



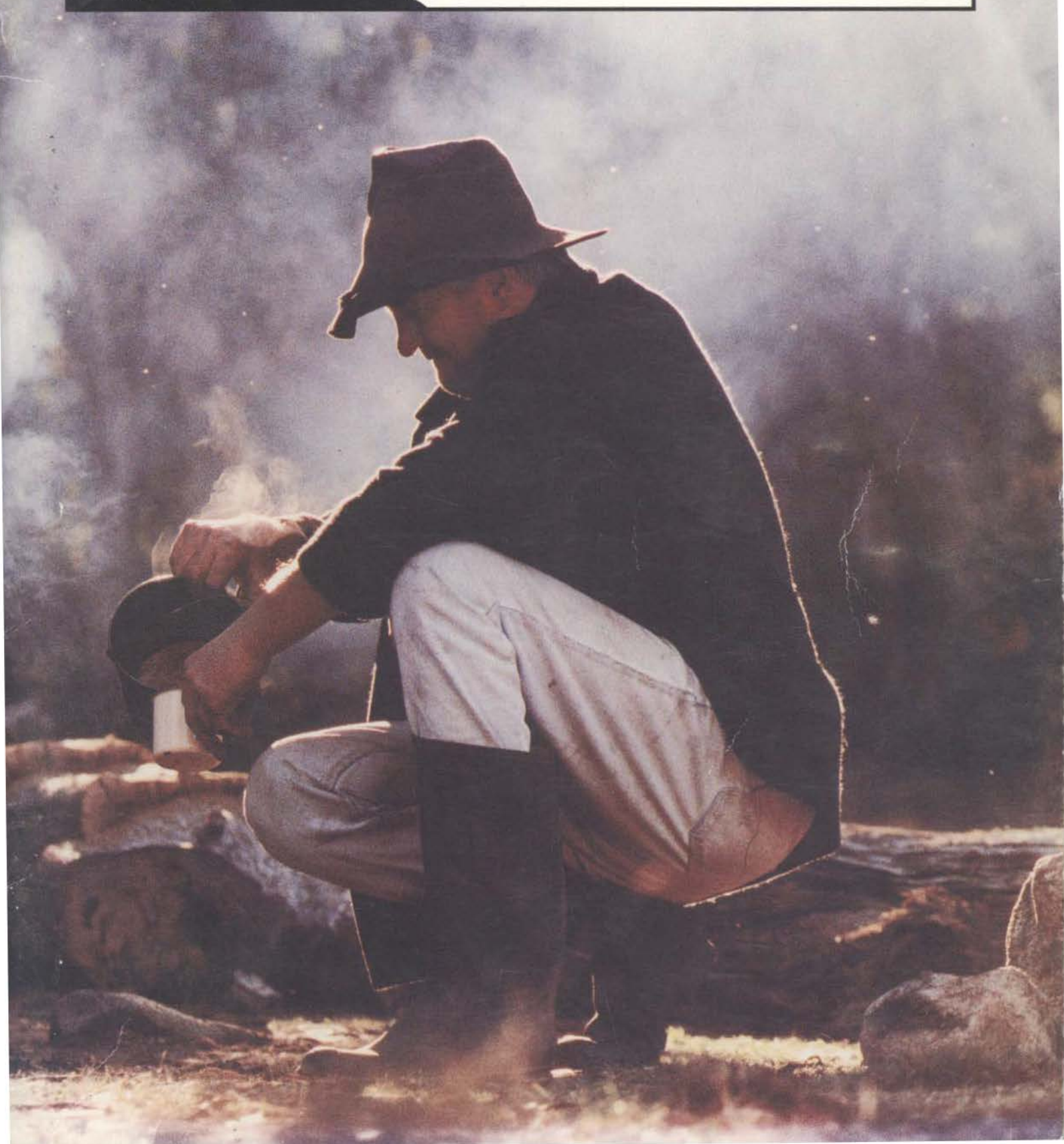
Voice of the Mountains

JOURNAL OF
THE MOUNTAIN CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA INC.

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Voice of the Mountains

Journal of the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria Inc.

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Editorial Committee: Debra Squires, Linda Barraclough and Sue Silvers

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COVER

'Morning Campfire' taken by Nicole Emanuel was the winner of the Open section of the MCAV Photographic Competition in 1977.

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President's Message 2001

Welcome to the 24th issue of *Voice of The Mountains* which was first published in 1972 for the purpose of collating and disseminating information in regard to the Association's activities and archival material, for which the Association is always appreciative of new contributions. Since the official formation of the Mountain District Cattleman's Association of Victoria (now Mountain Cattleman's Association of Victoria) in November 1969, many articles and photographs recording the history and present day activities of mountain cattle grazing have been published.

During the past twelve months the Association has been continuing to assist our members who were affected by the Caledonia Fire of 1998. Cattle have not been returned to these licences since the fire, which is creating extreme hardship for those licensees whose home properties have been suffering from prolonged drought conditions. The MCAV has been expressing concerns of the lack of pre- and post-fire data in respect to, bare ground (expressed as a percentage), vegetation cover and condition of the bog environments. The licensees, for the past two grazing seasons, have offered to allocate 70% of their grazing allocation to the licences that were fire affected, so as to enable grazing behaviour and consequences to be observed and monitored, however Parks Victoria have not excepted this opportunity to develop some real scientific data on post fire grazing.

Over the past twelve months the Association has been placed under difficult financial pressure, mainly due to the need to defend our position against those who are funded by the public purse. This position is not going to change, so in order to continue to adequately represent our members we have found it necessary to increase subscriptions to Full Members and a slight increase in Associate fees to cover costs.

In May of this year we have an opportunity to once again ride through the streets of Melbourne as participants in the 'Nation on Parade', to celebrate Federation and the opening of Parliament 100 years ago. Our part in the parade is the reenactment of 205 mounted stockmen dressed in Rob Roy tartan shirts, moleskin trousers, brown leather leggings, felt hat and a plaited stock whip draped over one arm. This will be an opportunity for members and associates to come together and show the world that the culture and heritage of the high country is very much alive and well today, after 165 years.

Finally I would like to take this opportunity to thank the editorial committee, Debra Squires, Linda Barraclough and Sue Silvers for producing this issue of *Voice of The Mountains*.

Simon Turner

Cobungra's Annual Bull Sale

Up on high where dingo's howl
The snow falls often frequent
A baby calf has just been born,
His mother licks him decent.
In twelve months time of his life
We'll know his future then,
Taken by truck to Omeo
And displayed in a saleyard pen.

He'll have a name up on a rail
Giving details of his birth,
The size of what his scrotum is
and the length around his girth.
He maybe sired by Ironbark Four,
the Dam Cobungra Colly,
But when he's sold to do his job
I hope his progeny is jolly.

Buyers come from Australia wide,
Look at ones that take their eye
And checks the catalogue for his herd
before he decides to buy.
The auctioneer calls all the bids,
In a voice that's loud and hollahs
Give us a start gentlemen please
Around three thousand dollars.

The old cane stick hammers down
When the bidding has been done,
The crowd move onto another pen
Until they sell the odd last one.
But to be up there amongst the throng,
Amid the young and the frail,
Come to the Omeo Saleyards friends,
See Cobungra's Annual Bull Sale.

Johnny Faithfull

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

Cobungra Station

John R. Grenville and others

The Grays in 1851 were resident at Pelican Station, about three miles from Wangaratta. George Gray snr had first operated a station in the Monaro district in association with Ben Warby, and it appears likely that he came over with cattle from the Monaro to Wangaratta at the same time as, and in association with, the Warbys. In making this decision, no doubt he was also influenced by that of John Crisp to take up the Wahgunyah lease, at the same time, in partnership with James Foord, for the Crisp and Gray families were very close.

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

Mary had married Thomas Worcester in 1839 and they joined the family at The Pelican. However, Tom was killed at Newmarket in 1842 leaving Mary with three children, Thomas, George and Mary. In 1847, she remarried John Crisp by now himself a widower also with three surviving

children. They subsequently became the parents of two surviving children, John and Edward. John became closely associated with Cobungra and Omeo, and is the Johnny Crisp of the Dog's Grave story.

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

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

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

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

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

The cattle on The Pelican were of mixed family ownership according to the pastoral records, but because the cost of pastoral licences varied according to the number of stock owned by any proprietor,

This year marks the return of the MCAV Get Together to Victoria River adjacent Cobungra Station, where we last gathered in 1985. In 1985 the issue of *Voice of the Mountains* concentrated heavily on the history of the area and it is one issue that is constantly requested by readers of *Voice*. Only two hundred copies were ever produced so to mark our return to Victoria River we have reproduced some of the more interesting Cobungra and district articles in this issue.



George Gray
from *The Everbranching Tree* by McMahon and Gray

family nominees were no doubt substituted for the real owner George snr. In total, about 600 head were included in the drive.

The Cobungra legend has always ascribed the physical leadership of the drive to George snr, because father and son were of the same name. However he was by then, beyond such arduous activity. In November 1850, not long before the drive commenced, George received a visit at The Pelican from Bishop James Goold, the first Catholic Bishop of Melbourne. Subsequently, in his diary, the Bishop described him as ... *a man of 90 years of age ... He is very feeble, but was in the enjoyment of all his faculties.* Again, in 1901, a tombstone was uncovered behind the Royal Hotel in Wangaratta. John and Mary Crisp were the owners of this hotel at the time of George's death. The stone was inscribed with the name of George Gray, and the inscription declared that he had died at the age of 97 years and 10 months in June 1853. There is a discrepancy between the dates of the Bishop and the stone but it all adds up to George being a very old man at the time of the cattle drive to Cobungra.

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

Leaving aside the question of who physically led the cattle drive, the stock nevertheless were in large part the property of George snr, and he sent

them in the charge of his sons and stepsons to find better pastures. The end result of this was Cobungra. The story of the trek appears in the following pages and it is well known how Brown and Wells, left in charge of the cattle when the Gray and McKenzie brothers returned to Wangaratta, discovered the Bogong High Plains, making George Gray and his family the first Bogong High Plains cattlemen.

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

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

George Henry maintained the lease until 1859 when he relinquished it to Ned's father-in-law John Meighan and James Parsloe, who was also a son-in-law of John Meighan, being married to Ellen's sister, Mary. A third Meighan girl, Susannah had by this time married Edward, the younger brother of John Crisp snr and so the respective families had close ties. Another Meighan in the story is John's son, Peter, who in one version, is the hero of the Dog's Grave story. By virtue of the spelling of his name in that recording (Meehan) he was not recognised as the son of the second leasee of Cobungra as well as being a brother-in-law to Ned Gray and James Parsloe.

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

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

John Meighan married Roseannah Green (born 105) in Campsey Village, Stirling, Scotland having himself been born in Donnegal, Ireland in 1794. They migrated to Victoria first settleing at Collingwood in about 1840. Subsequently John and his family moved to Wangaratta. The Meighans had eleven children, eight girls and three boys. John died in Wangaratta in 1880, Roseannah having predeceased him by fourteen years. He appears to have been a silent partner for there is no evidence of his presence at Cobungra. His sons-in-law were apparently the real operators of the lease.

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

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

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

It appears that the advent of free selection drew the Gray family away from a direct Cobungra lease involvement. George Henry in later life



• Ned and Ellen Gray
from *The Everbranching Tree* by McMahon and Gray

continued with various pastoral interests as well as becoming the first owner of the Benambra Hotel. He died in 1910 which in terms of the father-son span represents a remarkable period of Australian history. His father was transported from Ireland in 1796 on the *Britannia* arriving at Sydney Cove in May 1797. Father and son spanned 110 years from just nine years after the arrival of the First Fleet to ten years after the advent of Australian Federation.

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

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

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

After the 1871 split, these transfers took place:
Cobungra East -

18 Sep 1871 Frederick William Drevermann
5 Jan 1878 Hans Maas & Claus Maas
16 Dec 1878 Hans Maas & Richard King
14 Aug 1884 William & Walter Coughland

Cobungra West -

25 Apr 1884 James Parsloe & Richard King

Several changes occurred until Richard Riggall purchased Cobungra about 1898. He also took over Fred Box's adjoining property and hotel. He had a new brick home built before moving in and he then lived there with his wife Ellen and the family which grew to seven sons.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For a fully annotated copy of this article see *Voice of the Mountains* No. 9 1985

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The Discovery of the Bogong High Plains

or the Legendary Cobungra Cattle Drive

The Bogong High Plains were discovered by two Wangaratta stockmen, Jim Brown and John Wells, who were employed to look after the run at Cobungra which was taken up by George Gray in 1851. Gray, accompanied by Brown, Wells and others brought his cattle to Cobungra from a property called The Pelican, near Wangaratta. The move was undertaken immediately after the bushfires of Black Thursday (13 February 1851) when it became necessary to find grass for the cattle which survived.

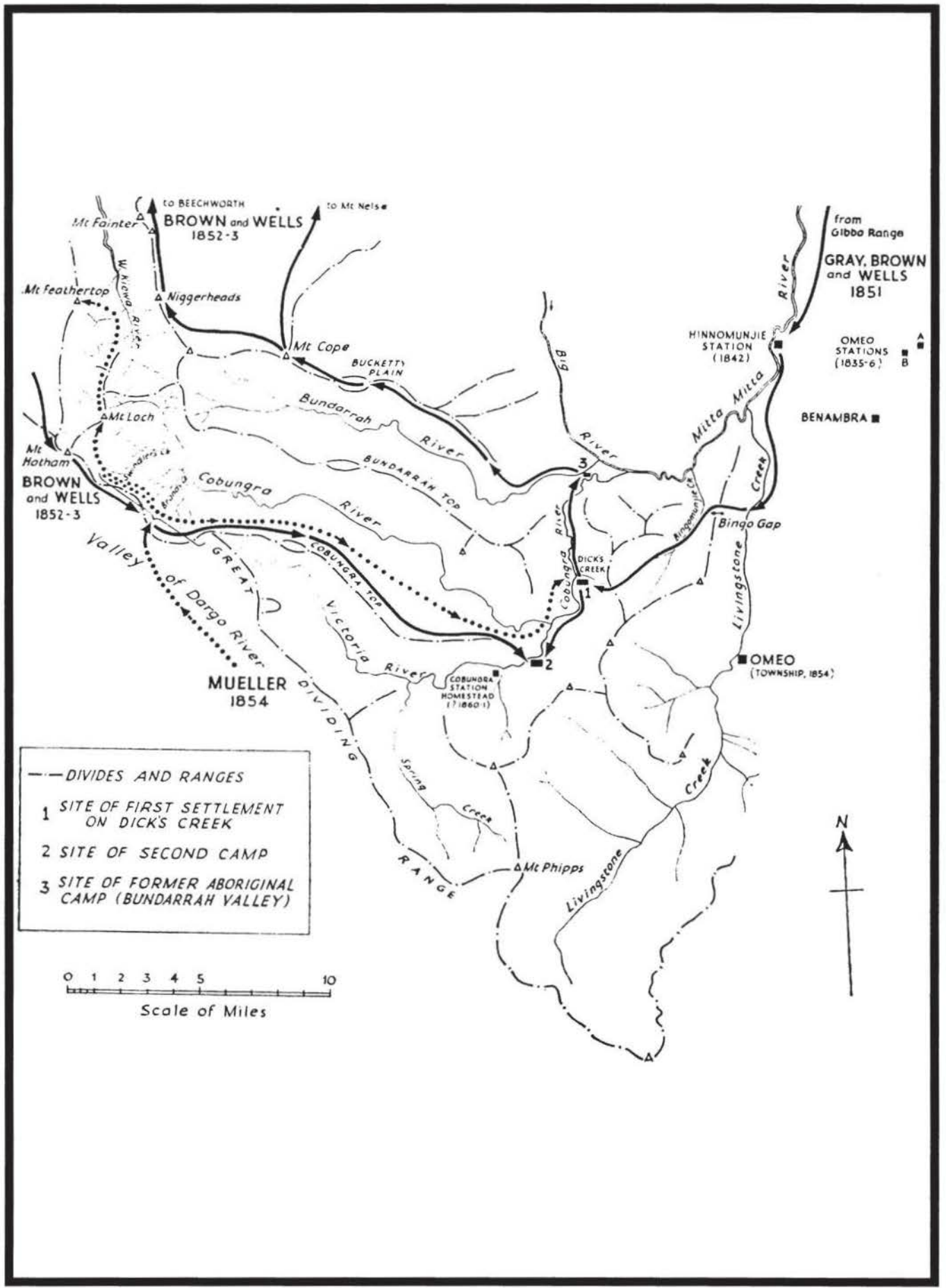
They went first to Lockharts Gap, but finding no grass there they went on to Mitta Mitta station, then held by Bowler. Again there was no grass available, but they fell in with an aboriginal called Larnie, who told them of Cobungra and offered to take them there. From Mitta Mitta they climbed the Gibbo Range, went down the other side to Hinnomunjie station, then held by Edward Crooke, then on up Livingstone Creek to the Bingo Gap. From the valley of Hinnomunjie Creek, they crossed into the valley of the Cobungra and established their first camp at Dick's Creek. In the course of the next few months they moved further upstream and settled on the Victoria River. The licence for the run is dated 4 June 1851. Its boundaries are not defined but it can be assumed that a boundary was agreed upon between it and the territory held by Hinnomunjie station.

... It appears clear, however, that Gray and his party were the first to open up the track between the Mitta Mitta and Hinnomunjie. In the next few years it was much used by miners, by the Grays themselves, and by others who took cattle to market at Beechworth. The track also provided a useful link between the north-east and the track between the Monaro and Gippsland which had been established some years earlier.

After their arrival in March 1851, Brown and Wells were left at Cobungra in charge of the cattle

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

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



Droving Cobungra Cattle to Market

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

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

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

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

Further preparations for the drive to the sales included the yarding and shoeing of the extra horses needed. Horses are always cold shod and those used for the drive had to be experienced, sure footed and sturdy. Drovers rode their own horses and as many as ten drovers were needed for the journey. Extra stock horses were required as well as five or six pack horses. Horses were not injured very often,

but accidents did happen. The extra stock horses allowed a change of mount when the drovers usual mount became tired.

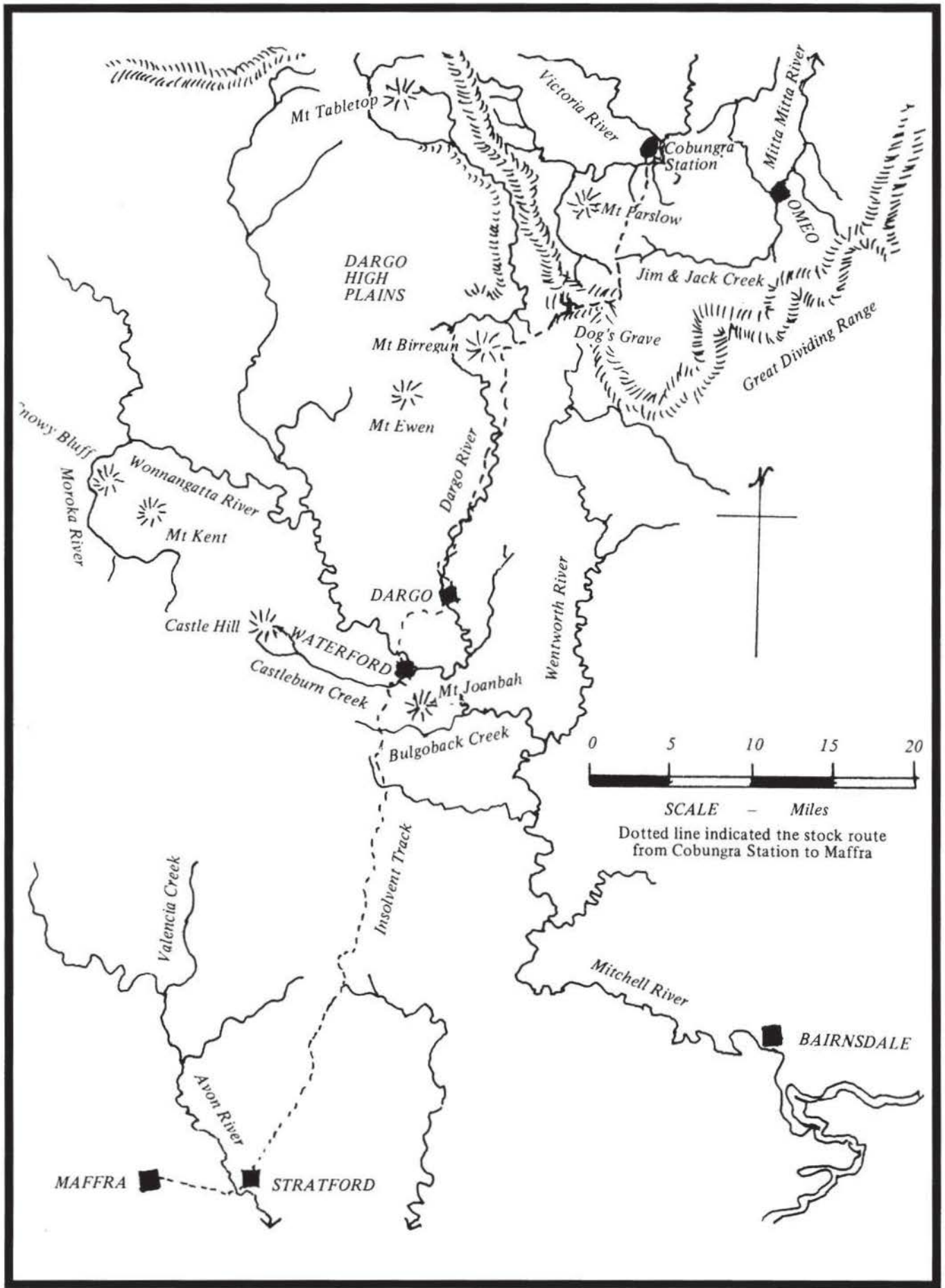
Pack horses had to be reliable and experienced, after all they were not led as a rule and they carried the provisions and supplies. They followed along with the cavalcade judging the width of their packs with skill and patience, negotiating the distance between rocks and trees. The packs placed on the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

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

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

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

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



tent was sometimes used.

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

The first two days journey was south then south-westerly from Cobungra's southern paddocks to the site of the Dog's Grave, a distance of twelve or thirteen miles between the Dinner Palin and Jim and Jack Creek. At the end of this and the next stretch, the stock were held in holding paddocks. Therefore accommodation paddocks were used. The second day the mob travelled to Mathiesons Flats on the Dargo River south west of Mt Birregun.

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

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

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

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

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

This was the same route taken by the Cobungra drovers and in the same year.

The fourth day, the mob grazed along to Trails or Longs at Waterford and at the end of the fifth day camp was made at Bulgoback Hotel. The sixth stage was extremely long one which included travel along the Insolvent Track (originally Andersons Track) from Lees Junction on the Dargo Road to Stockdale, the site of the nights camp.

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



Cattle coming down from The Fainter to Towonga Hut.

LOVICK'S Mountain Trail Safaris



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

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How Cattle came to be Running on the High Plains

Betty Fitzgerald

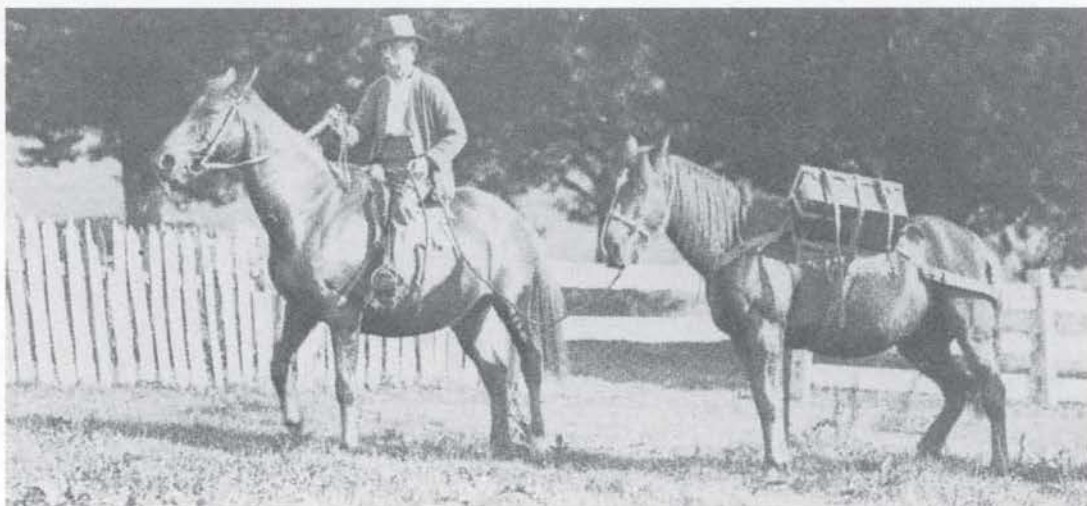
In the early days two tribes of Aborigines inhabited the area, wandering their way up when the winter snow had gone and remaining until the end of autumn. Winter months were spent in the foothills of the Bogong High Plains. The luxury item of their diet was the Bogong moth - 'Bogong' meaning 'big fella' in their language.

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

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

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

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



George Fitzgerald with packhorse



Trail Ride party lunching outside Fitzgeralds Hut December, 1928



Victorian Government Tourist Bureau Trail Ride party leaving Shanon Vale December, 1928

and Bundara and to Bucketey Plains area. Cobungra cattle headed out in the same direction.

With cattle running on the plains, huts became necessary. Wallaces Hut built in 1889 and Fitzgeralds Hut 1903 are about the earliest still in use. Kellys Hut was burnt down and replaced. [Since this was written, it has been necessary to rebuild Fitzgeralds.]

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

To get back to the cattle - early run holders paid an annual fee for their licence. For many years sheep were grazed on the plains in charge of a shepherd. This practice was discontinued about 1939. No bulls were allowed and only horses used for mustering cattle. The land above 4,000 feet was under the control of the Soil Conservation Authority. In 1966 the system was changed to agistment and in that year 50 cents per head was charged. Each run holder has an allocation of cattle which he cannot exceed. The number of cattle run at present [1985] is considerably less than in the early days. Cattle have a set date for entry and must be off by a certain date. This is decided by an Inspection Committee. This committee for many years

consisted of SCA officers and a member to represent each district of cattlemen. An inspection was made twice a year and the date of entry depended on the season. For some years cattle were counted up to ensure that numbers were not exceeded.

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

In 1978 the Land Conservation Council recommendations were introduced. This resulted in the Bogong National Park. From 1 October 1981 the high country was under the control of the National Parks Services with assistance from the Soil Conservation Authority who had much experience in the area. Changes were inevitable.

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

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

What the future holds - who knows?



Management Considerations Relating to the Assessment of Vegetation Condition Affected by the 1998 Caledonia Fire

A report prepared for The Mountain Cattlemen's
Association of Victoria Incorporated, July 1999



Louise Silvers (B.Appl. Sc. Hons)

This report was commissioned by the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria Inc. (MCAV) as an aid to assessing the validity of returning grazing to an area of the Alpine National Park destroyed by wildfire in January 1998. The area affected by the 1998 Caledonia fire is located within Wonnangatta-Moroka Unit of the Alpine National Park. The management of this Unit is the responsibility of Parks Victoria in cooperation and consultation with the community and associated users. Current grazing licences issued by the Department of Natural Resources and Environment under the National Parks Act (1975) stipulate that alteration of grazing management practices in this area may be made by the Parks Victoria Regional Manager only after consultation with the licensee. The MCAV is an association incorporated under Victorian law. Its primary members are holders of grazing licences in the Alpine National Park, State Forests, or both. As such, one of the MCAV's roles is to represent its members in negotiations and/or consultations with Parks Victoria and the Department of Natural Resources and Environment.

BACKGROUND

In January 1998, a major bush fire (the 1998 Caledonia fire) swept through approximately 33,000 hectares of the Alpine National Park and Carey State Forest north of Heyfield. Most of the area affected by the fire (22,000 hectares) was licensed for grazing. Seven licensees seasonally graze cattle within the area, and consistent with the National Parks Act (1975) and the Agreement for Provisions on Grazing Licences in the Alpine National Park (1989), the licences had been renewed (in August 1998) for the 1998/1999 to 2004/2005 season. Since the fire, Parks Victoria in collaboration with botanists from the Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research

in Melbourne, have carried out two assessments of vegetation condition - a thorough survey in October 1998 (9 months after the fire) and a smaller survey in May 1999 (16 months after the fire). Both surveys showed recovery in all vegetation communities surveyed. Cattle had been grazing the site and had to be hastily removed when the disaster occurred. Additional grazing was found for them in nearby areas and they remained in the high country for the remainder of the 1997/1998 season. Cattle were not returned to the area for the 1998/1999 grazing season, as the site was deemed too fragile for such use in the period directly following the fire.

This report relates to specific objectives defined by the MCAV which were to:

- Review available literature to examine whether the conservation values of this portion of the Alpine National Park would be compromised by the return of grazing in the 1999/2000 season; and to
- Comment on the scientific adequacy of the 'Assessment of vegetation condition - 1998 Caledonia fire' reports provided by Parks Victoria in October 1998 and May 1999. This report aims to help clarify the current issues at hand.

This report is directed to the MCAV Inc. so that it may be well informed as it consults with Parks Victoria in making decisions relating to the future management of the area.

CONSERVATION VALUES RELATING TO THE AREA AFFECTED BY THE 1998 CALEDONIA FIRE.

The area affected by the 1998 Caledonia fire is considered to be part of the Victorian Alps bioregion. The major land uses in the bioregion are conservation, recreation, forestry, hydroelectricity generation and seasonal grazing. The Victorian Alps bioregion remains largely uncleared and is in relatively good health. There have been no recorded extinctions of alpine flora or fauna, although some populations of species have been eliminated from some locales (DNRE, 1997). It is the largest area of Victoria where native vegetation predominates; invasion by weeds is a present and potential problem. Ski resorts are exclusive to this area and represent the most altered and developed sites within the Victorian Alps. The area is becoming increasingly popular for a wide range of recreational activities including camping, horseriding, bushwalking and four-wheel driving.

In the absence of specific data relating to the conservation values of the Caledonia fire site, it is assumed that the values held there are the same or similar to those held by the Wonnangatta-Moroka Unit of the Alpine National Park. This Unit of the Alpine National Park is valued for its spectacular mountain scenery with many outstanding natural features. It supports a number of nationally significant plant and animal species including Rough Eyebright, Hairy Anchor Plant, Maidenhair Spleenwort, Broad-toothed Rat, Powerful Owl and

the Smoky Mouse. Alpine herbfields, Snowgum woodlands, Alpine ash forests and riparian and riverine communities are the most significant of the Unit's diverse vegetation types. It includes several major rivers, and several proclaimed water supply catchments important both domestically, and for irrigation. There are also a number of historically significant sites. This Unit is well known and visited by those seeking recreation, from walking to horse-riding, 2WD and 4WD touring, to fishing and deer hunting. The Alpine Walking Track also traverses the Unit. Winter activities are also popular, especially cross-country skiing in remote settings. Timber harvesting within the Unit has now been phased out, however beekeeping is still permitted and much of the Unit is held under summer grazing licences (DNRE, 1992). Grazing has been included here as a heritage value which should also be considered worthy of conservation in the area. A nonmarket economic study assessing the value of cattle grazing on the Bogong High Plains obtained positive 'willingness to pay' figures for the 'continue grazing scenario' indicating that traditional grazing practices should be preserved (Lockwood et.al, 1996.)

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The history and effects of high country grazing in south-eastern Australia have been well researched and documented since the mid-1900s. Extensive studies such as those undertaken by Carr and Turner (1959a&b), Carr (1962a&b, 1977), Costin (1957, 1958), Arnold (1977), Williams (1986, 1990), Williams & Ashton (1987a&b), van Rees (1982), and Wilson (1990) seem to be those most commonly referenced. The results of these works and many others provide vital documentation from which land managers may make, and have made, decisions. Prior to European settlement, high intensity fires were rare in the subalpine tract; low intensity fires were more common and tended to occur in any one place only once every 10 to 70 years (Banks, 1981). Therefore, few protocols have been established to aid managers in dealing with subalpine areas after medium to high intensity fires.

The purpose of this review is to assess the major factors affecting regeneration of vegetation particularly after fire, with a view to determine whether or when cattle may return to graze portion of land burnt by the 1998 Caledonia wildfire.

SEEDLING ESTABLISHMENT AND GROWTH AFTER FIRE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE EFFECT OF CATTLE GRAZING

Purdie & Slatyer (1976) suggest that the initial floristic composition of vegetation immediately following fire will be influenced greatly by the species composition at the time of disturbance. Species richness can fall, rise or remain more-or-less constant with time after the initial post-fire recovery phase (Gill, 1994). In subalpine or alpine regions after fire, species richness remains more-or-less constant as reported by Kirkpatrick & Dickinson, 1984; O'Dowd & Gill, 1983; and Good, 1982. The main barriers to successful seedling establishment after fire in sub-alpine and alpine areas include inadequate seed supply, rapid colonisation of weeds, competition from weeds and other seedlings, moderate to severe frosts and snowfalls and browsing and trampling by introduced and native animals (Cochrane, 1966; Fagg, 1981). In general, most young seedlings experience a 'critical period' up to 8 weeks of age where they are extremely susceptible to all factors influencing their survival, and mortality of newly established seedlings is often high during the first summer (Gill, 1975). In the two to five years immediately following establishment, competition with both native and introduced plants (including other seedlings) becomes increasingly significant (Fagg, 1981). Environmental conditions (severe frosts, heavy snowfalls and drought) and grazing and trampling (by both native and introduced animals) are always potentially hazardous to the early establishment and success of seedling regeneration (Bryant, 1971 & 1973). It is not within the scope of this review to deal with all the issues mentioned above; this review will focus on the role of cattle grazing and specific environmental conditions on regeneration.

The effect of grazing on regeneration of vegetation after fire has been well documented (Bryant, 1971; Leigh & Holgate, 1979; Williams, 1990). Papers describing the influence of small to medium-sized herbivores are less common than those dealing with large herbivores. Several studies noted the specific impacts rabbits, hares, wombats, kangaroos and wallabies have had on subalpine and alpine environments recovering from wildfire (Wimbush & Forrester, 1988) and anthropomorphic

fires (Fagg, 1981; Leigh et al., 1987). In both instances, the effect of browsing by these herbivores is significant. Fagg (1981) noted 'the main animal species responsible for browsing were the rabbit, swamp wallaby, and wombat.' Leigh et al. (1987) determined that 'No significant differences developed in plant cover or biomass between the plots open to wombats, rabbits or other mammals and those open only to the rabbits, indicating that grazing by the larger animals was too light to be measurable'. They concluded 'rabbit control is essential, particularly after fire'. Rabbit grazing is severe on perennial forbs and tree seedlings in the subalpine areas where they are common (Leigh et al., 1987). The importance of monitoring and managing the impacts of these herbivores seems therefore essential to the healthy recovery of the burnt site.

The effects of larger herbivores (sheep, deer, cattle and horses) have been more commonly studied in areas following wild (Bryant, 1971) and prescribed fires (Newman, 1954;). It is most popularly noted that cattle and horses rarely graze young Eucalypts (e.g. Dexter 1967) and that cattle and horses cause minor mortality (<1%) by trampling (Fagg, 1981). However, the effect of the re-introduction of grazing by sheep in Kosciusko National Park suppressed growth and reduced the survival of young trees less than 3 feet in height (Bryant, 1971). Farrell & Ashton (1973) noted (at Shaws Creek within the area burnt by the Caledonia fire) that 'the major effect of grazing (by cattle) seemed to be simply a reduction in the cover of *Poa* and no alteration in the total floristics of the area was apparent'. Cattle are highly selective in their dietary preferences. van Rees (1982, 1984) found that *Poa hiemata* (Snowgrass) constituted an important part of the diet of cattle on the Bogong High Plains, however, this grass was generally grazed less than its availability and its contribution declined throughout the season. It is evident from these reports that cattle most commonly browse upon grassy, and to a lesser extent, herbaceous material, rather than shrubs and other mid-stratum species. Grazing by cattle and horses may be advantageous in aiding the establishment of some mid-storey canopy species after fire. Carr (1962) on the Bogong High Plains, and Farrell and Ashton (1973) on the Bennison High Plains noted that 'competition with *Poa* inhibits the regeneration of

shrubs'. Given that cattle preferentially browse *Poa*, reduction in cover and biomass may occur, leading to reduced competition for the establishment of other (including shrub) species. Continual and unmanaged grazing by rabbits, hares, and deer may be more likely to influence the recovery of mid-canopy species. The most commonly mentioned impacts caused by the re-introduction of cattle into areas following fire are those relating to erosion. Newman (1955) recorded that grazing had not led to any 'marked damage except where fire has initiated erosion, or vegetative depletion, and in this instance grazing has assisted in they are both grazers of grass and herbage and browsers of shrubs and trees. Native species which commonly show signs of browsing include *Coprosma quadrifida* and *Coprosma hirtella*, *Pomaderris aspera*, *Pittosporum bicolor* and *Pittosporum undulatum*, *Acacia melanoxylon*, *Exocarpus cupressiformis* (also a favoured rub tree), *Veronica derwentia*, and *Rubus parvifolius*. Commonly browsed introduced vegetation includes blackberry (leaves rather than the fruit), willows, periwinkle and clover (Stevenson, 1994). Although the impact of these herbivores on the vegetation of the area is unknown, the potential impacts of these animals must also be taken into consideration.

The effects of browsing by herbivores on the Caledonia site after fire are going to be directly related to the different grazing strategies employed by each animal. Cattle are unable to graze as closely as sheep, so herbaceous species are more likely to survive in areas grazed by cattle (Graetz, 1980). Other herbivores, such as large kangaroos, have the ability to reduce herbage to the same low residues as sheep (Short, 1985), and their browsing strategies will normally affect a narrower range of species (Barker, 1987). Rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) are still abundant in subalpine regions and are credited with major impacts upon vegetation in this area (Wilson, 1990).

MOSSBEDS

Mossbeds are present in the area, and have been destroyed by the Caledonia fire. Mossbeds are important in the hydrological processes in the high country, and it is not surprising that there is concern for the status of mossbeds in relation to the fire. Whilst it has been reported that fire can damage

mossbeds (Newman, 1954; van Rees et al. 1985), regular wildfire may be a natural component of these ecosystems (Banks, 1988). Typically, mossbeds regenerate successfully after fire when the shrubs that support them regrow relatively quickly from rootstocks (van Rees & Walsh, 1985). It is known that mossbeds are not a preferred habitat for cattle grazing and that if cattle do browse within mossbeds, they will preferentially browse on the sedges *Empodisma minus* and *Carex gaudichaudiana* and *Poa constiniana* (Prickly snowgrass) (van Rees & Hutson, 1983). Good (1973) reported that the major factor inhibiting the successful re-establishment of mossbeds after fire in Kosciusko National Park was erosion due to heavy falls of rain. If cattle were introduced onto a burnt area before the shrubs within mossbeds had a chance to recover, then any erosion would be exacerbated (Oxley, 1990). Mossbeds have survived damage by both wild and prescribed fire in the subalpine tract in the past, and if those affected by the Caledonia fire are managed to reduce the effects of erosion, successful regeneration should result.

SHRUB REGENERATION

It has become generally accepted that regeneration of shrub strata is restricted to the period immediately after fires (Cheal, 1994; Purdie & Slatyer 1976). van Rees & Walsh (1985) noted that 'shrubs may have an advantage in establishment over the herbaceous species following a fire, or other disturbances which create bare ground'. Many woody shrub species are naturally dependent on fire for germination (Floyd, 1966; Purdie, 1977, Grice & Westoby, 1987, Hodgkinson & Oxley, 1990). Species such as *Acacia*, *Bossiaea*, *Cassia*, *Daviesia*, *Hovea* and *Oxylobium* fall into this category. In areas where crowns are burnt, regeneration may be altered due to the loss of canopy cover. The removal of tree canopies results in an immediate increase in the amount of light at ground level (Begon et al., 1990) and an associated increase in soil moisture. Fox & Fox (1986) have shown that in these cases, epicormic growth quickly re-establishes the canopy each time after fire, and that the lack of canopy in their study did not seem to affect the understorey in any way. However, studies by Newman (1954) show that these areas are usually left bare and exposed to the autumn and winter rains and snow or the summer storms. As a result, 'normal ground cover is not

present again for at least twelve months unless the fire has been a particularly light one'.

FROST

It seems that generally after fire, there is insufficient vegetation cover for the protection of soil against wind and water erosion and against the effects of frost heave. Frost-heave and freezing (caused by frosts) are well-known causes of seedling death. Although cultivated soil is associated with high mortality due to frost-heave and freezing, a burnt seedbed may produce even higher mortality (from causes just mentioned) (Fagg, 1981). Seedlings of shrubby species are also susceptible to death caused by frost. Regenerating seedlings of *Grevillea*, *Hovea* and *Leucopogon hookeri* were killed back on the Bennison Plains during the autumn frosts of 1972 (Farrell & Ashton, 1973). Frost was also considered to be the main cause of Eucalypt and shrub seedling death in a study undertaken by Wimbush & Forrester (1988) after fire in Kosciusko National Park. The impacts of severe frosts are particularly detrimental to young Eucalypts and shrub species (O'Brien, 1989), especially after fire when little or no protection is afforded by upper strata. In the Caledonia fire area, the impacts of frost and heavy snowfalls will probably be a major cause of seedling mortality during the regeneration period.

CONCLUSIONS

It is proposed that the conservation values of the portion of land burnt by the Caledonia fire in January 1998 will not be compromised by the re-introduction of cattle into the area in the 1999/2000 grazing season. Assessment of recovery made by Parks Victoria in conjunction with the Arthur Rylah Institute has shown that:

- floristic composition is extensive, with limited weed establishment and the return of the rare or threatened (in Victoria) *Ranunculus gunnianus* to the area.

- Between October 1998 and May 1999, total ground cover had increased in all Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs), ranging from 17% in Montane Shrubby Woodland to 23% in Subalpine Grassland (similar results were obtained for the re-establishment of native ground cover).

- In the same period, there was appreciable reduction in the amount of bare ground in all EVCs ranging from 16% in Subalpine Grassland to 24%

in Subalpine Woodland (this reduction was statistically significant).

- Between October 1998 and May 1999, seedlings of shrub species were observed to be increasing and were widespread, with five species occurring in all EVCs.

- In the same period, canopy cover was gradually increasing (e.g. Montane Damp Forest), although the EVCs with reasonable canopy cover (between 15.6% and 25.5%) were not surveyed in May 1999. The results for Montane Shrubby Woodland and Subalpine Woodland seem to be skewed by the introduction of new quadrats in the May 1999 survey; and

- there was an increase, although small, in the level of mid-storey cover across the fire affected area since the 1998 assessment. The range of increase was from 0.3% in Subalpine Woodland to 0.9% in Montane Shrubby Woodland. There was a decrease in the values obtained for Montane Damp Forest, yet this may be attributable to the introduction of new quadrats in the May study.

The reintroduction of 500 cattle across the 22,000 hectares of grazed land affected by the Caledonia fire will have little impact upon the continued recovery of the site as a whole. Widespread and difficult to manage factors (such as frosts, snowfalls, drought and grazing by rabbits, hares, kangaroos, wallabies and deer) will have significantly greater influence on the successful rehabilitation of the area. It should be remembered that 'fire substantially reduces the nature conservation values of alpine ecosystems' (Kirkpatrick & Dickinson, 1984), therefore any method of management resulting in the reduction of fire risk should be embraced. The notion that cattle grazing reduces fire risk in subalpine areas is often questioned and to date has not yet been fully addressed. Arnold (1977) stated that 'fire hazard reduction is a valid reason only when grazing physically removes biomass which would otherwise dry off and form fuel'. More recently, Wilson (1991) records that 'the effect of grazing on fire frequency is circumstantial, but since grazing reduces fuel loads, a logical link between the two can be expected. Grazing may therefore reduce fire frequency, with advantage to the Government in term of fire suppression costs.' Cattle have been an

inherent part of this ecosystem for 125 years in both the presence and absence of high and low intensity fires. It is well recognised that the establishment of the Alpine National Park in 1989 was a major step in conserving alpine ecosystems and their biodiversity; diverse ecosystems of which cattle and cattle grazing had already been a part of for 154 years. Consideration should be given to the notion that removing cattle from the area may compromise the conservation values under which the park was proclaimed.

REPORTS: ASSESSMENT OF VEGETATION CONDITION - 1998 CALEDONIA FIRE. OCTOBER 1998 AND MAY 1999.

SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER MONITORING OF THE CALEDONIA FIRE SITE

If Parks Victoria is going to make full use of this opportunity to assess recovery of the Caledonia fire site in the presence of all current land uses, then thorough surveys such as the one undertaken (in collaboration with the Arthur Rylah Institute) in October 1998 should be continued. The survey undertaken in May 1999 has several major flaws:

- Nineteen new quadrats were assessed for recovery and results from these were added to those from quadrats established in October 1998 (surveyed again in May). Comparisons were then inappropriately made between the October 1998 and May 1999 results, even though different sites had been surveyed. This does not seem to be stringent scientific method and it is not surprising that some of the results seem skewed.

- Only four of the original six EVCs were surveyed in the May study, so this report cannot give a full indication of the recovery of the area as a whole. The original six classes were selected as they accounted for 94% of the Alpine National Park portion of the fire area and were considered to be 'representative of most of the area of the National Park that was affected by the fire' (Wright & Sieler, 1998). Grazing licences covered these EVCs so it is not clear why Parks Victoria decided to introduce the new quadrats in May 1999 to 'ensure sampling

of each licence area' (Wright & Sieler, 1999). Had Parks Victoria wished to establish a study investigating the recovery of this ecosystem in both grazed and ungrazed areas, then an enclosure experiment should have been established directly after the fire. Given that the initial October 1998 survey assessed regeneration of the area as a whole (regardless of land use), Parks Victoria should now aim to continue this type of assessment.

- The initial survey in October 1998 (the methodology of which was based on the Draft Protocol for the Assessment of Vegetation Condition in Victoria's Parks and Reserves) aimed to 'assess vegetation condition' and as such, measured eight parameters commonly used for this purpose in modern vegetation surveys. These were total ground cover*, native species ground cover, regeneration of native perennial shrub species*, strata intactness*, age structure of dominant canopy species*, bare ground*, litter cover* and floristic composition. The survey conducted in May 1999 focussed on six of these parameters (*). The field-work component of each study was performed within the same number of days, so unless there was a decline in the number of field workers available for the latter study, a full assessment could have been attained. The May study was meant to be a 'partial' one, conducted in order to determine whether a full survey should be conducted that Autumn. Parks Victoria deemed that the results were inconclusive and have stated that a full survey will be repeated in October 1999. The value of 'partial' studies of this type are highly questionable; it would have been more appropriate to have sub-sampled existing quadrats for all parameters previously observed in all EVCs originally monitored.

The survey conducted in May 1999 is inadequate, and its contents should not be used in conjunction with those obtained in the October 1998 report. It is recommended that a full survey in the manner of that originally conducted in October 1998, be undertaken in October 1999, with a view to undertake replica surveys on a yearly basis.

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Down the Track

Caledonia area, where the fire began,
Tracks still closed- how long is the ban?
Keep the people out means no erosion to find,
Out of sight - out of mind.

Areas empty, take Wonnangatta Station,
Years ago perfect, cattlemens' creation,
Now thistles, blackberries, St John's Wort,
Show the results of management 'university-taught'.

Everyone saw the torch at Benalla,
Reminding the people of this 'Cattleman fella',
The Sydney Olympics displayed to the nations,
Our proud heritage ongoing, for generations.

The Minister thinks ignoring them's fine,
Keep them out a bit longer and stall for time,
For the moment we'll offer to buy them off,
In five years time they'll have had enough.

Three years now since the fire has passed,
The battle 'tween parks and cattlemen lasts,
Meetings, discussions, fenced off plots,
Nothing is gained, the friendship rots!

John Walker

Hut Photograph Folio

For some years now David Oldfield, has graciously provided us with some excellent photographs of huts and other buildings associated with the cattlemen for publication in *Voice* and we thank him for his continued support.

This year he have Hec Stagg's Hut and Briggs Logging Camp.

To quote David ... *Hec Stagg's Hut is north of Mustering Flat on the Baw Baw Plateau. Stephen Dempster gave me a "mud map" of how to get there which helped but I have to agree with all those who say it's a difficult hut to find. Interestingly it doesn't appear on later versions of the bushwalking maps of the area. I suspect that this may be the first time a photograph has been published. I am quite certain that it would be the first time the GPS location (N:5815630, E:55439180) has been published...*

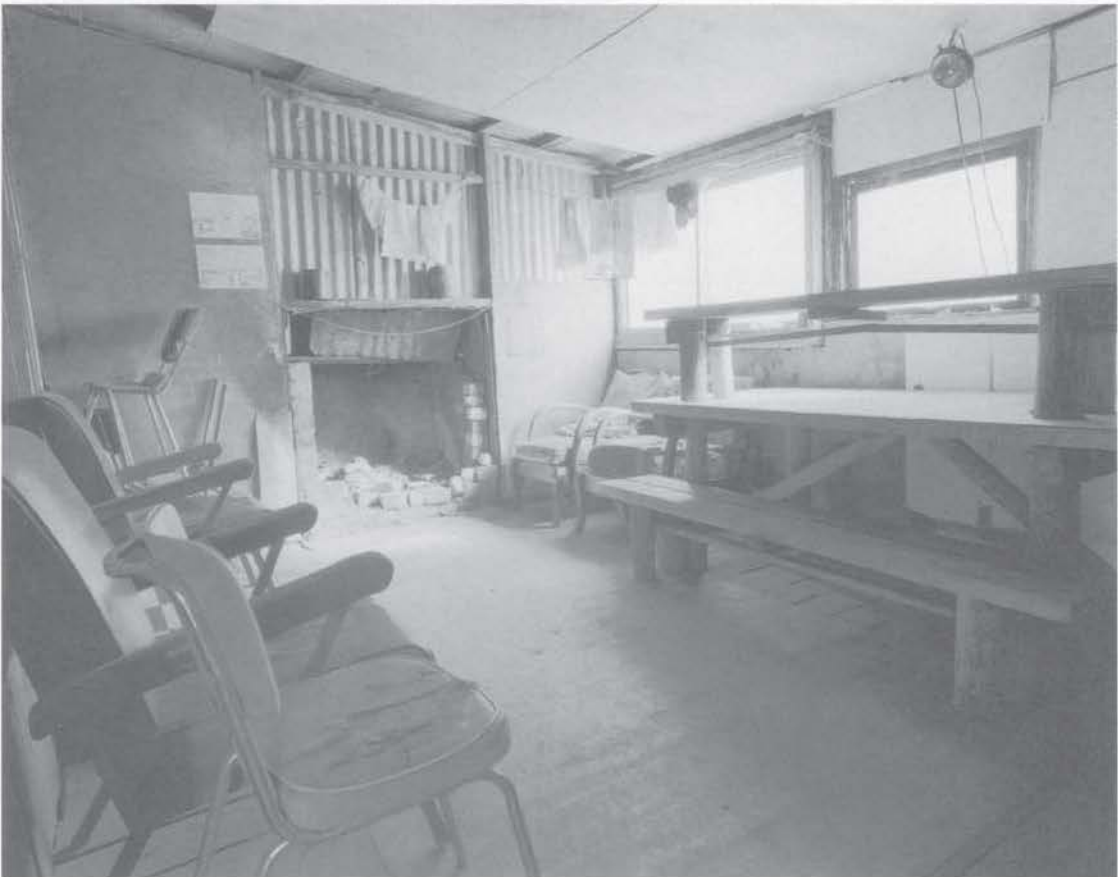






... Briggs Logging Camp on the West Kiewa, just upstream from Blair's Hut, is Ron Briggs home-from-home during themusters. I doubt that photos have been published before of that hut either.

We are quite sure you are right David, as none of us recall seeing published photographs of either hut before. The photographs on the previous pages are Staggs Hut while this and the following page are Ron's home-from-home.



Seven Decades of Mismanagement

James A. Commins

The bushland environment of South East Australia is probably in greater risk of the most severe damage than during the past thousand years or more.

This paper very briefly outlines the historical background, the public controversy and the present position of land management of undeveloped Crown lands. Its purpose is to draw attention to the now largely unused resource potential and the benefits for flora and fauna that could accrue from well managed operations.

These combined benefits could make a very worthwhile contribution to sustainable siculture, pastoral pursuits and the overall environmental protection over a very large region of South Eastern Australia.

There is wide scope to establish studies that, if truly and conscientiously researched and then publicised would dispel many of the incorrect notions that are advanced by unproven and over zealous "green" propaganda that has been most damaging.

Most of the Eastern forests of Victoria and the Snowy Mountains region of New South Wales were used for grazing cattle from the early days of European settlement. It was during the latter half of the 19th century and early 20th century that the most widespread pastoralism was practised.

In Victoria this coincided with Parliament invoking Land Acts that made most of the accessible areas suitable for improved farmland available for selection. These allotments of land were available to almost any person with the strength and ambition to develop a farm that they could be proud of and might ultimately give them economic independence. The remaining vast area that was not classified for selection was marked on maps as pastoral land before the delineation of natural hardwood forests for timber production in some areas.

Grazing licences were issued for extensive areas of bushlands that usually ranged in blocks of from ten to twenty thousand acres (4000 to 9000 hectares) and ranged from coastal plains in the East to the remote and often rugged mountain allotments along the Great Dividing Range.

In Victoria the pastoral resource was predominately utilised by cattle and to a minor degree by horses and sheep. Most sheep grazing was where sheep could be turned out adjacent to farmland and there were only several occasions many years ago when large flocks were taken to the Bogong High Plains for short summer periods. The number of animals involved and the environmental effects of them have often been greatly exaggerated by anti-grazing lobbyists. Before the days of motor transport, horses were bred and raised on a few of the mountain runs and their descendants are the numerous brumbies that remain in the Eastern mountains of Victoria and South East New South Wales.

Until the advent of mechanical earthmoving machinery very few roads penetrated and crossed the mountainous between immediately east of Melbourne in Victoria to Canberra in New South Wales. No people other than the aboriginals ever regularly travelled widely in the remote bushlands as the cattlemen did and these intrepid pioneers learned to understand the causes and effects of various activities there better than all others.

Most pioneering farmers and graziers who confined their activities to developing and improving pasture land by the age old system of clearing land and fencing it rarely ventured far into the unimproved wilderness. They were conscious of the risk of becoming lost much more than most people would be today. They also had a well founded fear of fire in the dry months of the year.

The aboriginal people who had no easy way of creating fire, in all probability, were very careful to maintain fire at all times if possible, regardless of how hot and dry the weather was. Thus it is no wonder that they were persuaded to go and camp somewhere else and certainly not upwind of farming settlers pastoral and structural improvements.

Newcomers to this hot and dry land, with the safety of their lives and property at risk, were soon imbued with the dread and risk of fire.

Graziers who utilised the pastoral resources of the natural bushland with no thought of clearing native vegetation soon learned two things by observing the practices of the indigenous people. Firstly that a low intensity fire guarded against the severity of an intense wildfire that would be damaging because it would very much upset the ecological balance. No cattlemen welcomes the drastic change from mixed and balanced vegetation to an almost mono-culture of eucalyptus regrowth or other shading species. The second benefit was that a greater diversity of vegetation species was maintained and the welfare of all grazing animals was enhanced.

Unfortunately the bush graziers practice of raising smoke from their patchwork method of burning raised very serious misconceptions, many of which persist to this day. These misapprehensions extended from the fire conscious farmers to city based theorists, and some of the latter became the vanguard of the present day 'green' movement.

It is significant that there appears to be no record of farm property being destroyed by the escape of graziers patchwork fires until they (the graziers) were blamed in the report from the Royal Commission in 1944 to examine forest grazing. That prestigious enquiry totally disregarded the likelihood of fire by lightning strike during the drought summer of 1938-39 and its inadequate findings can only be regarded as either a scandalous cover-up of administrative failure or ignorance on the part of influential government officials. Given drought conditions and hot, windy weather property and wildlife will be more in jeopardy now from wildfire than ever in the past for many thousands of years. Officials now know the danger of a chain of lightning strikes and that was most likely to have initiated the 1939 conflagration when such a huge

distance was burnt over in several days. The word lightning was used only once in the Royal Commission Report in one line that acknowledged 'the rare occurrence of fire by natural causes such as lightning.'

In the Autumn of 1998 fuel reduction was being conducted in mild autumn weather and the smoke was sufficient to obscure vision beyond much distance all over much of Gippsland - one has to ponder upon how dense the smoke would be if the forest floor then burning was alight during hot and windy weather in a very dry mid summer.

Observers of the present situation would suggest that within management circles there is much greater emphasis and deployment of financial resources to fire suppression than to minimising the effects of wildfire. There appears to be much more publicity, glamour exposure, and almost limitless money for more equipment and manpower than might be even dreamed of for the more mundane tasks of wildfire prevention and limitation. The present fire managers must consider so themselves 'Would I be better off dealing with preventative burning or wild fire suppression?'

Students of Australia's origin agree that all the natural eco-systems of the country were conditioned by fire for long ages of time before the first human occupation and those fires must have been ignited by lightning. The only land based animals other than birds were marsupials and reptiles and dry seasons and droughts must have also been an ongoing feature. Kangaroos provide evidence of this by the fact that they have evolved to survive such difficult seasonal conditions being able to postpone the birth of their offspring in embryo form until suitable pasture is available. The first human inhabitants learned to create fire by rubbing two pieces of dry wood together. How they must have welcomed any lightning fire while their fire sticks were damp. There can be no doubt that they felt more secure and comfortable if they always managed to keep a fire alight both day and night regardless of the season or weather.

When considering protection of the natural environment more regard should be taken of the historical events that have occurred in Victoria since the establishment of the Port Phillip settlement in 1835. By 1851 the natives had been severely restricted in their fire lighting habits and the first



Devastation after the 1939 wildfire on the high plains (*Authors collection*)

major holocaust in the time of the new settlement swept over more than half of the recently formed state of Victoria. There is little evidence of the effects of that fire in the eastern forests but much of the forest that has sustained the sawmilling industry during the past fifty years appears to be even aged growth. It may well be that much of it has developed from regrowth in the wake of that most extensive fire in 1851.

In a paper presented by Alfred Howitt¹ to the Royal Society in 1890 entitled *The Influence of Settlement on the Eucalyptus Forests of East Gippsland* he commented on how many localities in Gippsland had become overgrown with young forest since the more or less regular burning by aborigines had ceased. About 1863/64 he observed that many red gums were dying on the plains between Bairnsdale, Maffra and Stratford and expressed a strong belief that insects (*Urubra lugens*) were the principal cause because their population had been insufficiently checked by fire every few years. In other parts of Gippsland he noted a very large increase in the number of young eucalypt trees. During the time of Alfred Howitt areas within the forests of East Gippsland had

become much more populated. Following the discovery of gold about 1851 prospectors scoured the country and many gold digging settlements were established that lasted until early in the 20th century. After the gold rushes much of the pastoral runs that had been held on grazing licences were, by Acts of Parliament, thrown open for selection and a rush to occupy blocks of farmland took place. It was from this time that a much increased interest was taken in acquiring the broad acre grazing runs that were available on the land that was not suited for farm selection.

By the end of the 19th century interest was also being taken in the potential for timber harvesting and areas were being planned for reserves of forest for timber harvesting. This was also about the time that conflict of opinion between local knowledge and remote theorists began to emerge and it has been unfortunate that the voice of practical experience has not, with very few notable exceptions, been trained to make confident public announcements whereas the distant self styled experts have had no such inhibitions.

It was during this early part of the 20th century that the pastoral industry on both freehold



A.W. Howitt

and Crown land alike suffered massive degradation and a consequent set-back in productivity as a result of the rabbit invasion. For half a century and more these creatures had a far more devastating effect upon natural eco-systems and as an agent of soil erosion than all the domestic grazing animals ever had before or since that period of dominance by these vermin. For landowners to survive financially during that period time (and many did not) they had to try and maintain sufficient of their flocks and herds along side hordes of rabbits. Landowners explained this when giving evidence to the Royal Commission Enquiry into Forest Grazing in 1944. Evidently they were not accorded much credibility as the judge in his report when commenting on this wrote flippantly ... 'and I suppose Brer Rabbit would have blamed Brer Fox'!!

In 1952 rabbits were quickly decimated by the introduction of myxomatosis and much of the pasture under open forest had been denuded after many years of continuous heavy grazing. This allowed a dense growth of tall woody unpalatable shrubs such as ti-tree, dogwood, grevilleas etc. to establish and dominate the forest understory and

shade out much of the grass and small wildflower shrubs.

Since that time the announced intentions to conduct fuel reduction burning have fallen far behind scheduled plans and a very large area of the eastern forests have not known any fire for five or six decades. The net result of this is that present grazing capability is much less than it once was and the result is that much of the grazing wildlife and predators have relocated to the perimeter of improved farm land, where often there is easy access to improved pasture. It comes as no surprise that attacks by native dogs on livestock are now more prevalent on adjacent farm land and are proving to be more troublesome than they ever previously have been. This is simply because so much of the interior bush land has become unattractive to grazing animals. At the same time the fire danger during hot, dry and windy weather has increased enormously.

The Victorian Forest Commission was established in 1919 and subsequently a special school was established at Creswick in western Victoria to train cadet foresters. Graduates from this school gained practical experience as junior foresters and some of them succeeded in working their way up in the service to become senior administrators. For three decades from the inception of the Forest Commission, the ruling commissioners did not appear to have sufficient practical knowledge to balance their flawed theory that a fire free natural eco-system could be achieved in Australia.

Matters became more complicated when the Government portfolios of Conservation, Forests and Lands became combined. It soon became evident that university trained Department of Conservation staff gained ascendancy and divisions of opinion on conducting forest management continued. The net result has been a decline in safety from wildfire in the forests and pressure has greatly increased on the well being and diversity of all flora and fauna. A well written and comprehensive exposition of the divisions and controversy within administrative circles was published several years ago by a visiting American author, Stephen Pyne, in a book entitled *The Burning Bush*.

The parameters of the few studies used to make judgements on cattle grazing in the eastern

ranges have been far too narrow and too often management decisions have been based on unproven and very doubtful assumptions. Unfortunately these have been presented with the imprimatur of scientific fact.

There should be carefully monitored research to examine the combined effects of managed fire and seasonal or intermittent cattle grazing in the widely diverse environmental conditions that exist in the eastern forest region of Victoria.

One of the more questionable thesis in recent years was that by Dr R.J. Williams entitled *Vegetive Changes in Heathland and Grassland Communities in Sub-Alpine Tract of the Bogong High Plains*.

This thesis was publicised from a Melbourne University press release in September 1986 and was eagerly applauded. The study purported to show why woody shrubs are increasing to become an almost impenetrable thicket over a large area and to show what effect cattle grazing had in respect to this. To achieve this small exclusion plots were established to show the content and composition of regrowth after the ground in them had been mechanically denuded of all vegetation. These plots were one metre square and surrounded by several strands of barbed wire, supported by star posts at each corner to prevent cattle grazing on them. Regrowth was recorded and compared with the adjacent land supporting a range of mixed species of predominately grass land and tall woody shrubs. The grass land was generally overgrown with much senescent material.

Woody shrub varieties appeared to completely dominate regrowth on the plots and despite the fact that numerous hares had free access to eat any young vegetation that they favoured, and that they left many excretia pills upon the barred ground, the conclusion denigrated cattle grazing. The presence of the hares upon the plots was completely ignored. Another short coming of the study was that the effects that fire might have were not discussed.

While there has been no fuel reduction fire on the Bogong High Plains for more than sixty years, it is very presumptuous to believe that that area could be exempt from the effects of fire any more than any other part of Australia might be.



Severley denuded hillside after wildfire on the Tumut River, Kosciusko National Park

It may well be, and some who should know would say a certainty, that the preponderance of shrub growth would be corrected to a much more diverse range of vegetation if moderate fire was used there as a management tool.

In the late 1980s the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria moved to finance and establish trials for research into forest grazing and hoped that the Meat Research Corporation arm of the Australian Meat and Livestock Corporation would take an interest by at least examining the issues and the potential of the resource, but a tentative enquiry to senior officials of that body suggesting such studies met with discouragement.

The years have rolled on since the representation was made to the MRC and during the past decade or so evidence of forest mismanagement has been raised following very devastating and extensive wildfires in National Parks both here and abroad. Some examples are the Yellowstone burn out in USA, the Royal and Byadbo fires in NSW National Parks and more recently the Caledonia fire in the Victorian Alpine National Park. During the Northern hemisphere summer of 2000 much of the western mountain

areas of USA are or have been burning mostly out of control. Burning through most, if not all, western states from Montana near Canada in the north to Arizona by Mexico in the south. There is ever increasing risk that sooner or later the same sort of catastrophic conflagration will happen in the bushlands of Victoria and the south east of New South Wales.

It appears as the years pass by that the taxpayer contribution to fire management and wildfire control is continually rising and at the same time the fire hazard on National Parks and other public land is ever increasing.

For far too long we have, in many ways, slavishly followed what is done in the United States of America, and not the least of those is the matter of what is done regarding fire management on public land. Anyone who has travelled through the western states of America and bothered to observe the

natural environment there would not be surprised to hear of the widespread wildfire that has devastated vast areas of forest during their summer of the year 2000.

When eventually a similar degree of wildfire occurs here there will be enquiries and recrimination to follow. It is a matter transcending State borders and would be of Federal interest.

I believe that a Senate enquiry should be established to take evidence and ideas from which an original Australia fire management system might develop to protect life and property before an all consuming and costly inferno forces change.

1. Alfred Howitt was a notable citizen who established himself at Bairnsdale during the latter half of the 19th century. He was a botanist and during his lifetime served as a magistrate, a gold commissioner at Omeo and he led the rescue party that found the only surviving member of the Burke and Wills exploration expedition.

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STONEYS' BLUFF & BEYOND

2000 Get Together 'Bennison Plains'

The Year 2000 Get Together was held at Kevin Higgins' freehold at Bennison, beyond Licola, on the land seriously affected two years before by the Caledonia fires. This was a salutary reminder that, while Get Togethers are a wonderful social occasion, there is a sharper political edge to life for the MCAV. Many took an opportunity to go by helicopter to inspect nearby areas that had been closed - a cynic might suggest that was so no-one could see the erosion as a result of the fires.

The freehold, having been more extensively grazed and managed, survived better than areas that had been "cooked" by the fire, and was an absolute picture for the weekend.

The Gippsland Branch turned on an excellent Get Together, Ricky Hodge won the Cup, again, having also again competed strongly in the Don Kneebone Heritage Awards. Billy Ross from Queensland, a strong support of the Kneebone for many years, was a popular winner there, with "home-grown" poet Dennis Carstairs taking out the Bush Minstrel award.

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.

Congratulations to all winners, placegetters and competitors - it made a great weekend.

RESULTS

Cattlemen's Cup

- 1st Rick Hodge
- 2nd Lincoln Adams
- 3rd Andy Purdon

Sprint Race

- 1st Shea Carney
- 2nd Edward Higgins
- 3rd Danielle Clemson

Open Race

- 1st Andy Purdon
- 2nd Kevin Bayliss
- 3rd Shea Carney

Relay Race

- 1st Graham Fordge
Denise
Jim Kiely
Ian Forge
- 2nd Neville Wright
Curly Cousins
Brett Hau
Ros Knight

Packhorse Race

- 1st Graham Forge riding 'JR',
packhorse 'Apache'
- 2nd Jim Kiely riding 'Snowy',
packhorse 'Pretty Star'
- 3rd Neville Wright riding 'Captain',
packhorse 'Wally'

Mountain Cattlemen's Classic

- 1st Ron Connely
- 2nd Chris Stoney
- 3rd Nick Cook

Walking Race

- 1st Ron Connely
- 2nd David Stoney
- 3rd Blue Commins

Open Whipcracking

- 1st Jack Cross
- 2nd Diane Hurley
- 3rd Wayne Campbell
- 4th Brian Spencer

Ladies Whipcracking

- 1st Diane Hurley
- 2nd Rosemary Hurley
- 3rd Chanelle Spencer

Junior Whipcracking

- 1st Tyrone Spencer
- 2nd Eamon Jarrott
- 3rd Wayne Campbell
- 4th Brian Campbell
- 5th Ric Quilford

Juvenile Whipcracking

- 1st Brandon Spencer
- 2nd Raymonf Campbell
- 3rd Brent Hughes
- 4th Stephanie Riley

Mulga Bill

- 1st Lee Van Geet
Sam
Brett Hau
- 2nd James Clarke
Paul Clemson
Daniel Taylor
- 3rd Warwick Richardson
Travis Hetheron
Daniel Britton

Dog High Jump

- 1st Rachel Smith with 'Dougall'
- 2nd Edward Higgins with 'Spike'
- 3rd J.McLeod with 'Burger'

Tugs of War

- Mens - Dargo Hotel
- Womens - The Chicks
- Older Kids - The Crosses
- Younger Kids - The ANZACS

Haystacking

Results not to hand



Don Kneebone Mountain Heritage Award

Billy Ross (Qld)

Bush Minstrel

Dennis Carstairs (Stratford)

Bush Laureate

Dorothy Watt (Briagolong)

Photographic Competition

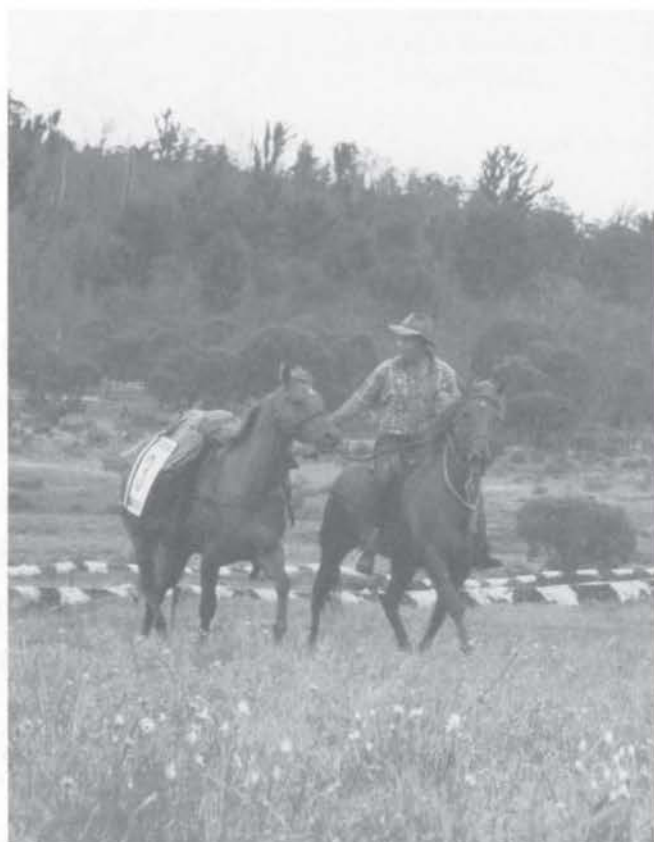
- 1st Debbie McCormack
- 2nd Christine Lakeman
- 3rd Margaret McCormack

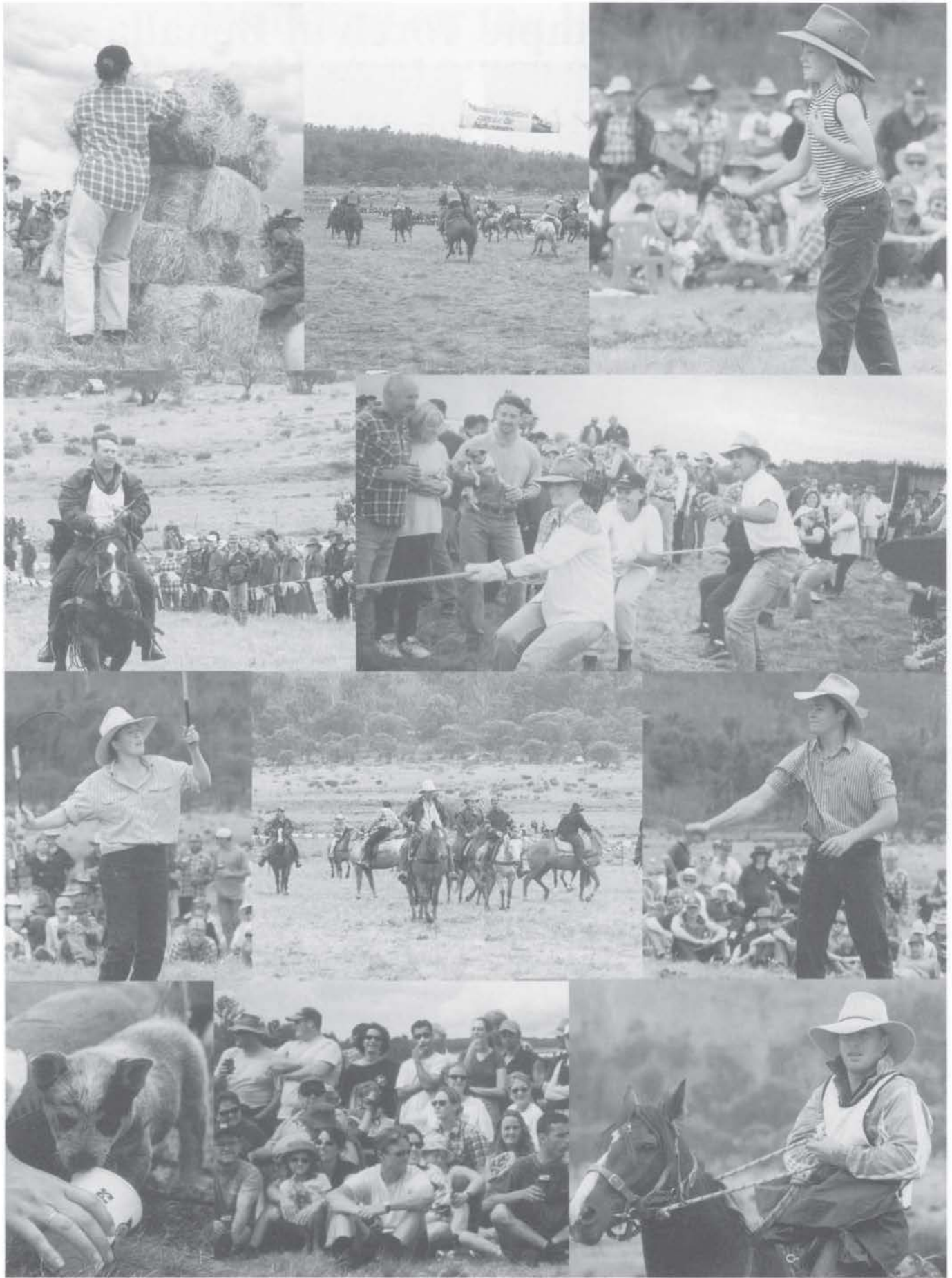
Kids' Colouring Competition

- 11 and over Jenni Keitzing (Mooroopna)
- 8 to 10 Patrick O'Kelly (Berwick)
- 5 to 7 Ben Pickering (Berwick)
- 0 to 4 Alexander Coleman (Heyfield)

Honourable mentions (from a total of 64 entries):

- Ben Robinson (Markwood)
- Christopher McKay (Sale)
- Josh Keane (Nar-Nar-Goon)
- Emily Schultz (Wangaratta)
- Jake Veenstra (Bairnsdale)
- Thom Coleman (Heyfield)
- Tegan Stephenson (Sale)
- David Cooper (Wulgulmerang)
- Amanda Colahan (Willow Grove)





Photos Courtesy of Jenny Wright, Julie Carstairs and Julie Marland

The Olympic Torch at Benalla



Photos Courtesy of Brian Higgins

Wedding on the Bogongs

Thanks to Jacko Faithfull for the photographs and report.

This is the first wedding to be held this millenium on the Bogong High Plains, and possibly the last century also. It took place outdoors at Faithfull's Hut, Bucketty Plains. Last Saturday (6 January 2001), precisely on the stroke of noon, John Turner (a nephew of the late George W. Faithfull) was married to Peta Leigh Morris formerly of Buchan, by Rev. Rob Dummermuth from the Uniting Church, Swifts Creek.

The weather was a fine sunny day and over 100 guests attended from Vic, S.A., W.A., Qld, Tas., N.S.W., Ireland and Canada. The bride wore a green skirt and cream corset made by her sister to blend in with the Aussie bush scene, while the groom was attired in green moleskins, cream shirt and akubra hat. The reception was butts of beef rotisserated on a spit with varieties of salads followed by cheesecakes, rumballs and extras, enjoyed by all. The bride and groom spent their honeymoon night at Faithfulls Hut

which was constructed in 1961 by the late and well known local cattlemen of the high country runs who were George and Maurice Faithfull, Ken and Colin Faithfull, Gordon Toland, Percy Huggins and Jim Ray (a helper from Swifts Creek). Materials were bought in by packhorses from Trapyard Gap where the Glen Wills sawmill logging road ended. It was erected out of timbers, corrugated iron and rocks from the creek which runs along outside it. Previously these men camped at Wallaces Hut on the Bogongs which was given a Heritage building listing at the end of droving the herds up. Their first

night was to stop over at Honeymoon Cottage up from the Bundarah River on a ridge before proceeding onwards. This is why the hut is here today as it is central to the runs of the decendants of the origianl deceased cattlemen. John and Leigh run cattle on a property at Hinnomunjie just northeast of Omeo and we're sure they are proud to be part of the history of the Bogong High Plains.





Lou Pendergast

Henry Louis (better known as Lou) Pendergast was born at the family property 'Kimberly Park', Benambra on 16 October 1919 and died at the family home 'Delvin Park' on 13 February 2000. Lou Pendergast was laid to rest at the Benambra Cemetery overlooking the plains and the stock that he loved so much in a private family funeral on 18 February 2000. He was synonymous with the high country and very sadly missed all who knew him.

Although a man of few words, Lou was a strong supporter of the local community, not only running the family farm business but also being mindful of his community duty serving on many local committees and a time on the local council.

From humble beginnings, Lou and his wife Sylvia worked hard to establish a vast cattle and sheep farming enterprise from scratch, of which he was justifiably proud. It was after the war in 1948 and 1949 that Lou and his brother in law Mick Murphy built the Low Plain Hut at Nuniong and spent the winter trapping rabbits there.

Lou was very proud of the fact that he carried on the Pendergast tradition of farming at Benambra. He was very interested in the local history of the area and was deeply saddened when the original family home which contained much of the family history was destroyed by fire in 1979. He regarded this to be one of his greatest setbacks. When the original Delvin Park was destroyed Lou built a new brick home but it was never really the same. It didn't have the same link to the past that the original Delvin Park had, the link that he treasured.

When Lou was 74 years old he travelled throughout Central and Northern Australia on farming tours. One particular trip to Ayers Rock, Lou climbed to the top and returned as fresh as when he left much to the amazement of his fellow travellers. It was also on these trips that he spent time talking to Wallace Logan who controlled large tracts of land in the gulf country. These two men from opposite ends of the country compared notes on how they each ran their respective enterprises.

During his lifetime he was pleased to add to the family property at Benambra by acquiring the Loch-lomond property at Johnsonville and flats along the Mitchell River. One major milestone that Lou wanted to achieve was to breed and mark 1,000 head for the Annual Weaner Sale at Benambra. He was to achieve that feat after his death when at the sales following 'Delvin Park' offered 1,000 head for sale.

Lou was the son of Lewis Henry and Helena Frances Pendergast and married Sylvia Murphy at Omeo. Sylvia and Lou were married for 58 years and had six children - five daughters, Barbara, Kaye, Jennifer, Dianne and Lindy, and one son, Louis.

The passing is also noted of **Dorothy Pendergast** and **Pearl Treasure**. Auntie Dorrie was the last surviving child of C.H.V. and Julia Pendergast of 'Omeo Station' and is greatly missed. She was in her 100th year. Pearl was the last surviving child of Albert and Maud Treasure and sister of Ivy, Edna and Jack.

Bob Gilder

Robert Alsop (Bob) Gilder of Glenfalloch died on 31 December 2000, aged 77 years. The third Gilder of the same name to operate the property the family bought about 1913, he managed extensive lands in the Macalister Valley. Early alpine grazing started by the Riggall family when they owned Glenfalloch, was continued when they sold to the Gilder family. Bob was active in the early formation of the MCAV. He was also involved in the air rescue of Jack Kelly from Holmes Plain in 1947.

Bob was fortunate to be associated with two of the most historic properties in the high country, in Glenfalloch and Wonnangatta. When the Guy family chose to sell Wonnangatta, it came into the ownership of the Gilder family, and was managed by Bob, in association with alpine runs around the Snowy Plains and Mount Howitt. This also included the freehold around Guys hut. In turn, the Gilder family then sold Wonnangatta to the State of Victoria for inclusion in the Alpine National Park.

For years now we have been writing obituaries marking the deaths of cattlemen and others, acknowledging their contribution to the Association but also to the ongoing traditions of the mountain cattlemen. Back in March 1983 Bernie Lawler, a name long associated with the high plains, died in Melbourne. A copy of his obituary from the *Alpine Observer* has come to light and in recognition of this man's contribution we reprint it here.

The Gentle Man of The Mountains

**BERNARD VINCENT
LAWLER**

**Recollections of
Cattlemen:**

The death of Bernard Vincent Lawler on March 26th, 1983, at St. Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne, has closed an episode in the illustrious history of the Cattlemen of the High Plains.

Bernie Lawler was born at Bright in 1912, the third son of Martin Henry and Mary Josephine Lawler. His grandfather came from Ireland and joined the gold-rush to Harrierville. There he met his wife Ellen O'Rourke, and in 1895 they moved to Snowy Creek. Bernie's father, Martin, was one of 11 children born to John and Ellen, who lived on their farm at picturesque Snowy Creek, a few miles from Bright. John ran cattle and bred stock horses. In 1897 he obtained a licence to graze cattle on the Bogong High Plains. The presence of the Lawler's on the High Plains has remained unbroken for almost a century, until the death of Bernie in March.

His passing has brought to an end an era of kinship between the Lawlers, the High Plains and the Cattlemen of the Valleys.

Bernie's mates of the mountains have recalled some of the incidents and memories they shared with him in their many escapades together.

To meet and talk with such well known cattlemen as Eric Weston, Jack Keating, Vic Attridge, and Wally Ryder, and in addition hear the stories told by George Auger and Tom Waterhouse, gives one some insight into the remarkable and fine character of Bernie Lawler, the gentle man of the mountains.

The immense admiration these men have for Bernie is reiterated time and time again in the stories of his courage, skill and strength, with always the underlying thread of his good humour and gentleness. As Jack Keating put it — a real gentleman.

A glimpse into the life of a cattleman through his friends is a privileged experience. The following recollections are an attempt to record some of the chapters in Bernie's life.

Vic Attridge told of his long association with the Lawlers. Lawlers and Attridges were adjoining lease holders on Hotham, and the best of friends. One vivid occurrence was the 1939 fires when hundreds of cattle were burnt and Bernie and his Uncle Vic were getting the cattle out. The Lawler Hut was burnt down, but the Blowhard and Dam Hut survived and are still there to this day. Vic held

Bernie in the highest regard as a friend and cattleman.

Jack Keating, who shared a lease with Vic Lawler and Bernie, recalled that Bernie was only 14 years old when he first went up Snowy Creek with the cattle, across the Razorback to Hotham. The first overnight stop would be spent at Lawler's Hut at the head of the Snowy Creek Spring and the second at Hotham at another Lawler Hut.

The Lawlers were renowned for their building ability, and carted their materials by dray and sleigh over the rough and tough terrain to the sites. Bernie was one of a party that took materials by dray over Little Plains to Dibbins' Spur, then down by sleigh to the Bogong High Plains and there built Cope Hut, where it still stands, used very frequently by so many hikers and skiers.

As Eric Weston said: Bernie's knowledge about the breeding of Herefords and his thoroughness of investigation before buying took him to many parts of Victoria. He was recognised as among the best as a cattleman, and his co-operation and readiness to always give a hand was a marvellous quality, not uncommon among cattlemen.

George Auger talked about the talents of the Lawlers with horseflesh. He said Bernie was equal to the best horse riders in the district. You would find him riding in the roughest and toughest

est part of the High Country—he thrived on it.

George told of the days when Bernie and his father were farriers. They used to shoe a draught horse for five shillings. Bernie's father used to make the shoes at the Smithy which still stands today at Lawler's at Germantown. The Lawlers used their teams of draught horses in the building of roads. As a young man, Bernie and his father drove the teams to the road sites and used chovels, ploughs and scoops (made by them at the smithy) to construct roads at Tawonga, Happy Valley and Porepunkah.

Another great feat by these stoic men was to take the battery for the Red, White and Blue Mine, into the Buckland Valley—they hauled it there with their horse teams. After Bernie's father died in 1941, Bernie concentrated on cattle until his death.

Tom Waterhouse yarned about Bernie's affinity with animals, and told the story of Bernie's fantastic dogs. One night when they were mustering on the High Plains and the cattle were locked in the yards for the night, Scotty the dog smelt cattle and went off into the fog to search for them. He went six to eight miles in heavy fog and brought the wanderers up from way, way down the mountainside, back to Hotham and the yards.

Another interesting tale told, was of the time when George Caloutas was jammed against the stock rails by a bull, with the bull's horns either side of his body. Bernie discovered his plight and rescued him.

Yet another tale, this time about ice. Out on top, there are often freezing temperatures. Icicles close up the horses' eyes, and have to be wiped off, and hang on the horse rugs often only six inches from the ground. Candles are used to melt the icicles from the rug clips. This gives us a very graphic picture of the weather and conditions

Bernie and his mates endured on the High Plains. Many such stories abound among our cattlemen—certainly a special breed of Australian manhood.

A final tribute from another of Bernie's close friends came from Wally Ryder, who said: We admired the manner in which Bernie managed and bred his cattle. His herd of Hereford cattle were admired and sought after. He was a man that made a reality of the type of mountain cattleman that is all too rapidly passing.

Tribute from the Soil Conservation Authority:

Mr. Ken Terry, Area Officer of the Soil Conservation Authority, paid this tribute to Bernie:

Bernie Lawler and his Uncle Vic Lawler assisted the Soil Conservation Authority with cattle management for many years. Bernie served on the Bogong High Plains District Advisory Committee from its inception and for several years afterwards. His wisdom and advice in this regard were invaluable. The management of his cattle on Feathertop and Hotham was exemplary. After he

ceased mountain grazing he still remained available to all for his advice and guidance. He will be sadly missed by officers of the Soil Conservation Authority.

Bernie was also an original member of the Mountain Cattlemen's Association.

Family Tribute:

Bernie's sisters, brothers, nieces, nephews and aunt have all expressed their deep sorrow in losing such a generous, kind man. They said: He always had time for us all. A perfect gentleman, so patient with us as children. It was always a privilege and honour to be in his company. We had wonderful experiences of droving cattle with him and riding behind his handsome figure on his brown horse. He had a delightful sense of humour and he was the core of our family. He was

greatly loved and respected by us all.

The end of Bernie's life came after a short illness and he was blessed with a dignified death at St. Vincent's Hospital. He is now at peace and will never be forgotten. He is survived by his sisters, Kathleen (Mrs. Gunson) and Johanna (Mrs. Kepple) and brother Martin; also his Aunt, Johanna Lawler, and nieces and nephews.

Funeral:

A thanksgiving Mass for the life of Bernard Vincent Lawler was celebrated by Father Burtonclay at Our Lady of the Snows Church, Bright. The theme of the Mass was full of joy and hope for the beginning of Bernie's Eternal Life and thanksgiving to God from all those present in having shared in the life of Bernard Lawler.

The church that Bernie had so faithfully worshipped his Lord in, was packed with family and friends, come to honour him. His nieces and nephews took part in the Mass with the readings and offertory procession. The choice of hymns, such as "Peace my Friends" and "Strong and Constant" reflected the man we had come to bury.

In the Eulogy, Father Burtonclay spoke of Bernard as a man of the mountains, who spent a lot of time in the purity and quietness of God's mountains. He was also a man of the plains and brought the quietness of the mountains to his private life.

An example of his kindness was his care of his aged mother and aunt for a number of years. He was also a perfect example of God's commandment to love and help all people. The number of people he helped during his lifetime would be legion. All this without publicity or thought of reward for himself—but he most surely assured himself of reward in God's Kingdom.

At the conclusion of Mass the cortege left Our Lady

of the Snows for the Bright Cemetery. The coffin-bearers were Brother Graeme Lawler, David Lawler, Geoffrey Lawler and Anthony Lawler. After the graveside ceremony, many of the mourners gathered at the Lawler homeshead at Germantown, where many yarns were told of Bernie's life, spent amongst his family and the Cattlemen of the High Plains.

All who have contributed to this story will never forget Bernard Vincent Lawler—the gentle man of the mountains.

(By Bernece Delany)



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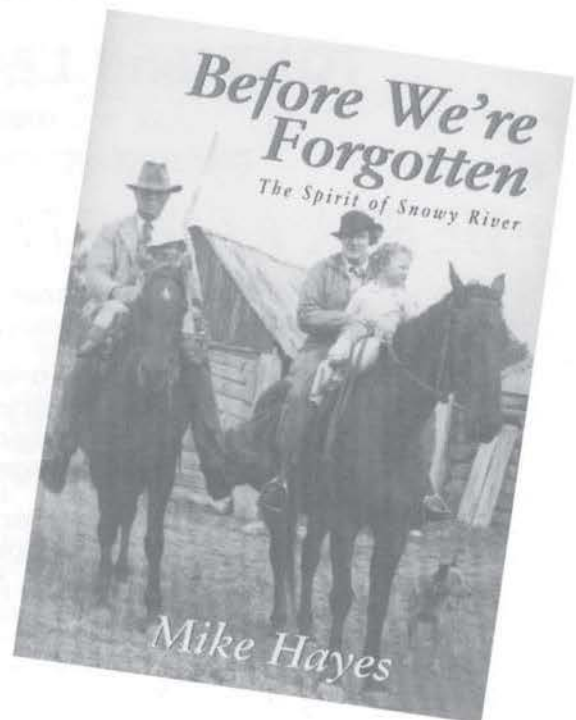
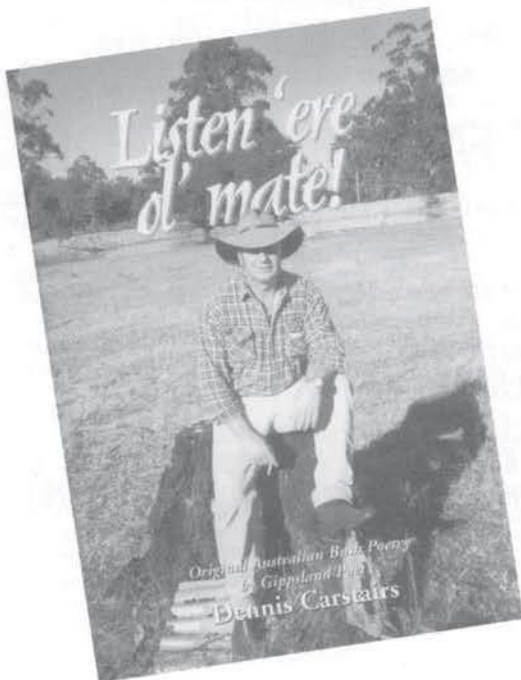
On the Bookshelf

The MCAV is proud to once again be associated with the development of a prominent Bush Poet. Dennis Carstairs has been competing through the Don Kneebone Award for a number of years, and now has a wide following throughout Gippsland. Who can forget his lament "The Bell", describing his feelings when, when his time came to receive the bell, it had not been returned! And his joy when, after giving this poem at Yarrawonga-Mulwala, the bell was returned.

Now, this poem and many others are available in book form, as *Listen, 'ere, Ol Mate!*, launched in the Briag pub by Craig Ingram MLA. His poem about Wally Ryder on the next page comes from his book. Dennis is now a regular bush poet around Gippsland, and a main mover in the formation of the Gippsland Bush Poets, who meet "about every six weeks" at the Rosedale Pub. To find out the date of the next meeting, give him a ring on 5145 6128. Or, if you would like a copy of his book, Mate, slip a cheque for \$15 plus \$2 p&p in the mail to him at P.O. Box 159, Stratford 3862.

ABC Books have produced *Before We're Forgotten: The Spirit of the Snowy River* by Mike Hayes. This book is mainly based in Southern New South Wales however, readers will find that various sections of it deal with Victoria. Like the chapter 'Over the top into Gippsland' which looks at droving into Victoria. Sadly there is no index, but on the thumbing through that I did names like, Pendergast, McGufficke, Marsden and Taylor jump out at you. It has some wonderful old photographs pre the cattlemen being banned from the National Park and appears largely to be the result of many hours of talking to many of the people that matter from that area.

My copy came from the ABC bookshop but I'm sure you would be able to get it on order by quoting the ISBN 0 73330735 3 and it costs about \$25.



Wally Ryder

He came to me in my sleep last night, stockwhip in his hand
He apologised for intruding - and said that he was off the land.
He was a big type of man, six foot high or maybe more
And I watched in awe his ghostly form move across the floor.

‘Don’t be alarmed I mean no harm,’ as he removed his battered hat
‘I am a friend and I come in peace - but we need to have a chat.’
His attire was sturdy droving garb, the smell of horse filled the air
His voice was calm and articulate, he put his stockwhip on my chair.

He lowered himself onto my bed (I swaer I heard it creak)
‘There’s things I need to tell you lad,’ and he began to speak.
Said his name was Wally Ryder, an that he’d long since left this earth
He was born a Mountain Cattleman, was all he’d known since birth.

There was no malice in his voice his eye’s were clear and bright
And he said he wanted to talk to me, about the words I write.
‘I’ve heard you at the Cattlemens, at the Sheepyard and the Rose
You keep the Mountain spirit burning with your poetry and prose.’

‘I remember way back when’ he said, ‘on horses fast and strong
We’d take our cattle every summer, to graze on Mount Bogong.
But now I watch with apprehension, in my heart I feels the dread
Will your children ever know, of hardy cattle mountain fed?

Will the Man from Snowy Rivers ride, become a long forgotten deed?
Will you see the mountains overgrown with ragwort, burr and weed?
Be wary of the enemy boy, tho uninformed, they’re a daunting force
And dare I say not one of them, whould know the backend of a horse.

They’ll never know the mountain life, the Kookaburras, the woolly butt
The lonlieness of a cattle drive - or a snug warm drovers hut.
There’s good fellows on our side who know the mountains, and it’s politics
The Maddison boys an Faithfulls my young bloke Harry, Jack and Barry Hicks.

Treasure the past’, he said to me, ‘and defend the future with all you pride
We know our history, custom and tradition - walk proudly by our side.’
I woke next morning feeling blessed, I felt enlightened - more aware
His words and face came back to me, he’d left his stockwhip on my chair.

This was no dream - he came to me, I just had to find out more
I examined all my mountain books - on horsemen and folklore.
Wally Ryder: fourth generation cattleman upheld a tradition fine
First ride the Bogong High Plains, when he was only nine.

He came to symbolise the cattlemen, he mustered many a herd
He was loyal, jovial and steadfast, his handshake was his word.
As the bushfires of ‘39 raged around, his bushcraft saved him then
And as a packers and mountain rescue man, he saved a score of men.

When he died in 1988, he was a legend, known throughout the plains
And until this day his reputation and he’s stature remains.
Way up yonder in the mountains, over Pretty Valley way
Lay a plaque of dedication - his memory here will stay.

I crossed myself and swore an oath - with Wally Ryder on my mind
My pen will never slander the mountain cattlemen - or their kind.

Dennis Carstairs

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 WEDNESDAY 4TH OCTOBER 2000.

PRESENT:

Simon Turner, Sue Silvers, Pauline Venn, Ian Geer, Doug Treasure Kathy Junor, Roger Hollis, Charlie Lovick Jack Lovick, Dave Saunders, Steve Ware, Frank Ryan, Ron Briggs, Chris Stoney, Rachel Parsons, Wendy Symons, Alan Rust, Rusty Connley, Barry Fitzgerald, John Cook, Vince Phelan, Jim Commins, Ros Andrews, Brian Higgins, C. Gruer.

The President of the Association, Simon Turner, took the chair and extended a warm welcome to all members, associate members and visitors. He opened the meeting at 11:05 a.m. and called for apologies.

APOLOGIES were received from Anne and Keith Whittam, Andrew Kee, Ross Brown, Stuart Hicks, Anthony and Kevin Higgins, Bill Cumming, Ben Treasure, Peter and Bruce McCormack and Peter Monds.

MINUTES of the previous Annual General Meeting of the Association as printed in the *Voice of the Mountains* Edition No. 23 of 2000 and circulated to all members and associate members were confirmed on the motion of Brian Higgins and seconded by Harry Ryder. Carried.

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

With the change in political climate, the Spring of '99 was full of change and uncertainty for the Association. When I assumed office in October, the result of the state election was hanging in the balance with the Independents and the Frankston by-election. The result is now exiled to the archives of history.

Before the political dust had settled, we were becoming acquainted with the new Member for East Gippsland - Craig Ingram, and the issue of great concern was the return of cattle to the Bennison Plains for the 1999-2000 grazing season, two years after the Caledonia fire.

Not only did I have a considerable amount of subject research to catch up on, but we had to convey our positions and concerns on the return of grazing to Bennison Plains to a new government. A government traditionally more easily swayed by minority radical groups, many of which claim to know what is best for the alpine and sub-alpine areas of Eastern Australia.

I must thank Craig Ingram MP for his participation in the whole Caledonia fire issue. Craig's office barely existed, staffing was short, and the pressures of being one of the three independents holding the balance of power were great. However, Craig was soon aware of our plight and our broad general concerns for the management of the Alpine National Park, and worked closely with us in our attempts to achieve a satisfactory outcome.

The return of cattle to the Caledonia fire affected licences is still not satisfactorily resolved. Parks Victoria intend to carry out vegetation surveys in October. Once these surveys are completed, a decision will then be made as to the possible return of the cattle for the 2000/2001 grazing season. Decisions made in this manner, so close to an impending grazing season, places extreme hardship on the licensees concerned who may well have to face yet another difficult dry season. These licensees require a greater time frame between the actual results of the vegetation surveys and the commencement date of the grazing season. We have already pointed this out to Parks Victoria, and hope that discussions will be start with a more realistic proposition of future vegetation surveys to take place in January for the following grazing seasons.

The executive of the Association has been continually monitoring the process for the return of grazing, and acknowledges the assistance given to it by those who share our concerns over the management of the alpine environment.

The Regional Forest Agreements for Victoria are now signed with Gippsland region being one of the last to be completed. As an issue, grazing was

obvious only by its absence, especially for Gippsland. Large areas have been classified into a range of categories which, in itself is acceptable. However the future management of these areas may be of concern to this Association and other members of the Public Land Council.

For some time the members of the Association have been concerned with the presence of deer on crown land within Eastern and Central Victoria. Deer have no natural predator in this country which should sound alarm bells to any environmentally conscious individual. There is to date very little scientific data on the populations and breeding habits of Sambar deer. Their browsing habits, along with migratory habits also share this same lack of scientific scrutiny. We must continue to encourage the management authorities of our regions to allocate sufficient resources to establish urgent research projects so that the appropriate management criteria can be implemented.

All the four branches of the MCAV have been continuing the weed initiative program. This program has been successful in reducing weed populations in strategic areas around the Alps. More importantly the program heightens the priority of weed control to the general public who see our work as being essential to the management of the Alps. We must be continually vigilant for any new and emerging weeds which may appear. They have the potential to be an even greater threat than the weeds that are already present.

I must express a deep appreciation to all our associate members, especially those who have joined this Association at our 2000 Bennison Plain Get Together. The associate members help to form the very fabric of the MCAV. Their assistance in almost every facet of the Association's concerns is greatly appreciated.

On Saturday 12th August 2000 members from all four branches met in Benalla to participate in the Olympic Torch Relay. The event was structured around Australia's bush heritage, consisting of a pioneer's parade of miners, drovers, timber workers, horse-drawn vehicles, squatters, and so on. Members of MCAV and others formed a guard of honour to welcome the torch to Benalla. The torch was carried by Gerald Egan who rode onto a podium and ignited a cauldron. The Mansfield team of Charlie Lovick, Geoff Burrowes, Bruce McCormack, Chris Stoney and Gerald Egan are to

be congratulated for their excellent effort.

Over the weekend of the 12th, 13th and 14th of January 2000 the Gippsland branch held a very successful Get Together. The event was held on the freehold property owned by Kevin Higgins. The weekend ran like clockwork, and with the availability of a helicopter taking joy flights out over the Caledonia fire area, the public had a chance to see at first hand the massive devastation unleashed by such an intense burn. We had a number of new events, including Mulga Bill's Bicycle challenge which was very successful and promises to be entertaining next year. Well done Gippsland branch for a great weekend, and a big thank you to Kevin Higgins for the use of his paddock and horses.

The next twelve months is likely to cause concern for MCAV and its members. We have yet to achieve a satisfactory outcome for the Caledonia fire affected licensees. Even though we have secured seven year licences this does not mean that pressures to reduce grazing will not be exerted on our members. We now have a government in Victoria with a lack of understanding of our aims and objectives. This government also seems to have a problem communicating with the Association. We need to continually inform and remind this government of the obligations contained in the legislation regarding alpine grazing. This is, in itself, a relentless task.

Our future success is going to depend upon every single member coming forward, being involved in, and understanding, the issues at hand. We must remember what our licences mean to us. There is no room for complacency. If we do become complacent then we will become exiled. We need to gather our strengths and continue to defend our way of life to continue to care for the high country and to alert others to the real threats to the alpine environments of Victoria.

Now for some very exciting good news. We have been working with the Shire of Delatite since April this year on an event which we hope, will have great benefits for the Association's members. The Centenary of Federation is to be celebrated Australia-wide in May 2001. As part of the enactment of Federation, there will be a mighty street parade to take place on Wednesday May 9th 2001. Part of the parade in 1901 were 205 mounted stockmen. The Association was approached by the Shire of Delatite to take responsibility in the re-

enactment, and to provide 205 riders. A very large task. I have much pleasure in announcing that the proposal from the Association and the Shire was accepted, and better still, funding has been granted by the State and Federal governments, to enable the Association to fulfil its commitment.

I thank Ian Geer of Delatite Shire for his invaluable assistance and expertise in organising the funding application. We look forward to working with him over the next 7 months. We will be requiring assistance from Associate members to fill the ranks of stockmen. More details in coming Newsletters.

Sue Ryder has been quietly working on a project to be able to produce a pamphlet on the history of the cattlemen's huts of the high plains. She has reached the second round in applications for funding. I thank and congratulate her, and hope that her application will be successful.

Finally I would like to thank marketing officer - Pauline Venn, and members of the central council, past president Harry Ryder, and vice president Brian Higgins for their helpful assistance throughout the year. On behalf of all the members of the Association I would like to thank our secretary, Sue Silvers, for her untiring efforts and expertise in all matters that the Association encounters.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

This is my 15th annual report to members and associate members. Examination of the financial statements for the year 1999-2000 will show that the Association has had a very expensive year, the major expense being legal fees for representation before an Independent Panel into grazing in the Caledonia fire area, and I shall speak more on that later. At the same time it is important to note the drop in subscriptions, both for members and for associate members. Full member subscriptions are down by nearly \$2,000. This is not due to a fall-off in membership, but simply to unpaid subscriptions. The fall in associate membership subscriptions of \$1630 is due to non-payment plus the fact that a number of memberships change category, for example from family to single, or single to pensioner/student. On the income side we can be extremely grateful for the profit achieved by the Gippsland Branch at the last Get Together.

The increase in expenses is due almost entirely

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to the Association appearing before an Independent Panel into the banning of cattle for the second season from the grazing area affected by the 1998 Caledonia fire. The Association was forced to request the Minister to form the panel after Parks Victoria informed the Association that there would be no cattle returning to the Caledonia for the 1999/2000 season. This was seen by members to be absolutely unjust, unreasonable and absurd. The Association was forced to engage senior legal counsel when Parks Victoria set the stage at the first Directions hearing by being represented by five lawyers: a Queens Counsel, his junior, the State Government Solicitor, Parks Victoria's solicitor, and DNRE's legal officer. I am able to state that it was never intended that any Independent Panel be set up as a formal court. It was originally set out as a mediation mechanism to resolve any disputes between the Association and the Department. In addition expenses were incurred in providing back-up scientific assistance. Naturally flowing from this

was an increase in expenses incurred by the President and myself in attending the hearings, of which there were three, with the final hearing taking three days. The end result was a mixed one for the Association. The Panel ruled that the cattle should not return for the 1999/2000 season. It also ruled that it would be difficult for Parks Victoria to justify keeping the cattle off in future seasons, that Parks Victoria had missed an opportunity to study the effects of grazing by not accepting MCAV's offer to put 70% of the cattle up, that the practice of 'catchment fencing' be replaced by buffer zones of 10 to 15 metres, and that management practices should be fully explained and understood by both parties. You will note that the rest of the expenses have stayed more or less at the same level as last year.

The cost of the Panel hearing has critically depleted our reserves, and there will need to be some serious discussion today about ways of increasing our reserve funds. It means also that, for the Association to continue to represent its members, each member will have to make a very real commitment to achieving a strong financial base. If the Association does not achieve this objective it will only be able to continue on for a period of time.

Central Council has held two formal and one informal meeting during the past 12 months. Apart from general business the major issues for discussion were the Caledonia fire area, and the Get Together. The Association was also involved in the Olympic Torch relay which was a great success, and we had initial discussions on a proposal to take part in the Centenary of Federation celebrations. Members and associate members will be reproducing the ride of 205 mounted stockmen in the 1901 parade, again in 2001 as part of the major event - Our Nation on Parade. This wonderful opportunity for the Association will take place in May 2001 and we will need the assistance of every member and as many associate members willing to take part.

The MCAV office relocated in April this year to 3A, 14 High Street Mansfield. This is a relatively new building and it is a pleasure to work in, adequate space and very light and airy.

Two new items of equipment were purchased during the year. A photocopier which was needed as a replacement for the first one the Association

ever owned. This has cut down on costs somewhat, as I am now able to print our Newsletter instead of having it done at the printers. The other item purchased was a replacement fax machine for the office.

In conclusion I would like to thank Simon Turner whose initiation into the Presidency has been demanding, but one he has handled with cool determination; to Brian Higgins who has given great support, Harry Ryder, an outstanding backstop, and to the Central Council; members and associates for their generous encouragement.

MARKETING OFFICER'S REPORT

In preparing my fourth annual marketing report, I recollect with a smile the 2000 Get Together held on Bennison Plain.

After leaving Melbourne with the temperature threatening 38 degrees, it was a welcome relief to head for the high country. A refreshing dip in the Macalister River at Licola was most welcome before heading up the track and settling into camp after taking in the scenery on my first visit to the Bennison Plains.

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This year Jeannine and I were assisted by a very enthusiastic group of ladies and one man. Their friendly smiles and invaluable assistance made the marketing tent a most pleasurable place to be. At the running of the Cattlemen's Cup, a young lady, who was a stranger to us, and her infant took shelter from the elements in our marquee. We were able to share a very special emotional moment with this lady when at the conclusion of the race, she informed us she was the wife of Ricky Hodge, the winner of the great race. The weekend was full of special memories such as this.

The cooler temperatures of the high country caught many patrons short of warm clothing, so it came as no surprise to the marketing crew to sell out of windcheaters. The most amusing sight of the weekend was when a very stocky gentleman dressed in a singlet presented himself at the marketing counter. He was shivering from the cold and requested a windcheater. Unfortunately, at the time we only had children's' sizes, however in his endeavour to beat the cold he was willing to attempt to get into a size 14, when his normal size would have been XL. Needless to say we didn't sell him a windcheater, but we did manage to outfit him with a polo shirt.

The gross sales from the Get Together surpassed \$15,700 and with a figure like that it was little wonder we sold out of a lot of items, including 70 caps, 400 stubby holders, 60 Get Together T shirts, 8 dozen special edition port crocks, and as mentioned 35 windcheaters. The clothing items were reduced in numbers to below five at the close of business on the Sunday.

Now from the highs to the lows. The GST has naturally impacted on our range of merchandise with some items decreasing in price, while others have increased by the tax component after absorbing any wholesaler increase.

Visitors to the 2001 Get Together can expect to see the release of several new products such as poly cotton collared long sleeved rugby tops, westminister ceramic mugs, playing cards, High Country Stationery sets, oilskin wooly wine coolers, High Tea in the high country gift packs as well as an extension to our literary range to include maps and books on historic subjects. The special 17th edition port crocks will feature the Buckwong Hut with several people already taking advantage of pre-release orders as invited in the mid-year Newsletter.

Our own exclusive merchandise range at the 2001 Get Together will be complemented by the work of Hinnomunjie shearer and local Omeo district artist, Nick Sargant. I have had the privilege of reviewing some of Nick's work and am delighted to have him join us. His drawings are not to be missed.

My report could not be complete without once again acknowledging the efforts of my special friend and cousin Jeannine in assisting me at the Get Together. A special mention needs to be given to my mother Gloria Spencer, who did an exemplary job in her allotted role of clearing out the old stock at reduced prices with her "Have I got a bargain for you" approach. Cheers Mum!

At the conclusion of the reports it was noted that Sue Silvers had presented her 15th annual report and she was thanked by members and associate members.

Moved Jim Commins seconded Doug Treasure that the financial statements as presented be accepted. Carried.

SETTING OF MEMBERSHIP AND ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTION FEES FOR YEAR 2001/2002

It was agreed during discussion that the fees needed to be increased and the reserves built up again. Many members expressed the view that full membership to the Association should be increased significantly.

Moved Harry Ryder seconded Brian Higgins That subscription fees for full members be increased to \$200 (plus GST) for the first 100 head, and then \$3.00 (plus GST) per head thereafter. Carried.

It was noted that in the matter of associate membership subscriptions there had been no increases in over ten years, and that the cost of administering a pensioner/student membership was done at a cost to the Association. Agreed that there needed to be a strong committed base of associate members who were properly informed of the issues affecting the Association.

Moved Brian Higgins seconded Barry Fitzgerald that the associate membership category be changed and increased by an increase to \$35.00 (plus GST) for family membership, \$25.00 (plus

GST) for single membership and that the pensioner/student category be dropped with those associates now joining on the single rate. Carried.

It was agreed that a letter be sent out explaining the reason for dropping the pensioner/student category, and the need to increase the family and associate member subscription rate.

SETTING OF HONORARIUMS

After discussion it was moved Doug Treasure and seconded Brian Higgins that:

The Honorarium for the President be \$3,000 plus expenses,

That the Honorarium for the Vice President be \$1,000 plus expenses,

That the Honorarium for the Special Projects Officer be \$1,000 plus expenses,

That the Honorarium for the Secretary/Treasurer be \$20,000 plus expenses, and

That the Honorarium for the Marketing Officer be \$1,000 plus expenses. Carried.

ELECTION OF OFFICE BEARERS

Mr Bill Crump took the chair for the election

of office bearers and declared all positions to be vacant.

The following officers were elected:

President - Simon Turner proposed by Doug Treasure seconded by Rusty Connley was elected.

Vice President - Brian Higgins proposed by Harry Ryder seconded by Jim Commins was elected.

Special Projects Officer - Jim Commins and Harry Ryder proposed by Brian Higgins seconded by Doug Treasure were elected.

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

Marketing Officer - Pauline Venn nominated by Rusty Connley and seconded by Jim Commins was elected.

APPOINTMENT OF AUDITOR

Mr Bill Crump was nominated as Auditor by Jim Commins and seconded by Harry Ryder was appointed.

There being no further business the chairman closed the meeting at 12:35 p.m.

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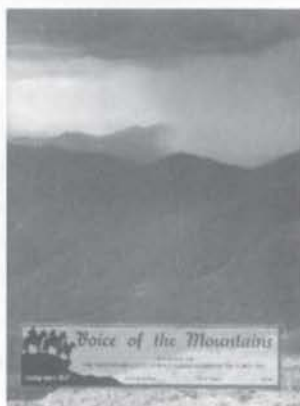
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The Committee of *Voice of the Mountains* would like to thank everyone for the support it has received during the year particularly Dennis and Julie Carstairs, Jenny Wright, Sue Ryder and her Aunty Dot and Hamish Baggs for literally taking *Voice* to the Get Together 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 early so as to deal with our insane deadline and that management is so flexible with the input of *Voice*. Thanks guys.

