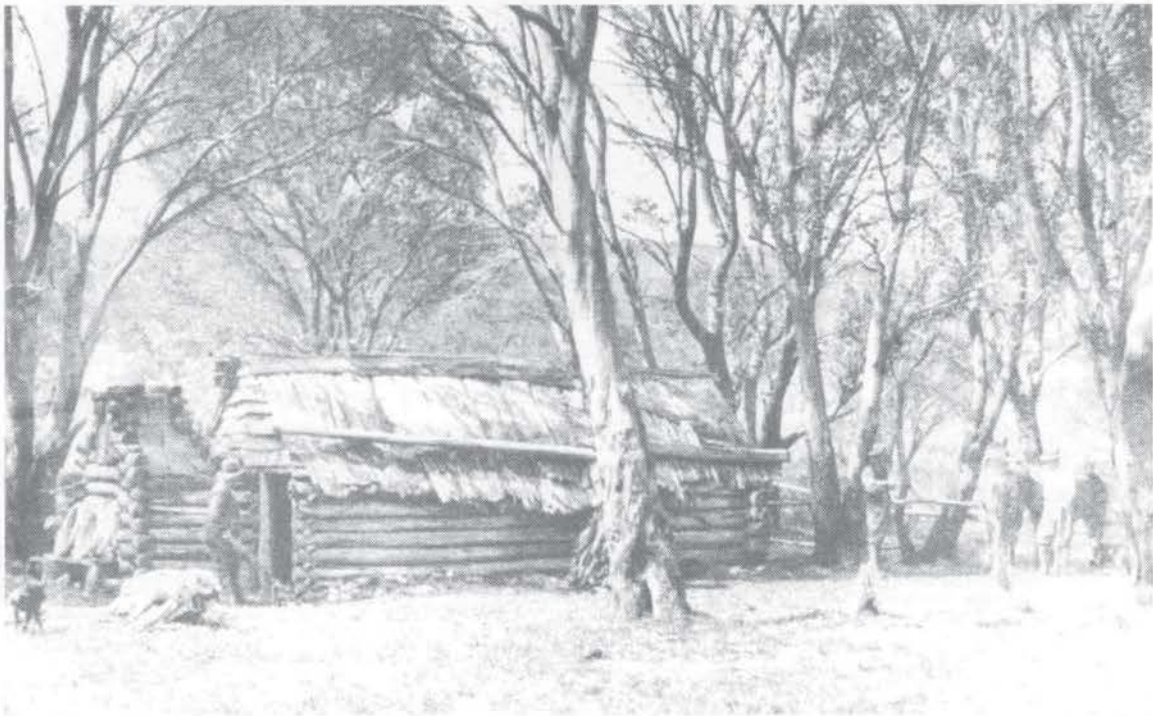
"Young" Kevin's nephew, Steven (son of Brian) of "Mountain View", Glenmaggie, is the fifth generation to have worked cattle on this section of the Bennison Plains. The third of Jack's sons, Anthony, is on the land Jack jr bought at Glencairn in the 1950s, and is also associated with the country around Bennison Plains.

Mick's son Kevin, who died in 1994 went on to be one of the most respected bushmen in the area, for many years the local "dogman", or dingo trapper. The main Higgins hut, now also a "fourth generation hut", was on his section of the freehold. Following Kevin's death, this portion of the freehold went to his elder son, Michael, where Kevin's grandchildren are the fifth generation of the family to work cattle on that land.

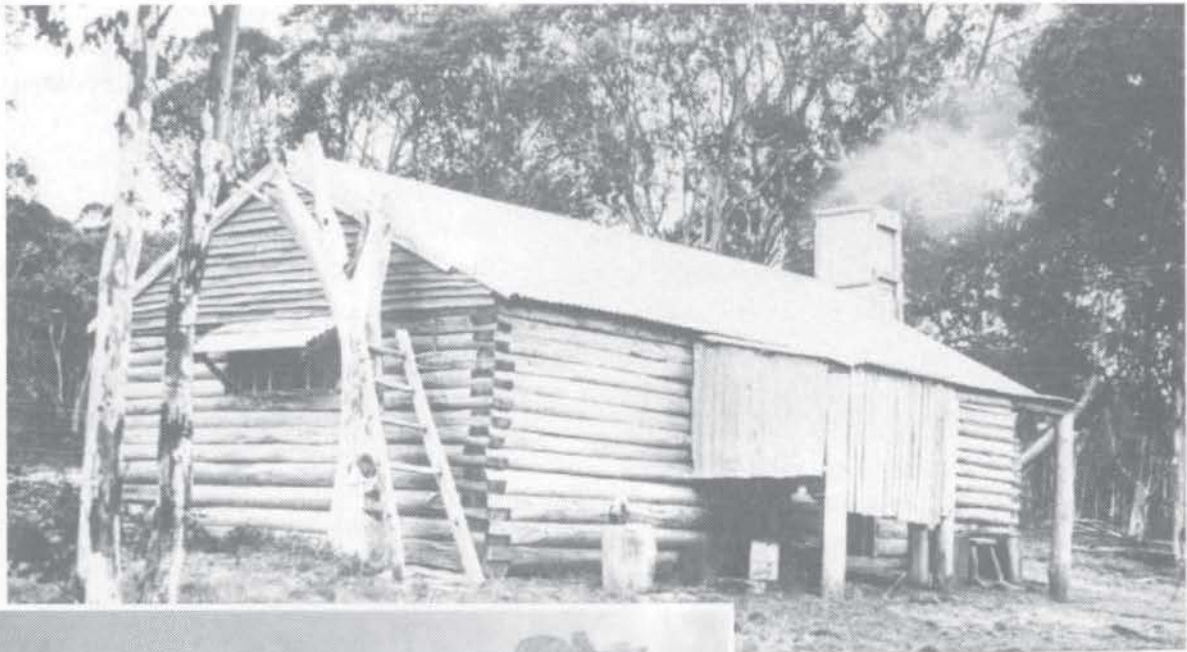
The Cumming and Gell families

Bill Cumming of Glenmaggie and Jeff Gell of Heyfield work leasehold around Bennison Plain from McMichael's hut. This hut is substantially different from the first McMichael's hut, probably used by either Bill or Tom McMichael from Licola.

The Cumming family first came to Glenmaggie in 1866, where they took up "The Retreat", land the family still holds, making them along with the Chesters, one of the most continuous landholders in the area. Edward, the first generation, came to Australia with an extensive knowledge of horticulture, and worked first as foreman at the Government Experimental farm at Royal Park. His son William Edward followed him at "The Retreat", and his son Eric in turn. Eric was active in the Licola Stockowner's Association, one of the groups that



First Higgin's Hut at Bennison. (Linda Barraclough)



Top: Higgin's Second Hut, so fine it was known as 'The Menzies of the Plains'. (Linda Barraclough)
Centre: Higgin's Third Hut, made with burnt tin from the second hut. Roy Hutchison (a bushwalker), Kevin Higgins and Mick Higgins. (Linda Barraclough)
Lower: Fourth Higgin's Hut at Bennison. (Linda Barraclough)



McMichael's Hut on the left and Chester's Hut is on the right. (Linda Barraclough)

amalgamated to form the Mountain District Cattlemen's Association (now the MCAV). For many years the Gippsland Branch of the MCAV actually continued its bank account as the Licola Stock Owner's Association, whose main business activities were the management of the travelling stock reserve at Cheynes Bridge. This reserve was used by cattlemen from Bennison and elsewhere north of Licola who traditionally walked their cattle to the autumn sales at Heyfield. Eric died in 1982, and his son Bill has worked and run cattle on the family leasehold since the 1950s.

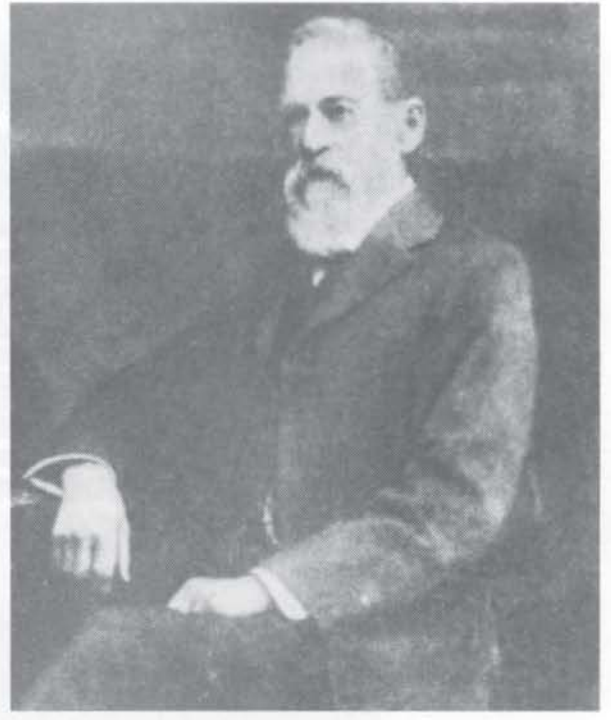
Jeff Gell, who also has a base just up the Tamboritha road from Licola, is the third generation of his family in the Macalister Valley. John and Miriam Gell came from Geelong to the area the family still holds north of Glenmaggie in the late 1880s, and Jeff's father Clarrie was born there in 1897. Among early crops the family grew were opium poppies, under licence for the drug trade. Jeff's family is no stranger to serious bushfires. In January 1900, with six small children and the seventh on the way, Miriam Gell watched from the river as the family home was destroyed by what are still the worst bushfires the Glenmaggie area has known. All that was saved was a box of papers and

a box of cutlery. She was taken the long journey up the steep hill to Blanket Hill and gave birth to a daughter there the next day.

The Chester family

William Chester applied for his first block, the site of the current "Chesterfield" home, in 1868, and the family have held land there under that name ever since. William's grandson, Norm, the son of Harry Chester, was one of Heyfield's legendary cattlemen, and the auctioneer who presided over the autumn cattle sales at Heyfield. Norm ran cattle from Jimmy Kelly's hut on Holmes Plain, now continued by Norm's son Dick. The family now also holds part of the freehold on the Bennison Plains, which includes a little known and derelict hut of Depression era ripple iron.

Together, the Higgins, Cumming, Gell and Chester families have been on the land in Glenmaggie well over a century each, and have links well back into the history of the Bennison Plains.



Top Left: The Higgins home at Talbotville. Top Right: Edward Cumming.
Above: The Gell family at Glenmaggie, with a young Clarrie Gell on the left.

DISCOVER THE TREASURES OF THE HIGH COUNTRY

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

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

**For a brochure and full details contact Ben and John Treasure,
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Phone 03-5145 6055**

Getting to the Get Together

The time has arrived for our annual ride.
The horses are ready and gear put aside.
Our usual driver's providing back-up,
All set to go to the Cattleman's Cup.

The jiggling and jogging it seemed not to stop
From down there in Oxley right over the Top
Razorback, Pineapple, down to King Hut,
Five weary riders and one tired mutt.

March flies and Yowies and leg-brakeing rocks,
Skin off the buttocks and burrs in the socks,
Kicking and biting and gouging of eyes,
Sand in the swags and more bloody flies.

Up from the King on a track they had closed,
To the Movie-land set where pictures were posed.
Pegging the horses on lush mountain grass,
Sitting and talking of travellers past.

Monument, Binderee, Pike's damaged Flat,
Ducking and weaving and lost the odd hat.
Onto the river track, all in a string,
Into the country where stockman is King.

Boulders and holes and losing the track,
The mares in front and geldings in back.
Down into the valley, an unwanted dip.
Then onto Sheeppark, the end of our trip.

*Lorraine Lucas
Margaret Arnold
Roger Smitheran
Ron Knight
Bill Allan
John Frankie*

The presentation of this poem at Sheeppark in 1999
won the Don Kneebone Mountain Heritage Award.

1999 Get Together 'Sheepyard Flat'

It only seems like yesterday when we were all enjoying the Get Together at the familiar and beautiful location at Sheepyard Flat. There is no doubt about this location being one ideal for Get Togethers. It really is a wonderful spot with plenty of shade, the lovely Howqua River, those magnificent trees and good areas suitable for holding all of our events.

The Mansfield Branch ensured the weekend was a great success, both financially for the association and socially for those attending. A change was made this year that proved to be most popular. We kept Saturday clear for socialising and watching the Don Kneebone Heritage Award and novelty events.

We would like to say Thank You to all of our sponsors for their ongoing support to the Association. Particular thanks go to Mazda (Vic), who are exceedingly generous to the Association with the provision of vehicles and the winners rostrum, and QBE for the mobile display unit that is the nerve centre of the Association during the weekend.

Congratulations to all winners and placegetters, and thanks to everybody who joined in and added to the fun.

RESULTS

Cattlemen's Cup

- 1st Travis Kelly
- 2nd Dean Backman
- 3rd Neil Waite

Junior Cattlemen's Cup

- 1st Adam McCormack
- 2nd Clancy Burrowes
- 3rd Edward Higgins

Open Sprint

- 1st Terry Moore
- 2nd Michael O'Dea
- 3rd Jane Abbott

Relay Race

- 1st 'Bluff & Beyond'
- 2nd 'McCormacks Madogs'

Packhorse Race

- 1st Neville Wright
- 2nd Jim Kiely
- 3rd Mark Jones

Wally Ryder Horse Walking Race

- 1st Sen Reseigh
- 2nd Chris Stoney
- 3rd Paul Walker

Slow Walking Race

- 1st Kelly Lovick
- 2nd Dave Ralph
- 3rd Paul Minahan

Working Dog Race

- 1st Judith Corona
- 2nd Dave Blundell
- 3rd Morgan Plumley

Dog High Jump

- 1st John McCormack with 'Gracie'
- 2nd Dave Blundell with 'Rotor'
- 3rd Rachel Smith with 'Dougal'

Tug-A-War

- 1st The mens team from Dargo
- 2nd McCormacks Madogs

Junior Whipcracking

- 1st Brandon Spencer
- 2nd Tyrone Spencer
- 3rd Ric Quilford

Ladies Whipcracking

- 1st Diana Hurley
- 2nd Rosemary Hurley

Open Whipcracking

- 1st Diana Hurley
- 2nd Brad Goonan
- 3rd Tyron Spencer

Don Kneebone Mountain Heritage Award:

Combined effort of Lorraine Lucas, Margaret Arnold, Roger Smitheram, Ron Knight, Bill Allan and John Frankie - 'Getting to the Get Together'

Bush Minstrel:

Dennis Carstairs - 'Caring Since 1835'

Bush Laureate:

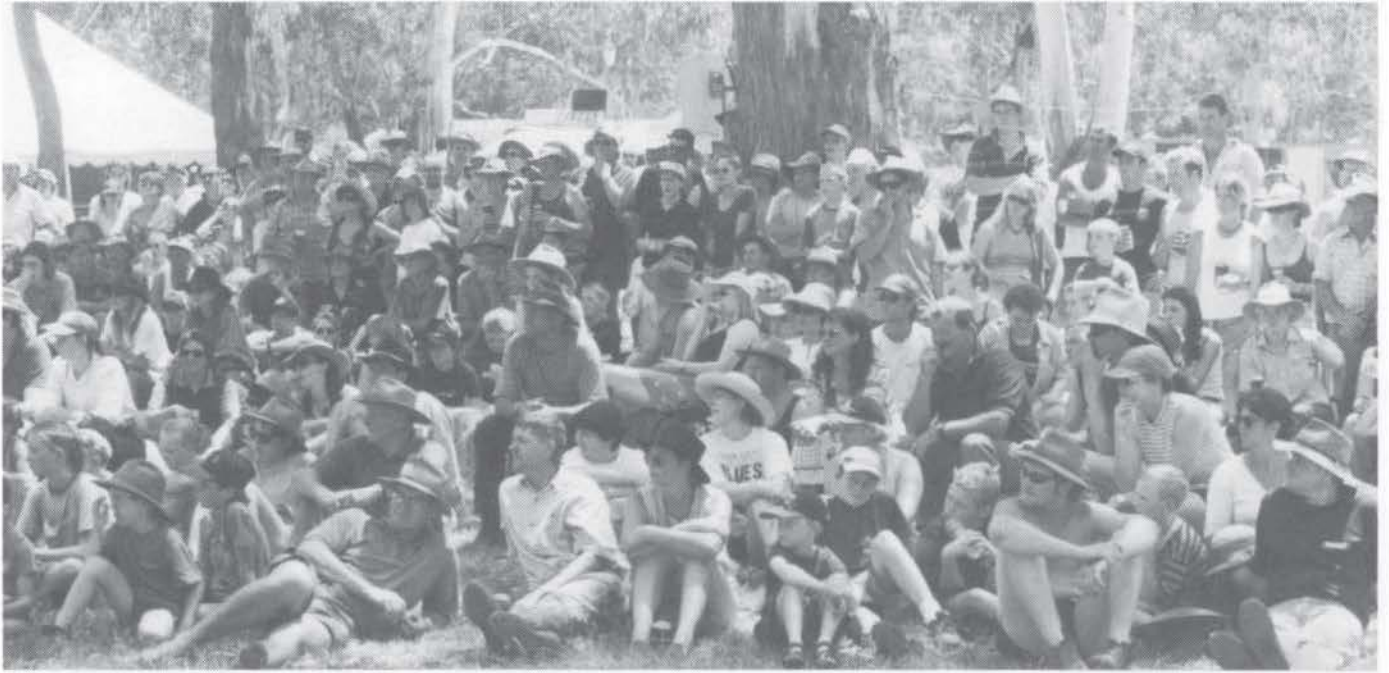
Paul Hutchison - 'Gordon's Song'

Encouragement Award:

Val Kirley - 'Home to the Cobbler'



1999 Get Together





1999 Get Together





LOVICK'S Mountain Trail Safaris



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

We Ride The Great Divide

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

The Safari is serviced by four wheel drives that meet up with the riders in camp each night and are licenced to carry passengers.

All fresh food carried under refrigeration.

The Lovicks will make sure you have the holiday of your life in the mountains.

Write ... Jack Lovick, Merrijig or Phone 03-5777 5510

The Bell

There's a Bard in outback New South Wales, from Minmi, near as I can tell
And I'd love to have a word with him, cause he's got my flamin Bell.
You see the Mountain Cattlemen, at their Get Together every year
Hold this Bush Poetry competition, but the winner must adhere
To strict and simple rules that very simply state
You win the Bell for twelve months then - you bring it back ol' mate.

Now he won it fair and square at Gibbo, and for that I dips me lid
Then he should have fronted at the Rose, but he never did.
Yeah, I won it at the Rose that year, 'twas nineteen ninety eight
Wasn't even gonna have a go, but I was prodded by me mate.
Garn! ave a go 'e said you've got but nought to lose
It'll only take yer a couple 'o' hours, an it'll keep yer off the booze.

So I wrote all about the Cattlemen, and I put it all in rhyme
Got thru all the heats OK, then it came to finals time.
They put me up on this stage, in front of - three thousand people I suppose
I was wishin I could find me mate - and punch him on his bloody nose.
With shaking knees and croaking voice I somehow mumbled thru
When they announced I was the winner, it was too good to be true.

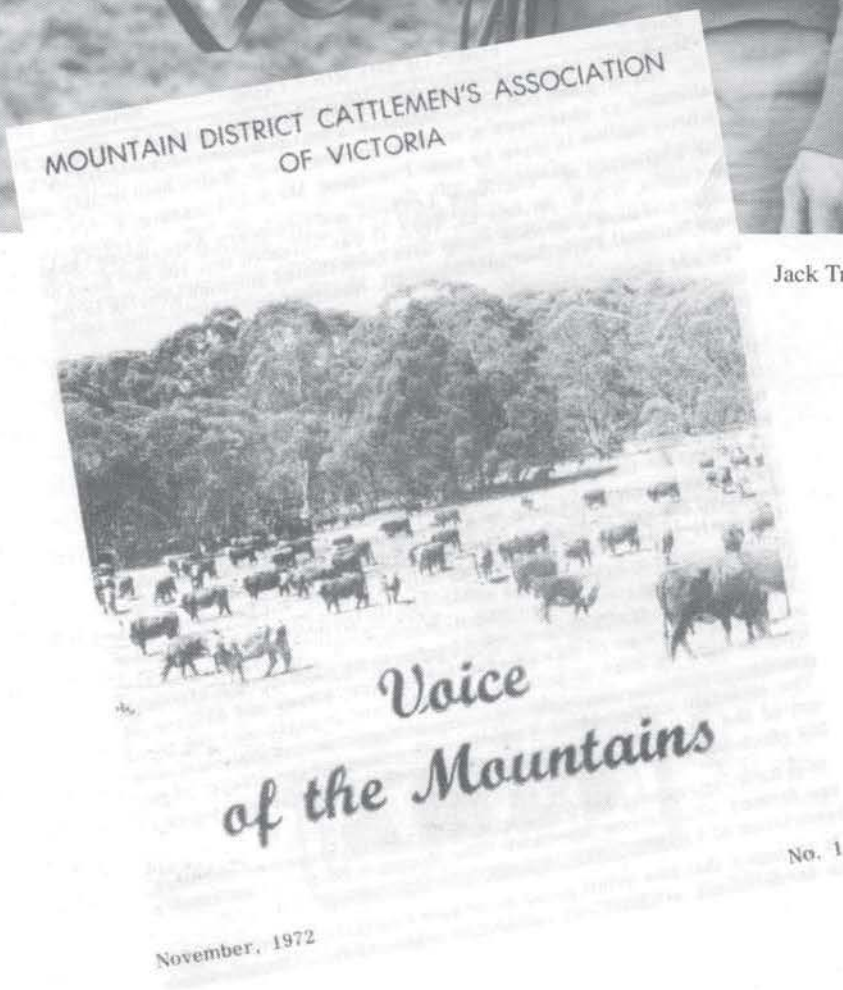
I was called on stage - but the MC then bewails
We can't present you with you Bell, it's gone bush - in New South Wales.
So I sit back in me Stratty home, I keep me mantlepiece nice 'n' clean
And I sit and gaze at that shelf, and think what might have been.
I've visions of this New South Bard, acting - like some artistic swell
I'd like to scruff him by the neck, and tell him where to shove his Bell.

Dennis Carstairs

In 1997, the 'Don Kneebone' Bell was won by Bob Skelton from near Newcastle N.S.W. Bob disappeared with the bell, and it could not be found to present for the next two years. Last year, Dennis Carstairs, the 1998 winner wrote and gave his poem at Sheepyard, and again at the Australian Bush Poetry Championships at Yarrowonga - Mulwala. Bob Skelton materialised out of the crowd, got his address from Dennis and the bell turned up about ten days later in the mail.



Jack Treasure on the Dargo High Plains in the 1960s.





Sydney John (Jack) Treasure

With the passing of Jack Treasure, on 25 October 1999, the Voice of the Mountains is stilled.

Jack, was instrumental in the founding of the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria, as we know it today. However, above and beyond that, he was the founder in 1972 and first editor of this journal, *Voice of the Mountains*. His writing and passion for the high country means his name will be long remembered.

It is fitting that Jack, the son of Harry and Clara Treasure, was born during a snowstorm on the Dargo High Plains, on 13 June 1913. His parents had just lost their home at Mayford to fire, and his father desperately rode the thirty miles into Dargo to bring back the nurse, but Jack arrived before their return. The greatest war the world had known was soon to occur, in 1914, and these were fitting omens. Jack was independent and a fighter for his beliefs.

As a young man, the mountains became his back yard, and all through his life he rode them and walked them, with fossicking for gold holding a particular interest for him. He was a living link with names which are now history, telling stories of the people such as Albert Stout of Talbotville, where he arrived unheralded looking for supplies at Albert's shop one Sunday. Albert, a strong believer in his Church, would not carry out commerce on a Sunday, and conveniently left so that Jack could get supplies and return to his fossicking.

But Jack was more than a fund of stories and anecdotes. He was respected by scientists, geologists and politicians alike, and his name was synonymous with Dargo and the Dargo High Plains.

Fifty-eight years ago, while returning by ship from a visit to Queensland, where several of his uncles had relocated from Dargo, Jack met Marcia Saunders, a Sydney accountant's daughter on her way to England. They married, and Jack and Marcia built a home during winter on the Dargo High Plains, during the dark days of the second World War.

Jack was a visionary man, and a leader. He took ideas and words, and worked with them. His

mother, Clara, was a former school teacher, and Jack was the epitome of a man who never stopped learning.

Following his father's example, he became a councillor of the Avon Shire, travelling regularly to Stratford for meetings. When a party of politicians and bureaucrats made the arduous journey from the Buffalo River in the north-east through Wonnangatta to Crooked River, about 1950, it was organised by Jack, whose project it was from the start. He arranged the party, cleared the track through beforehand, and led the party. At the time of his death he remained a strong advocate of a new low-level route through the mountains, from Gippsland to the North-East, that would be less at the mercy of winter snows.

Of particular interest to Jack was the complex of relationships that was Nature. He believed in the need to respect natural cycles and was a strong advocate of the natural place of fire in the Australian bush.

Jack's passing leaves a tremendous gap, and will be felt beyond Dargo and the MCAV. However he has left us with the wonderful legacy of his poetry and writing. He was one of the foremost cattlemen poets, before the current resurgence in popularity of bush ballads. In 1996 he published his collected works under the title *Verses of the Mountains*, including works from other poets who he admired. Jack was instrumental in ensuring Billy Wye's poetry was not lost, and his copies of Wye's works lodged for public access were an important source for later students of his work.

The intellectual rigour, which Jack brought to the position of inaugural President of what was then the Mountain District Cattlemen's Association of Victoria, is also an inheritance that we cherish.

The Association extends its sincere sympathy to Jack's wife Marcia and his family: Geoff, Jim, Rita and her husband John McMahan, Pamela and her husband Herman Bila, and his grand-daughters, Angela and Christine.

Ode of Kevin

It was near on forty years ago
We left the Burnside Hut
Pushing cattle up to the "Bogong's"
Through the towering Woollybutt
I drove there with the Kelly boys
Bush stockmen of renown
But now it's just a memory
As the sun goes sinking down.

Kevin Kelly was a figurehead
Of High Country cattlemen.
He knew all of the High Country
And the bush around the Glen
Raised his family by the river
On the Mitta was his domain
To him, they're special ladies
As a father he did reign.

Now it's sad to see a man of life
Leave many friend behind
Kev was such a gentleman
To sin that was unkind.
And he'd suffer many hardships,
Even lost an old big toe
But that never hindered Kevin
Cos at running he could go.

Kev made a go at everything
A sporting man we'd say
Loved tennis, golf and football,
And dance the night away
May his stock whip and blanket go with him
And the bridle that's on the wall
As we say goodbye to Kevin Kelly
A true mate to many and all.

Johnny Faithfull
1999

rural organisations to be more rational, long before anyone had invented the term 'economic rationalism'. She did not argue these issues as a demagogue, but as a person with a sincere belief in a better way to organise the economy. She did not press them with obsession but whittled away at disbelievers. Many was the time she said 'Catch more bees with honey than vinegar'.

Perhaps the most significant achievement of Heather's presidency was to change the perception of agriculture within the then State Labor Government. The establishment of the Rural Affairs Sub-committee of Cabinet, for example, flowed directly from Heather's approach to the advancement of rural policy. It is an achievement that may continue to have effect for years to come.

Heather's presidency also highlighted the family nature of the farming operation and gave all women on the land a focus for the expression of their involvement in the business of farming.

In becoming the first female President of the Victorian Farmers Federation Heather significantly increased the profile of the organisation and the attention that was devoted to rural issues. The success was acknowledged at the Federal level, where Heather was elected Vice President of the National Farmers Federation in 1989.

After her work with the VFF, Heather continued her interest in environmental issues and became a Board member of Greening Australia (Victoria) Ltd.

Heather had a strong attachment to the land and its protection. Together with Joan Kirner, the former Victorian Premier, they founded the now internationally acclaimed LandCare movement. In a letter to *Stock and Land*, a couple of years ago, Joan Kirner wrote: We were exceedingly fortunate that at the time that Heather Mitchell was the innovative and energetic VFF president. I asked her to join me as joint chairperson and sponsor of Landcare.. She and the VFF agreed, and a great partnership bloomed between farmers, farmers' organisations and government.

Heather championed LandCare at every opportunity and kept in touch with groups throughout Victoria. Notably, her last public engagement was to visit the Wooragee School LandCare group in North East Victoria to take part in its 10th anniversary celebrations. Her great friend



Heather Mitchell at the Castleburn Get Together.

Joan Kirner, and Caroline Hogg, a former Minister in Labor Governments, were with her. Joan Kirner has often commented that Heather was a joy to work with and has said that some people are in politics to help people and that Heather was one of them.

Heather was a strong supporter of young people seeking to start a career in agriculture. As Deputy Chairman of the Young Farmers Finance Council, Heather materially assisted young people to obtain a start on the land. In this capacity, Heather continually encouraged an improvement in the quality and availability of agricultural education.

As if all this was not enough to fill several lives, Heather was awarded the S.S.St.J. in 1973 for 25 years services with the Red Cross and St. John's Ambulance.

Heather Mitchell was the inaugural President of the Public Land Council of Victoria (PLCV).

The manner in which Heather ended up firm friends with supposedly natural adversaries is the key to one of her most important natural talents.

As noted earlier, in discussions at every level Heather always connected with the person who was on the other side of the table.

On being elected as President of the Victorian Farmers Federation in 1986, Heather embarked on a trip around the branches in country Victoria. At one Gippsland meeting two elderly men were muttering off by themselves. As only Heather could, she sailed over to them and introduced herself. One responded, "Couldn't they get a fella to do the job." "No," Heather smiled, "They couldn't".

Although many women have been inspired by Heather's achievements in a formerly male domain, Heather didn't have much truck with feminism. She saw greater virtue in being feminine rather than feminist. Many women later claimed that Heather was their role model, but Heather was coolly indifferent to sexist issues. She even defended the use of the word "Chairman" because the "man" part came from *mannus*, which she claimed, meant the hand holding the chair. We had no idea if this was correct but if Heather said so, well, that was it.

Her third and surviving husband, the Hon. Gordon Carmichael, a retired NSW Supreme Court Judge, was her first teenage love in Albury. One went on to serve New South Wales, the other Victoria. They were reunited much later in life at the conclusion of their distinguished careers. This story alone is worthy of a book and a film. It is only a pity that Bette Davis would not be around to play Heather!

Heather Mitchell, a lady of great style and grace, passed away peacefully on Friday 12 November 1999.

She is survived by her husband, the Hon. Gordon Carmichael, three daughters, one son, and eight grandchildren. She was 82.

(Thanks to Tim Barker for the above obituary. Heather Mitchell was connected to the Mountain Cattlemen as an associate member, and attended most of the MCAV Get Togethers where she cut a stylish figure in moleskins and Akubra. As President of the VFF, she supported the MCAV on many issues, as she did also as President of the PLCV. Heather was loved and admired by mountain cattlemen families across the high country.)

Arch Timbs

Ernest Archie (Arch) Timbs died on 15 August 1999, aged 78 years. Arch, from Hiamdale near Rosedale first went into the bush with Stuart Hair and was, with Andy Estoppey, Bill Gillio and Eric Bateson, one of the four men who built the Moroka hut in 1946.

He recalled packing the malthoid in for the roof and sitting in the creek holding the horses head out of the water when it slipped with its load of malthoid, so that the horse would not drown.



Arch Timbs

Mick Jordan

Members of the MCAV were saddened to hear of the death in a railway level crossing accident in December 1999 of Mick Jordan of Rosedale. Mick was an Associate Member of the MCAV for many years, always took any opportunity that he could to speak out in favour of the cattlemen and was always there for a yarn at Get Togethers.

The Association also regrets the passing during the year of **Tom Connley** of Stratford, **Ken Riley** of Sale Party Hire and **Judith Hosier** of Queensland. Tom was a member of the Connley family from Benambra and the sympathies of the Association are extended to them. Ken has long been a supporter of the MCAV, and Judith, through the Stockmen's Hall of Fame at Longreach, carried out oral history interviews with Cattlemen and was involved in the organisation of the MCAV trip to Longreach several years ago.

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Great Divide and Beyond**

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**WE HAVE OUR OWN HIGH COUNTRY ACCOMMODATION ON
THE LAND OUR FAMILY HAS HELD FOR OVER 130 YEARS.**

Let's Hear it for the Women

Let's hear it for the women, the wives who stayed at home
When cattlemen rode with their herds, the vast High Plains to roam.
Each woman in her lonely hut, must manage as she could
To keep the home fires burning as all good housewives should.

With water to be carted and logs to split and stack,
The livestock to be tended in spite of aching back;
The baby to be seen to, the bread to knead and bake,
Whit shovel handy by the door in case of roaming snake.

And when the sun was setting, the livestock housed and fed,
The woman ate her frugal meal and gladly sought her bed.
The High Plains tales are legend, the Snowy yarns, folklore,
The songs and poems many, the histories galore.

But who sings for the woman, that tireless, caring mate
Who bore and reared the children, a family to create?
She fashioned home-spun comfort through flood and fire and drought,
and what she couldn't buy or make she had to do without.

Australia wouldn't be the same without its pioneers,
Those lonely, hardy women who survived the early years.
Let's hear it for the women, in poem, tale and song,
And give them their own Hall of Fame - 'cos that's where they belong.

Dorothy B Watt

The Cows and High Plains always came first ...

Recollections from the Women of the North East

Two years ago at the Rose River Get Together, Sue Ryder organised display boards featuring the 'women behind the men' from the North-East branch. It created such interest at the Get Together we have decided to present it here in permanent form and encourage other branches to do the same.

Ethel Amelia Blair nee Gormley was born in 19?? (we are not allowed to tell!) in Albury - one of eleven children. Ettie grew up on farms in Boonamoonamah and Barooga.

Ettie learnt to ride when she was about five years old; at ten years of age Ettie's parents shifted to a dairy farm at Baranduda, before moving onto a farm at Allan's Flat. Ettie recalls when her mother was away checking cows on the bends of the Murray, that she invariably attempted to get into trouble at school (usually because she had ink on her fingers) so that she could be sent outside, where she took off to spend the rest of the day at home.

Ettie met Ross Blair whilst at Allan's Flat and was married in 1953, Max was born the following year and they moved to Snowy Creek in 1963.

While living at Snowy Creek, Ettie used to ride up Snowy Creek each day to check that the cattle were not coming home, or if any cattle were there, Ettie used to bring them home. This was while Ross and Max were away on the plains (Max started going to the plains when he was nine years old - approximately the same time they moved to Snowy Creek).

As well, Ettie had to milk four or five cows, feed the horses left at home, attend to the dogs, chooks and ducks and keep the vege garden! All this as well as raising Max!

Ettie used to separate the milk and cream, then make all their butter. Veges and fruit from the garden were put to good use, with the fruit being stewed or made into jam.

After Bryce Blair died in 1971, Ettie had to prepare all the food for the six or seven people who went to the plains each year with Ross and Max. She made cakes and always apple slice - a favourite

with Ross. Legs of mutton were cooked as well as corn beef. Bread, homemade butter, tins of condensed milk, tea (not coffee - the men didn't like coffee), tins of baked beans, spaghetti, Irish stew were all packed into pack bags. As well as the food, Ettie had to pack clothes, blankets and 'big bag woggers'. Woggers were wheat bags sewed together and used over the top of blankets for extra warmth and protection. And of course, when the clothes and blankets came home, all had to be washed.

Ettie enjoyed being at Snowy Creek when the men were away. 'I was never scared ... I'd do things ... paint a room ... clean up the yard...'

Over the years, Ettie only went to the plains with the cattle a couple of times. She attended only one muster, that being when Max was away. When the Falls Creek area had to be patrolled in 1978/79, Ettie used to ride around with Ross, leave the horses in the yard and come home for the night. They would return the next day to continue their patrolling duty.

In 1990, Ross and Ettie moved to Bowman's Forest where they lived until Ross' death in 1997. Ettie then moved to Myrtleford where she now resides.

Doreen Mary Briggs nee Goldsworthy was born at Bright on 5 September 1942, the eldest of three children to Eileen and Cyril Goldsworthy of Wandiligong, where her father had an apple orchard. She attended Wandiligong Primary School until year six and then went onto Bright Higher Elementary School, finishing in year nine. After leaving school Doreen went to work at the Bright Pharmacy for nearly ten years.

On 28 May 1966 Doreen married Ronald Briggs, a mountain cattleman who also worked for

the then Forestry Commission. They lived in Ron's mothers house in Bright for nine years, Ron travelling daily to his farm at Porepunkah.

In 1967 the first of Doreen and Ron's six children were born - twins Andrew and Jackie. Due to complications after the twins were born, Doreen spent time in Wangaratta Hospital at the same time as Ron had to go mustering. 'It was a very lonely and long week for me and I learnt early in our marriage that cows and high plains would always come first. And they still do.'

Karen was born in 1969 followed by Rhonda in 1969 and a second set of twins, Michelle and Suzanne in 1972.

In the early years Doreen was very busy with the family but always managed to find time to cook food and do the shopping for the muster and when they took the cattle out in December. As they lived on the stock route, Eric and Adrian Weston always had a cooked breakfast and on the way back, it was a cooked lunch. Doreen found it hard at times - fitting in feeding the children, giving babies bottles and having breakfast and lunch ready.

In Doreen's words 'one of the worst things about mustering is washing all the smelly horsey clothes and saddle blankets. I used to hate putting babies nappies in the washing machine after horsey clothes.'

Doreen does not ride a horse and has never been to a muster. She has, however, been out to the logging camp (in the West Kiewa valley) in a vehicle and then walked to Weston's Hut. 'And that's my extent of high plains knowledge. It's not always easy for the wives that are left at home while the men share in the glory of mustering. Some-one has to be at home to take care of cattle left behind and children.'

In 1975 Doreen and Ron moved to EvertonUpper. Doreen also found that first year hard, being left at home with the children and not knowing anyone. Doreen recalls 'at 10 o'clock one night there was a knock at the front door and two policemen were asking if I had a bloody big bull out on the road. I had to leave the older children in charge of the younger children and go with the police. They had a spotlight and kindly helped put the bull back in the paddock.'

These days Doreen helps cook the men's supplies, but daughter Suz-anne and her friend

Shelley Hall do the shopping and pack all the provisions, but, as Doreen says, 'I still cop the smelly washing.'

Mary Cooper nee Briggs was born on 1 July 1903 - the third child of seven children to Emma and John Briggs. Emma's parents, Edith and David Ford were amongst the earliest settlers to the Kiewa Valley, as were John's parents, Rachel and Thomas Briggs.

Esme Barr (Mary's daughter), when told of the project, offered the following recollections and observations:

'Mary spent all her life in the valley. She first attended school at the old Tawonga Hall (located at the Tawonga Recreation Reserve - approximately 5km north of the current township of Tawonga). This was a walk of three to four miles along the banks of the Kiewa River, then across the river via a narrow swing bridge.

After the swing bridge was washed away in a flood, she and her brother and sister had no alternative but to walk five miles to the school at Mongan's Bridge. Once again the track followed the river, at times passing some very deep waterholes. They were quite envious of their cousin who rode a horse [to school].

She often spoke of the winter when it was still dark as they left for school and again dark when they arrived home after making sure they had picked up the kindling wood and carried it home in readiness to light the fires in the morning.

When school days were over it was time to join her mother, father and brother milking cows. Each person was allotted a number of cows according to their speed of hand milking and each one was responsible for their share, no dodging the job.

Mary often spoke of the dances they attended at the old Tawonga Hall. Her father was the local musician so they all went along and seem to have found it a very enjoyable pastime. They danced until the early hours of the morning, then, if they were walking, by the time they arrived home day was breaking. They started milking immediately and what a battle it was to stay awake as they had leant their heads against the warmth of the cows.

Another job which became Mary's responsibility as a teenager was to help her mother with the washing. Light the copper for boiling the whites and scrub the men's dirty clothes. She often spoke of the white starched petticoats that were worn in those times. Just imagine ironing for five women with flat irons. It would all have been done to perfection because Mary and her mother were meticulous housekeepers. The men's trousers were scrubbed with a brush on a ribbed washing board.

Mary married Ben Cooper in 1930 and began married life on his property adjacent to the Tawonga Hall, where she continued to attend the local dances. Her two children, Esme and John were both born in Yackandandah. Mary travelled the 35 miles by mail car, staying with her sister-in-law three to four weeks while awaiting the birth of each child.

During the winter Dad [Ben Cooper] ran cattle on the lower hills between the Kiewa Valley and

Dederang. He would often ride off into the bush for four or five days at the time, with only a lunch for the first day. At night he could always rely on finding a bed and meal in Running Creek with either Mrs Sissy Hynes, his cousins wife May Cooper or Mrs Charlie Grealy (Clarice). At Mongans Bridge, Mrs Herb Maddison was the one who offered hospitality.

Mum always milked about twelve cows and sent the cream to the butter factory. This meant that there were sometimes pigs to be fed as well as horses.

Dad was a very trusting person. He never said no to any swaggie who was looking for a job. These were the depression days of the 1930s. He sometimes

employed these unfortunate men to help feed the horses and pigs while he was away.

Mum never showed any signs of nervousness, refusing to ever lock a door, but when the odd inebriated swaggie made advances towards her, she quickly took me and my brother by the hand and made a hurried retreat to either our uncle Frank or Jim Edmondson, both of whom lived nearby. We were more fortunate than others who lived in isolated areas.

Fifty to sixty years ago, women were not an integral part of the legendary cattlemen's high plains experience. One tends to think

of the life led by the mountain cattlemen as lonely, but, just for a moment think of the women left behind in the valleys while the men were away.

The men had the camaraderie of the like minded males, camp-fire yarns and riding the plains together in a job they loved. What did the women



Ben and Mary Cooper 1930.

have? They were isolated by distance and loneliness. They were left to care for the children and perform the mundane jobs on the farm, if life was to continue in the valleys.

A group of women may have occasionally gone up to the Bogong High Plains during the summer months, when the cattle were being salted, but this was more of a social event than work orientated. Women never participated in the muster or the main movement of cattle to the high country.

I always had the feeling life was going to be more interesting for the men who rode off into the distant hills with loaded packhorses, barking dogs and jingling hobbles than for those left behind. The men were heading into another world, a world without women and children.

Our place was a convenient stop-over for men droving cattle to and from the high plains on to the saleyards. Mum provided meals and beds for these men. It must have been very difficult in the days with only a coolgardie to keep food fresh. Bread was delivered three times a week and groceries once a week. Without electricity, the only means of cooking or even boiling water was the wood stove.

Mum spent 43 years of her life as a cattleman's wife, providing meals for the travelling stockmen, packing up food for high plains trips, then awaiting the men's return - tired and hungry, with the expectation of another meal awaiting them

This was the role of women in those days."

Rachael Isabella Edmondson nee McCulloch was born on 7 June 1893 in Melbourne. After leaving school she helped her mother at home, while becoming an excellent dressmaker and milliner.

She married James (Jim) William Edmondson who had been born under a dray at Gundowring when his parents were on the way to Mitta Mitta. Jim left school at 13 to work on farms and go horsebreaking. He returned to study at Wangaratta High School becoming a teacher before WW1 intervened. After returning from the war Jim returned to teaching whilst studying for a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Education.

Rachael and Jim had three children - Bob, Isabel and Murial in Melbourne and Neerim South before shifting to the Kiewa valley.

Rachael's daughter Murial recalls that her mother found the life on the farm lonely. Although they had a car, the vehicle was placed on chocks during the depression because of rationing. It was later sold and the money used to buy cattle.

Rachael started milking cows when they arrived on the farm - an activity she was not used to as she would often tell her daughters of her arm aching with cramps from milking by hand. They started with 35 to 40 cows building up to 50 plus cows when the 'new' dairy was built - another 'new' dairy now stands on the site.

The cream from the milk was sold to the Kiewa Butter factory with the milk fed to pigs - as nearly all the dairy farmers in the region did in those days.

At the same time as running dairy cows, Jim also had a herd of Angus beef cattle. These were run in the bush behind the farm over winter months until they were taken to the summer run on Mt Spion Kopje. Edmondson's Hut was built by Jim and is a reminder of the days when the Edmondson's ran cattle on the high plains.

Rachael's mother would often visit thus alleviating the loneliness and isolation she felt. Even attending voting days was difficult for Rachael; as she couldn't ride a horse, Jim would place her on 'old Bill' and lead her to the polling booth.

When Jim was away, Rachael did all the milking - she had assistance from the children as they got older - fed the pigs, poultry and the draught horses as well as looked after the children. The draught horses were used to plough the paddocks to grow oats and maize; then harvest the same and finally run the chaff cutter. They were also used for other general farm work.

In 1939 when fire threatened the farm, Rachael and Jim milked the cows while Murial and Isabel patrolled the boundary putting out spot fires. It was in this year that the creek stopped running and it was the girls that had to get up at 2.00am to pump water to fill the tanks that supplied the dairy.

Rachael died in 1949, aged 59 and when Jim died aged 83 years their son Bob continued to run the farm. Today Bob's sons continue to run the dairy farm.

The information in this portrait was supplied by Rachael's daughter Isabel and Murial.

Nanette Hall nee Barrett was born in Wangaratta on 22 August 1935. Her parents lived in Porepunkah and Nan attended primary school there before secondary education at Bright Higher Elementary until she left at 14 or 15 years of age.

Nan's first job was as governess/housemaid on a cattle station at Narromine in northern New South Wales. After returning to the Porepunkah district, Nan was employed at the Alpine Hotel in Bright as well as at the Mt Buffalo Chalet as a housemaid.

On 22 July 1955, Nan married John Hall. They lived in Porepunkah and raised five children - Christine, Jennifer, Beverly, Lynette and Colin. John was a log truck driver who also had cattle leases at Little River (Buffalo River side of Mt Buffalo). From the time the girls were able to ride, they helped their father take cattle to Little River. Nan, with the youngest, Colin, drove the vehicle with the food and the other essential bits and pieces. When Colin was old enough, he joined his father and sisters on horseback, leaving Nan to the support vehicle on her own.

In 1966, John and Nan purchased Gordon Hepburn's farm in the Buckland valley and shifted out there. At that stage, electricity was not supplied to the Hall's farm and Nan used a wood stove, a copper for washing clothes and kerosene lamps for lights. A gas fridge and a meat safe kept their food.

As there was no school bus to take their children to school in Porepunkah, John and Nan started a school bus run. Nan regularly drove the bus, and is still doing the bus run twice a day, even now.

In 1978, John and Nan took over the bush leases of the Upper Buckland valley from Selwyn Timbers, who in turn had taken over the leases from Syd and Jack Beveridge. Since the children have left home, Nan has returned to riding and now assists John in the day to day running of the farm and cattle leases.

Throughout her married life, Nan's determination and great sense of humour has endeared her to all who know her. Nan is not only a loving wife, wonderful mother, caring grandmother, reliable bus driver, endurance horse rider par excellence, member/parent (and now supporter) of Porepunkah Primary School but combined with her dedication to maintaining the family farm, provides an outstanding example to the younger generation of a woman beside her cattleman partner.

Rose Marion Hicks nee Rust was born on 6 April 1930, one of ten children to Rose Margaret and Frederick Frank Rust. She lived with her family in Box Hill, Melbourne where her father was a motor trimmer with his own business.

Rose attended Box Hill State School until she was fourteen, at which time she left school to help her mother at home. At fifteen years, Rose began dressmaking with Myer Melbourne, which she continued to do until she was about twenty. At this time Rose came to Yackandandah where her sister worked at the Yackandandah Hospital. Rose gained employment at the hospital, firstly as a domestic than on the staff helping with patients.

Rose met Bill Hicks at her sister's kitchen tea party. At 21, Rose married Bill at Box Hill on 2 March 1952. Bill and Rose returned to Glen Creek where they shared a house with Bill's mother, Martha Louise (Lou) Hicks.

As a city girl, Rose had to learn a new way of life. She had to learn how to do things the 'Hicks way'. In the early days at Glen Creek, Grandma Hicks would milk eight or nine cows by hand, sending the cream to the factory and feeding the milk to the pigs, as well as keeping the chooks. Rose had to learn to cook food as Grandma Hicks did, preserve fruit, milk cows, make butter, look after the chooks, heat water with a wood stove and copper, keep food without the aid of a refrigerator, use Aladdin lamps and kerosene lights and the other one hundred or so things that cattlemen's wives do. Rose also had the task of learning how to operate the Glen Creek telephone exchange.

At first, life was very lonely - Bill went away mustering two weeks after they were married - and the isolation of Glen Creek made it difficult to meet new people. Rose found the new ways hard to accept, but determined to make a success, channelled her energies into supporting Bill and raising their family.

In 1956 Rose and Bill built their own home at Glen Creek, Barry being nearly four and Jack just a baby. Stuart followed in 1959 and Brenda was born in 1961. It wasn't until the late 1950s that Rose started to milk a house cow for the family milk supply as well as care for a few hens for an egg supply.

Electricity came to Glen Creek when Rose and Bill built their new home - this alleviated the need for the kero lamps and the kero fridge. No more



'Grandma' Louisa Hicks at Glen Creek in the 1940s.

setting jellies and junkets on the verandah in the cool of the evening under a wet cloth.

Bill always took two or three weeks supply of food whenever he went away - potatoes, pumpkin cooked salted lamb, jam, tins of fruit, fruit cake and bread. The latter coming from Dewar's bakery in Kiewa. Bill didn't like butter - especially homemade butter which melted very easily and turned to grease in the pack saddle.

Rose had to collect and prepare all these items - but Bill used to pack his own pack bags - 'that way he'd be sure he had everything'. Utensils and blankets were stored at Tawonga Hut with Rose only getting the blankets home occasionally to wash - and only after much pleading!

However, after Rose's recital of the rigours of washing clothes every day, one would have been far from sorry to not have seen the blankets! Rose only used an automatic washing machine after the kids grew up. Prior to that, Rose would light a copper, boil the clothes, lift them into kerosene tins, take them inside to the laundry trough where they were rinsed, wrung out and then taken out to the

clothes line. On wet days, nappies had to be boiled in a kerosene tine on the wood stove before rinsing and hanging on the verandah to dry.

Bill was away for long periods of time throughout the year. Apart from taking cattle to and from the high plains, there was 'salting trips', checking cattle in the bush and, of course, droving the cattle to New South Wales/Queensland during the winter months.

All this time, Rose spent at home looking after the children. As Rose never learnt to ride a horse, she could not leave the confines of the farm unless Bill could take her on trips.

Rose only went to the high plains three times - the first time was in a cream Austin truck early in the 1960s and they stayed at Tawonga Hut where Rose nearly froze during the night. Bill having to get up and light the pot belly stove to keep Rose warm.

The next two trips were both after Rose had gained her driver's licence and both were to bring supplies to the men. Rose remembers one trip in the Valiant ute with Brenda and Stuart in the front seat with Syd Ryder, Barry and Jack in the back. The trip was notable for one of the back seat passengers sitting on the apple pie and squashing it!

Bill Hicks died in 1992 and Rose now spends her time watching her sons run their properties, being proud of her Brenda and delighting in being with her eleven grandchildren.

Marion Maddison nee Schulz was born on 16 February 1923 at Wangaratta. Her father was a carpenter and her parents lived at Moyhu, next to the Moyhu Hotel that was owned by her grandparents.

Marion attended Moyhu school ... 'wouldn't have started if I had my wish ... couldn't wait to leave.' Marion did leave school at fourteen and although she attended Wangaratta Technical School one day per week to learn dressmaking, she spent most of her time looking after her mother who was poorly.

Her parents had a small parcel of land on which they had two or three cows, chooks and a large fruit and vegetable garden. Marion milked their cows (as well as helping Grandmother Tressider milk her cows at Meadow Creek) and assisted in the vegetable

garden. With the produce from the garden, Marion would preserve fruit and make jams.

On 21 May 1949, Marion married John James William Maddison at Moyhu and moved to Mt Beauty. She recalls:

'I have always been a country person but never had anything to do with cattle going to the mountains until I married in 1949. Our cattle then going onto Mt Bogong and the only way to get there was per horse and food in pack bags on the pack horses.

Several days before the men left, the wives were busy making plum puddings, apple pies, cooking silverside ad legs of lamb. It kept better cooked as there was no ice boxes to put it in those days.

First night out I'd send a supply of meat balls and a tin of tomato soup for them to heat and add meat balls - a packet of spaghetti to cook and add to meat and soup. Then you had to remember a tin opener, plates, cutlery, bread, bacon, eggs, pots and pans, dripping, candles, matches, sauce, kerosene, first aid kit and a hundred and one other things - frying pan, pots of different sizes.

Then there were the blankets, towels, soap, toothpaste and brushes and of course anything that was forgotten, it was usually the wives fault. And to know how much food to send was a problem as they never know how many days they would be away.

It was harder in Jack's mother and father's time. They often told me they went to Albury two or three times a year in a cart or whatever. First day, they would go to Gundowring and stay at Jack's grandparents, the Keats place; the next day, change horses and go on to Albury and stay at a boarding house. Next day do the shopping - a 150lb bag of flour, 50lb bag of sugar, big tins of tea, cocoa, coffee, ... everything was bought in bulk. They would stay another night in Albury, then start off for Gundowring. Again stay the night, change horses and lead off home to 'The Island' (now Mt Beauty).

And I suppose Jack's grandparents, George and Henrietta had it harder than they did. George was one of the first to take cattle onto the Bogongs.

Several years ago the cattle moved off the Bogongs and on to the high plains. That wasn't as far to travel and the horses could be trucked to Howman's Gap and ridden from there. The four-wheel drive could be driven to the hut. Now they

are all above Rocky Valley and with a fairly comfortable hut.

Our three sons take cattle up and the six [grand] children also go, they can all ride and love up there.

I always hated when they arrived home and everything had to be put away - if anything was left. Butter with twigs and bits of gum leaves in it, the same with the jar of jam. And the clothes, sometimes sopping wet and sweaty and the smell would knock you down. Also the blankets had to be washed.

It is done much easier now they have ice boxes to keep the meat fresh, also milk and they take gas barbeques. If they run out of anything they have mobile phones and their wives can take extra up.'

Barbara Ryan nee Wylie was born on 7 March 1929 at Wangaratta. She was raised on her parents farm at Cheshunt and attended school there. When she was ten years old, Barbara went to Wangaratta High School until she was sixteen years old. At that time, Barbara left to teach at Bright Higher Elementary School, where she was semi-trained by the teachers. Barbara recalls that some of the students were older than herself! Among them were Ronnie Briggs, John Hall and Nan Barrett (now Mrs John Hall).

After Bright, Barbara taught at Wandiligong, Wodonga West (where she was the only teacher), then went onto Teachers College at Bendigo. Completing her studies, Barbara was appointed to Tallarook School - a position she held for a few years until her appointment to Cheshunt School in 1952.

In 1966, Barbara married Frank Ryan and their daughter Roselea was born later in 1968 and son Leonard in 1974. Barbara managed to juggle full time teaching with raising a family and supporting Frank on the farm. When Frank was away with the cattle, Barbara recalls that she was the one who pumped water, fed the dogs and chooks, and looked after the garden. Barbara always worried about the bulls and 'prayed that they didn't get out or into the wrong paddock!'

As the years have passed she has become accustomed to Frank being away. In the early days there 'was uncertainty of when they would get back and you'd start to wonder if they were alright. I used to worry, but not anymore.'

Getting food for Frank was not really a problem - Frank had been batching for many years and usually arranged his own supplies. Although, as Barbara tells it, Grandmother Ryan probably would have got things ready for him when Frank first started going with Alan Bennie.

Barbara retired from teaching in 1974, at that time she was the longest serving teacher with the Victorian Education Department. Barbara enjoys her retirement from teaching, but still plays a pivotal role in the Ryan household, especially when Frank and Leonard are away with the cattle.

Doris Myrtle Ryder nee Blewett was born on 18 July 1913 at Canberra. She attended Narrabundah school, then Telopa Park school before leaving at about fourteen or fifteen years. With her family she moved to Uriarra and soon after started work as a housemaid at the Gundaroo Wine Saloon.

While working at Goulburn, Myrtle and a friend came to Tallangatta for a holiday. There she met Syd Ryder who had in 1937 started work for Gippsland and Northern. Myrtle got a job at the Tallangatta Hotel and on the 15 July 1940 she married Syd Ryder.

They moved to Wodonga and Ken, their eldest, was born the following year, followed by Jeanette in 1944. At the time of their marriage Syd's nine year old daughter from his first marriage also came to live with Syd and Myrtle.

When Ken was little, the family moved to Sandy Creek where Syd went into a partnership with Ben Cooper. From Sandy Creek, they went to live in Briggs' house at Dederang where Syd and Ben continued their association. Part of this association entailed going to the Bogong High Plains with the cattle.

In 1952, Syd and Myrtle purchased their own farm on the Dederang Gap where they milked twenty cows. At that time, Syd had gained a lease on the high plains and started to take his own cattle, although Ben Cooper and Syd continued to go to the Bogong High Plains together until Ben's death in 1973. Syd continued taking his cattle to the high plains until his retirement in 1971.

The following recollections were transcribed from a recording made by Sue Ryder with Myrtle Ryder, Jeanette Ozolins and Dorothy Andersen on 24 December 1997. Myrtle recalls:



Included in this photograph are Grandma Ryder, Thelma Johnson, Myrtle Ryder, Colleen Martin, Diana and Jeanette Ozolins.



Myrtle and Syd Ryder with their children Jeanette and Ken.

'... In the early days, I stayed home and looked after Ken and Jeanette. Then when we went to the Dederang Gap ... built our own house, milked twenty cows, sold the cream to the Kiewa Butter Factory ... I milked the cows on my own when Syd was away. Ken and Jeanette helped too.

Food. Syd was a sweet tooth ... always liked his biscuits and cakes. I always made a plum pudding - he always took a boiled plum pudding. He liked stewed fruit with lots of sugar ... used to make nut loaves ... sliced with butter. Tin fruit ... didn't really eat fresh fruit.

Potatoes, pumpkin ... *onions*? No, Syd didn't like onions ... meat, potatoes, bread, jam ... tins of camp pie ... porridge - always had to have his porridge ... especially in winter.

Chicory coffee - Chico ... Dad used to take condensed milk and coffee in tubes ... yes, latter on.

He used to take meat - cooked meat ... mutton or beef - anything - *silverside*? - yes.

Bread? Did you make it or send flour? Bread ... but bread. It was always those high tin loaves ... Keith Dewar used to make it at Kiewa and he'd deliver it.

Butter? Buy it. Jeanette - 'I remember you making it lots of times.' Yes, but not when I was at Briggs' ... milk and eggs came from Briggs' ... oh yes, I used to make butter when we milked the cows.

Butter was [put] in screw top bottles, so was the jam ... used to make my own jam. Sauce was in a bottle ... used to make my own sauce ... wrap newspapers around it.

And they used to take all that in the pack. I'd give the food to Syd and he'd pack it ... oh no! I couldn't pack it! I wouldn't do the right thing!

Syd was away on the plains when Jeanette was born. I was stopping with Syd's mother in Wodonga ... Syd only got as far as Dederang and they told him he had a daughter.

Scared? Syd would go to the plains and while on my own, used to tie a dog at the front door ... I was scared ... to let me know when people were coming ... when Syd was away, always tie a dog up.

I killed the first snake ... the snake in the lane. I don't know where Syd was ... I got the shovel ... of course I bashed him and bashed him ... of course when Syd got home I said 'oh look, I killed a snake' ... oh he put his arms around me and cuddled me and kissed me ... he was so pleased to thank that I killed a snake ... Another one on Mrs Patterson's gate after ... didn't get any kisses and cuddles for that!

I remember one day we came home, Syd was on the plains, we used to be over the hill where we used to milk. We came home to this big black snake at the bottom of the ramp. And he went under the

house and somebody said play a mouth organ - they'll come out if you play a mouth organ. So right - we got the mouth organ ... look that darn snake did come out and Ken killed it ... Ken was only young ... not old enough to go to the plains.

Syd and Ken spent the summer of 1962 and the summer of 1963 up there keeping the cattle off the revegetated grass areas along the aquaducts ... we had an old Land Rover and used to take food up to the men ... I remember the brakes failed one time coming home ... but we made it to the (sec) gate safely and the man said ... get your son to look at them ... but we got home.'

Myrtle was active in the Dederang CWA, Dederang Presbyterian Church and the Dederang Tennis Club. She enjoyed dancing and regularly attended the local dances. Syd died in 1997 and Myrtle now lives in Wodonga and is much loved by her children and grandchildren.

Mary Patricia Kathleen Weston nee Higgs

was born in 1910, to a father who was a miner and mother who bore thirteen children. She attended Bright School where she attained her Leaving Certificate.

On a holiday in Melbourne with her older brother (he was 24 years older than her and acted as a father figure after her father died when she was little), he saw an advertisement for a Junior Teacher at a school. They immediately attended an interview and at sixteen, she gained the position. As her mother was widowed and living Bright, the Education Department transferred Mary to Bright on compassionate grounds.

Mary was a talented pianist, loved dancing and attended the local dances, played golf and tennis, liked swimming and was deeply religious. Mary met Eric Weston at a local dance - he was also a good dancer.



Mary Weston



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In 1936 Mary and Eric married and shifted out to the farm at Eurobin. Mary as a 'townie' never learnt to ride a horse or drive a vehicle. She missed the townlife and felt isolated living on the farm. Mary raised four children and died in 1989.

Her eldest daughter, Kathleen, provided the following recollections:

'It would be harder than anyone younger that fifty to imagine working trips to the high plains in the 1930s and 1940s. I could bring out a long list of 'NOs', especially trucks, also eskies, mobile phones, sleeping bags, the odd VB or bottle of Scotch, but I am sure the lack of creature comforts brought out the resourcefulness of the cattlemen.

As everything had to be carried by packhorse, the emphasis was on careful packing and travelling light. A good packhorse, often a retired stockhorse, was vital to take basic provisions, bedding, chaff for the horses and salt for the cattle.

One of Dad's packhorses (in my childhood) had made so many trips to the plains that he could plod home to Eurobin completely unsupervised. His arrival in Weston's Lane after mustering was our signal that Dad would be home within that day. What a treat that was when Dad had been away ten days or so at mustering time, as he dismounted he'd take Mum and we elder three in a big hug and playfully rub his whiskery face along our cheeks.

Back to the provisions - a large piece of corned silverside (Red Gum Log in Dad's parlance) would be cooked the evening before, to be packed at daybreak. Dad was a neat and efficient packer, using oilskins and newspapers to secure the several loaves of unsliced bread, raw potatoes and onions, tea, sugar, homemade jam and sauce, Kraft cheddar, usually a Maderia cake, wax Vestas, soap, a small towel, candles, tin plates, enamel cups, sometimes bacon and the homemade butter pressed into Mellin's food jar.

Any leftovers were brought home - much to the annoyance of wives - perhaps not feeding the high plains rats was a consideration.

Changes of clothing were kept to a minimum - however in later years after severe dermatitis, Dad allowed himself a pair of PJ pants.

I vividly remember our entire back verandah taken up by heavy leather packsaddle bags, grey blankets, leather leggings, riding boots with spurs, assorted hardware including an axe with the blade

covered and neatly rolled oilskins, the evening before a trip to the plains.

The wives, including Mum and Grandma Weston, helped with the preparation and assembling of provisions, stayed at home with the children, milked cows, fed poultry and generally kept the home fires burning as mustering was a very strenuous and sometimes dangerous activity.

My mother as a 'townie' was genuinely fearful when Dad was at the plains. She would start chaining gates and locking doors long before dark and would keep me up for company 'till late at night writing (or re-writing) letters to her sisters interstate.

Although the high plains area is not far from home, there was very little communication - for example, if there was a death or serious problem at home, a mounted constable from Bright would ride out to the Top.

On the December trips taking the cattle out, Dad would sometimes catch trout in the icy mountain creeks when he was about to head home. He would wrap them in bracken, then perhaps a washed superbag and oilskin. As soon as he arrived, the fish would be washed in salted water and next morning breakfast would be delicious drown and rainbow trout with snowy white flesh - so different from the 'pink mashed potato' of farmed trout.

In retrospect, with the constraints of no motor transport or refrigeration, 'Operation High Plains' was as efficient as cold be. I remember Dad promptly unsaddling and feeding tired horses, foot dogs, being lovingly welcomed by his family, then enjoying a hot bath and shave.'

**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 1ST OCTOBER 1999.**

PRESENT:

Stuart Hicks, Harry Ryder, Sue Silvers, Ron Briggs, Frank Ryan, Roger Hollis, Bill Crump, Jeannine-Renee Bonney, Pauline Venn, Simon Turner, Brian Higgins, Bill Cumming, Steven Higgins, Doug Treasure, Jim Commins, Chris Stoney, Bruce McCormack, Neville Wright, Steve Ware, Cora Davey, Ros Andrews and Vince Phelan.

The Chairman, Harry Ryder, welcomed all members and associate members and particularly noted the presence of Mr Vince Phelan who was the first Central Council Secretary. The Chairman declared the meeting open at 11.20 a.m.

APOLOGIES were received from Ross Brown, Peter McCormack, John Andrews, Ben Treasure, John Treasure, Michelle Shaw, Barry Fitzgerald, Graham Connley and John Rogers.

MINUTES of the previous Annual General Meeting of the Association as printed in *Voice of the Mountains* No 11 of 1999 and circulated to all members and associate members were confirmed as correct on the motion of Brian Higgins seconded by Jim Commins. Carried.

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

It was with great sadness that we learned of the death of Kevin Kelly on the 30th August 1999. Kevin was one of the foundation members of our Association and served as Omeo delegate to Central Council for many years.

Meeting Kevin was always a pleasure whether it was on the Bogong High Plains at mustering time, at a meeting, or a cattle sale. He always had a funny anecdote and managed to leave you with a laugh.

The size of the crowd at his funeral was a testament to his standing in the community with a large guard of honour being made up of Mountain Cattlemen, Angling Club, Golf Club and Tennis Club.

The recent election result came as quite a shock to most of us and as we wait for the result of the Frankston vote to see who will form government, we can reflect on the possibility of having to work with a Labor Government. Traditionally Labor has tended to be pro the Greens and less sympathetic to the cause of the Mountain Cattlemen.

The consequences following the Caledonia fire have been the issues taking most of the Association's energies over the past twelve months. Parks Victoria prohibited the use of the grazing areas for the 1998/1999 season, as it was considered that the area had not recovered sufficiently to allow the cattle to return. Parks Victoria has conducted two separate assessments of the vegetation in relation to the fire area. It was no surprise to the Association that the first assessment found that where the fire had burned the hottest, the vegetation recovery was not as advanced as on the grazed areas. Parks Victoria conducted its second vegetation condition assessment in May at the request of the Association. Unfortunately, by the addition of new quadrants and the failure to resample all the original sites, the data obtained from this second assessment cannot be relied upon and would appear to have been a waste of time and resources. There will be a further assessment in October and we hope, following this, that cattle will be able to return to the grazing areas.

The Association had a scientific review made of the Parks Victoria vegetation condition assessments, and it was found that recovery was pronounced in all areas. It was also noted that difficult to manage factors such as severe frost, snowfalls, drought and grazing by rabbits, hares, kangaroos, wallabies and deer would have significantly greater influence on the successful rehabilitation of the area. Members of the Association are becoming increasingly aware of the growing number of deer in the high country. It has been noted that deer browse on the mid-story

canopy shrubs which are slower growing, and as such, are of concern to Parks Victoria.

Some excellent work has been achieved by members of the Association in the Mountain Cattlemen's Weed Initiative. Particular mention should go to Simon Turner and the Omeo Branch for the effort put in that area. Also mention must be made of the work done on blackberries on the grazing lease occupied by the Hall family who have done spraying on many kilometres of country that was heavily infested. On a recent drive along the Upper Buckland Road I was very impressed to see our signs in place stating that these blackberries had been sprayed by members of the Mountain Cattlemen's Association. This sends a very good message in an area that receives such high visitor numbers, as does the Upper Buckland Valley.

I would strongly urge all branches to keep up the good work and keep this program going.

The North East Forest Management Plan is a sub-plan of the Commonwealth's Regional Forest Agreement. It has finally been completed after two years of deliberations. Throughout the whole process the grazing industry managed to keep a very low profile which, with the benefit of hindsight, was the appropriate strategy. The process was mainly involved in discussing timber matters although cattlemen from the North East and Mansfield met with the planning team on two occasions to peruse the plan - once early in the process and again after the draft maps had been produced. The concern was always that Special Protection Zones would be created, which would have a negative impact on cattle grazing areas. SPZs are created for particular conservation values. Finally it was revealed that the intention was that grazing rights would not be affected where SPZs were declared for reasons of old growth or owls etc. Members of the Association came out of the procedure unscathed - the SPZs afflicting grazing were more in the foothill country towards Chiltern.

The Internet has become the latest battleground for all issues. The Association has had information on the Net for a couple of years now, and it has proved to be a great asset. It has helped Sue Silvers who previously had to provide printed information to a multitude of students requesting material for projects. Our opponents have a vast amount of anti-grazing, material on the Net, much of it on very elaborate sites containing

pictures. Any student seeking information on alpine grazing for a school project is going to find a large amount of anti-grazing material, as well as our material. This is an aspect of our public image that we cannot afford to neglect, especially if we are going to hold our present position in the public opinion stakes.

I had the pleasure of representing the Association at the VFF Annual Conference this year. The conference is always attended by a large number of rural politicians and there are many opportunities to meet with other rural people who are interested in our cause. I would urge all members of the MCAV who are not members of the VFF to get involved in the organisation. The VFF has always been extremely supportive of the Mountain Cattlemen, and with their resources and political bargaining power, we are sure to have an ally in any future negotiations with the Government. This was never more apparent than when we called on the VFF to assist in the price setting negotiations with Parks Victoria over the licence renewals.

Mansfield Branch is to be congratulated for the running of an excellent Get Together on the 16th and 17th January 1999. An outstanding financial result was achieved by keeping a very tight reign on costs, and the hard work by all the members was very much appreciated.

I have been approached by an author who wishes to produce a book on a cross section of families involved in alpine grazing. As well as profiles, the book will contain numerous colour illustrations.

An application has been made to the Public Records Office for a grant to produce a free colour brochure on the huts of the Bogong High Plains. My wife, Sue, has been working on this project which is proposed to produce a brochure which will be placed in Information Centres around the region.

I would like to thank the following people for their help and assistance during the year and over the last three years while I have been President.

Sue Silvers for her untiring efforts as Secretary of the Association, Debbie Squires and Linda Barraclough for their hard work in producing *Voice of the Mountains*, and Pauline Venn for her excellent work in the marketing area. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Stuart Hicks, who as Vice President has been very supportive.

SECRETARY/TREASURER'S REPORT

I am pleased to present my 14th Annual Report to members and associate members.

Full membership to the Association increased this year with the addition of Mr Bob Dunsmuir and his family, and we welcome them into the Association. A drive for new associate members has increased those numbers by 68 new families. The associate membership now numbers 634. We hope associate memberships will continue to increase during the year in order to boost our funds and our strong, committed support base. Subscriptions for the year 1999/2000 were due at the end of July. The majority of associate memberships have been renewed, full member subscriptions are slow to come in.

Central Council has met three times this year, and has continued to give strong direction for the Association. The main issues for discussion have been the affect on licensees of the Caledonia fire in January 1999, the 1999 and the year 2000 Get Togethers, the weeds initiative, and ideas to increase funding. The Association was informed by Parks Victoria in June this year that it had funds and was developing a research design for a study into the numbers and effect of deer in the high country. We welcome this initiative by Parks Victoria and will give our full support to the study.

I have continued to represent the Association at the Public Land Council of Victoria meetings. The issues of concern are those which also affect, or have the potential to affect, members of our Association. Access and administration of public land and concerns with native title being the two major topics.

In March the Government appointed a new Alpine Advisory Committee, and I will be representing the Association on that body. The first meeting is to be held next week, and for those members with grazing licence transfers pending I am pleased to say that these transfers are on the Agenda, along with the proposal to rebuild the Tawonga cooking hut which burned down earlier in the year.

I present the financial statements for the year ended 30th June 1999 to members. It will be noted that there is a small increase in income for the current year, and that there was a modest reduction in costs. The Association's finances are on an acceptable level.

I wish to thank Harry Ryder for his hard work over the past three years. We have had plenty of worries, but also plenty of laughs along the way. Thanks also to members of the Central Council for their support over the past twelve months.

MARKETING OFFICER'S REPORT

It's hard to believe another year has come and is almost gone, and I find myself writing another annual report to present to members - it will be the last time this century.

As we are all aware the biggest single annual event on the marketing calendar is the Get Together. Sheepland Flat was the location, and the patrons were eager to show their support. Gross sales for the weekend exceeded \$14,000.

The larger marquee was a little daunting at first glance, but we managed to fully utilise the space by breaking down the merchandise into three sections. We had the liquor department where people could purchase their port crocks and stubby holders, then there was the novelty department, and the men's and women's apparel which was headed with great enthusiasm by our own European fashion watcher x Jeannine-Rene Bonney. There really was something for everyone.

As expected, mail orders have been slow. We will continue to enclose the mail order form in every Newsletter. This will give those people who are unable to attend the Get Togethers an opportunity to purchase our merchandise.

At the time of preparing this report, stock levels are low, with a couple of items completely depleted. I was pleased to have the ordering levels right with the special Get Together T shirts. Ordering for these shirts can be a gamble with the need to sell all the stock over the course of the weekend. Stock levels will be boosted in July and August ensuring a complete range is on hand in preparation for next year's Get Together and to fill any mail orders that may come in.

At present I am conducting a project calling for expressions of interest from craft oriented people for the supply of unique items to sell on a consignment basis. The theme must relate to the high country or cattle grazing but is not restricted to either. I am hoping this project will be well received and that I can offer Get Together shoppers

an alternative to our standard range. New items will effectively boost revenue for the Association.

It is difficult to find new items to introduce as most novelty suppliers require minimum orders of 500 units. In view of the popularity of the Cattlemen's Hut placemat/coaster sets offered for the first time at Sheeppark Flat, I have been investigating photographic gift cards and am confident of offering these at the next Get Together.

The Mount Beauty Visitors Service Centre contacted me earlier in the year with a proposal to purchase stock. I followed this up and have been notified by the Manager that he will look at our range at the end of the ski season. I will also approach the Mt Butler Chalet Management with a suggestion that they stock some of our merchandise in the Off Piste shop for the coming summer months. It seems a reasonable proposition in view of the bronze cattleman monument commissioned by Mr and Mrs Rino Grollo, and Mr Grollo's interest in our history.

Once again special people need special thanks. I express my gratitude to Peter and Judy McCormack for all their care with towing the marketing caravan to the Get Together site, and to Terry Murphy for its safe return. Dot Corcoran is the proprietor of Graphic Screen Printing in Merrijig and is responsible for the purchasing and screen printing of all our windcheaters, T shirts and singlets. Thanks Dot for all your help.

Don Porter is the man responsible for the design on the port crock and Get Together T shirts. Don is an honorary Associate member, and we are very fortunate for his talents.

The marketing marquee at any Get Together cannot operate without help. Offers of help in the marketing tent at Sheeppark Flat were disappointing. I propose the host committee implement a roster type arrangement with my assistance for the next year's Get Together to ensure this does not happen again. At least eight people are needed at the commencement of trading on the Saturday morning. We operated with three at Sheeppark Flat.

I gratefully acknowledge the assistance given by the small group led by Judy McCormack who took up the challenge of serving in a stifling hot marquee, giving Jeannine and me a much needed break,

My biggest acknowledgment goes to my cousin Jeannine-Rene and her husband Fred Pascale.

McCORMACK'S MOUNTAIN VALLEY TRAIL RIDES

Ride with us to the high country through scenic tree-ferned valleys and river crossings to the head of the King River. See Lake Cobbler, Mt Stirling and take in the breathtaking views from Craig's Hut used in 'The Man from Snowy River' films.

WEEKEND RIDES OR LONGER

FROM 2 HOUR to FULL DAY RIDES

We operate all year round
(day rides include lunch and we cater for families)

BOOKINGS ESSENTIAL

Bruce and Debra McCormack
12 Reynolds Street, Mansfield, Vic. 3722

Phone 03-5775 2886

Mobile 018 573 708

Without the all day, all weekend assistance of these two special people who equally share my enthusiasm for marketing, stemming from their own business as wholesale fruit and vegetable traders, the weekend would not have been the success it was.

This concludes the marketing report for 1999.

SETTING OF FULL MEMBER AND ASSOCIATE MEMBER SUBSCRIPTION

After discussion it was moved Doug Treasure and seconded Brian Higgins that Full membership subscriptions for the year 2000/2001 be \$1.50 per head with a minimum of \$100.00. Carried.

It was agreed that Associate membership subscriptions should remain at the current level i.e.. Family membership \$30.00, Single membership \$20.00 and Student/Pensioner \$10.00

Moved Brian Higgins seconded Bill Cumming that the Policy of the Association state that in the

case of Associate members only the Gate fee at Get Togethers shall comprise a \$10.00 discount for financial Associate Members. Carried.

It was agreed that this Policy should be restated in the next Newsletter.

FIXING OF HONORARIUMS

Moved Doug Treasure seconded Brian Higgins that the following Honorariums apply for the year 2000/2001:

- President: \$3,000 plus expenses.
- Vice President: \$1,000 plus expenses.
- Special Projects Officer: \$1,000 plus expenses.
- Secretary/Treasurer: \$20,000 plus expenses.
- Marketing Officer: \$1,000 plus expenses.

Carried.

ELECTION OF OFFICE BEARERS

Harry Ryder remained in the Chair for the election of Office Bearers as he was not standing for re-election in any position.

President - Stuart Hicks nominated by Doug Treasure, declined.

Simon Turner nominated by Jim Commins was elected.

Vice President - Brian Higgins nominated by Ron Briggs was elected.

Special Projects Officers - Jim Commins nominated by Harry Ryder was elected.

Harry Ryder nominated by Brian Higgins was elected.

Secretary/Treasurer - Sue Silvers nominated by Doug Treasure was elected.

Marketing Officer - Pauline Venn nominated by Sue Silvers was elected.

APPOINTMENT OF AUDITOR

Mr Bill Crump was nominated and appointed Auditor for the coming year.

DRAWING OF PRIZES FOR FINANCIAL ASSOCIATE MEMBER, AND NEW ASSOCIATE MEMBER

Ros Andrews consented to draw the two winning names:

The winner for the Snowy Range Horseback tour for a weekend for two to the value of \$500 was won by Ms Wendy Symons (financial Associate member.)

The winner of the High Plains Droving weekend for two to the value of \$500 was won by Mr and Mrs K. Ingram (new Associate members).

There being no further business the Chairman closed the meeting at 12:30 p.m.

**David and Dianna Guy
invite you to stay at the**

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Letter to the Editor

Dear Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria,

I have been meaning to write, thanking you for the news letter I received several weeks ago, giving me a little information of the association activities, presumably also, to acknowledge my donation to the cause. Small it was, but given with pleasure. I am a frequent visitor to Australia and have enjoyed many holiday sin your lovely country as well as enjoying the company of my son, his wife and a very young grandson. Also, a daughter and five grandsons, all citizens of the land of blue skies. What the heck you may say has this to do with the cattlemen's association? Nothing really. About 15 or 16 years ago maybe more, one of my grandsons purchased a yellow sticker of the association, for me to place on the back of my car when I returned to the U.K. This I did. And one has been displayed continually since. I love the interest that it has stimulated and continues to stimulate. I am very used to the fact that people all but go on their hands and knees to read same. Very often one of your countrymen will recognise it and conversation will result. Or a passing car will sound off, horn tooting. One discovers, as they overtake, a transit sleeper van on holiday from Aus. So it gets around. Importantly to me, in my 79th year it conjures up in my memory my first ever visit to Australia, the High Country, a cattle drive, hundreds of Hereford cows (or so it appeared), dogs all over, rugged cattlemen or drovers, the thud of hooves on the hillside. Along with the sound of squeaking leather on leather, not a sight one is likely to come across here in our part of the world. Strangely enough, this last visit I was unable to purchase a sticker in the Bairnsdale area as a replacement for the tatty one on the car, they just manage to last the year in our climate. So the enclosure is more than useful.

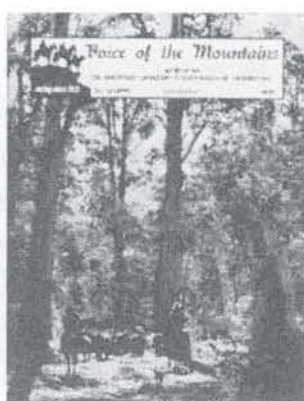
Best wishes

*M.A.B. Jarritt
West Sussex
England*

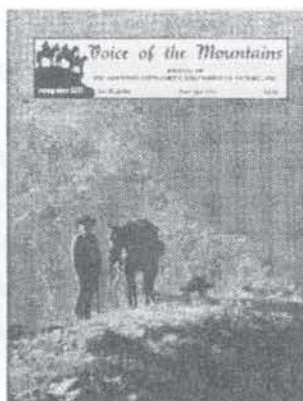
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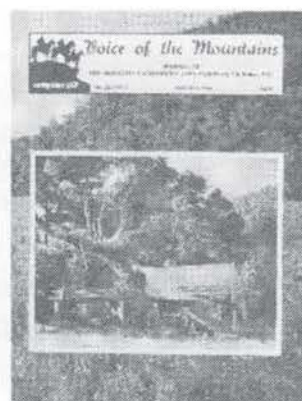
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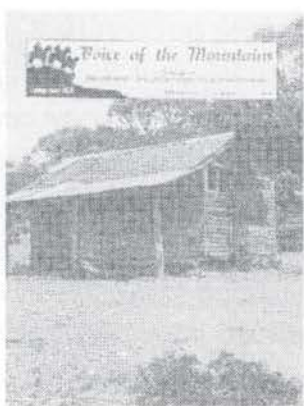
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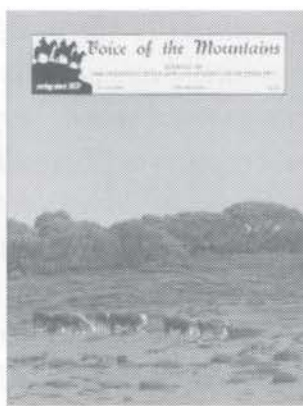
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No. 22 \$4.50

Back issues are available by post from: *Voice of the Mountains*, P.O. Box 86, Bairnsdale Vic 3875

The Committee of *Voice of the Mountains* would like to thank everyone for the support received this year particularly Rowena Turner, Dennis McNamara, Brian Higgins, Doug Treasure, Don Porter, Neil Cox, Harold Coverdale and Peter Lakeman. The **very** timely assistance given by Alma Angus, Lorna and Gil Macfarlane was the difference between you reading this and no *Voice of the Mountains* this year. **Poems, stories and photos suitable for *Voice* are always welcome, but please give us time to assess it by sending it in by the end of the October before the Get Together.**

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.

