

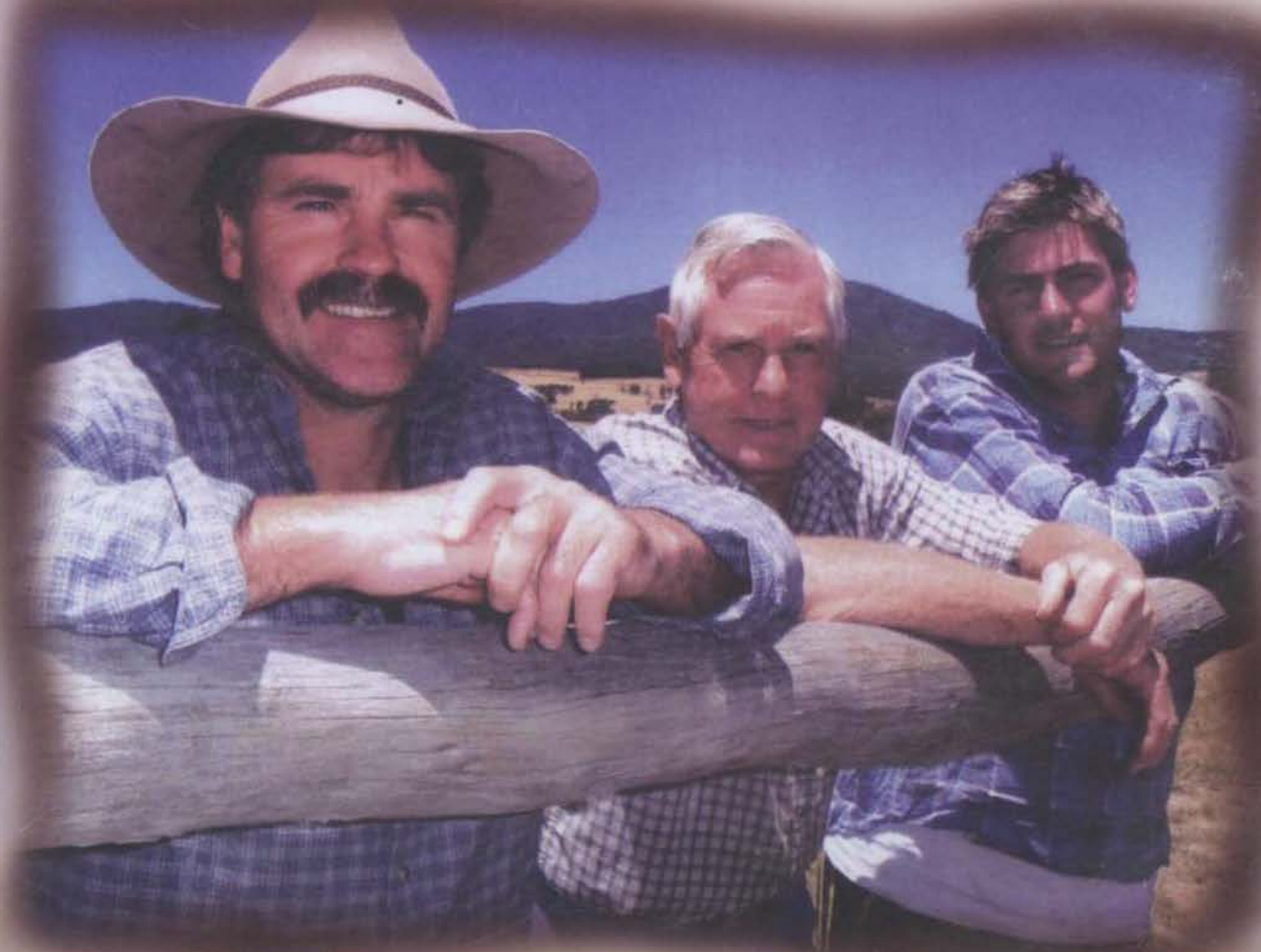


Voice of the Mountains

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

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No.27 (2004)



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

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COVER

Three generations of mountain cattlemen - the McCormack family.
Mansfield secretary Bruce McCormack with his father Peter and son Adam (Jack)
only months before Peter's untimely death in April 2003.
They are photographed at Sheepyard Flat shortly before last years Get-Together

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President's Message

2004

A word from Simon Turner

I need not dwell on the difficulties of the past year. Drought and fire have wrought their havoc and it will take many years for some of our worst affected members to recover. The many expressions of support from our friends and associates have been greatly appreciated.

We have been pleased and surprised by the rapid recovery of the land following the fires. It is now clear that earlier suggestions of 2, 5 or 10 year moratoriums on grazing were excessive. Many areas that were burnt, have recovered sufficiently to be grazed this year.

The arguments about the causes of fire and the resumption of grazing have again highlighted the gulf between the views of the parties involved.

Prior to the 2003 fires, our local cattlemen warned authorities such as NRE, PV and CFA about the need for fuel reduction burning and the potential for major fire. In particular, Jim Commins wrote extensively about the likelihood of disastrous wildfire. The warnings were generally ignored. To now be told, by the same agencies, that cattle might damage the environment is, to put it simply, a bit rich.

We have at least three colleges of knowledge on the issues of concern to us. They are the views expressed by the extreme greens, the attitudes held within the various government agencies with which we have to deal and our views which are based on generations of observation, discussion and involvement.

The views of the extreme greens on alpine cattle grazing, fuel reduction burning, fire management and the management of public land in general are of great concern. The extreme greens' groups seem to be led by people who have an almost religious passion for their point of view.

Professor Peter Attiwill acknowledged this when he addressed our November Council meeting. He said that the extreme greens have managed to include elements of spirituality in their discussions about land management and biodiversity. They use terms like balance of nature and mother nature, which, in fact, have nothing to do with the actual dynamics of the land, flora and fauna.

It is of some relief that the community seems to be getting tired of the extreme greens' carping demands for ever more national parks and the religious fervour with which they promote their views. On the other hand however, with the demise of the Democrats, the Greens will probably pick up seats in Melbourne at the next State election. It will be ironic to see the Greens make gains in the political sphere at the same time as their environmental policies are being worn thin by closer and more rigorous examination. Perhaps the exposure of their policies in the unforgiving chambers of the Parliament will bring the extreme greens to more account and expose some of the myths that they have created.

The second college of knowledge is the set of views held within government agencies. They are supposed to be based on scientific information but we have great difficulty aligning the conclusions of their scientific investigations with what we see on the ground.

Finally there are our views which are generally expressed in relatively simple language and are based on first-hand observations and reports of what has actually happened for generations. We know this is sometimes dismissed as simply anecdotal information but we also know that this information is just as important, accurate and useful as the most learned scientific paper.

For the good of the land, flora and fauna we must find a way to communicate and not just lecture each other.

To start with, we all need to understand the condition of the land at the time of white settlement. The evidence from explorers indicates that much of the land was open woodland and there was significant evidence of fire. If we can agree on where we started, we might be part of the way to agreeing on where we are heading with public land management.

We need to agree on what we are trying to protect.

We need to agree on our aims and aspirations for the land.

We also need to agree on whether commercial gain from public land damages its heritage or whether it provides the funding for sensible conservation and land management.

If we are to advance the debate, and not just argue with open mouths but closed ears, we must try to get some consensus on these issues.

We go into 2004 with a strong team at the MCAV. We now have Jack Hicks, Harry Ryder and Brian Higgins as Special Projects Officers as well as Bruce McCormack as Vice-President. This will give us a bit more strength at the top of the organisation and the ability to spread the workload.

I want our associates to know that we appreciate your support and draw strength from your enthusiasm.

We must ensure that our successors look back on 2004 as the year when we put the dry ashes of devastation behind us and put cattle back on green alpine meadows.

Simon Turner

President

We may have been battered around in the last twelve months but we are still looking toward to the future.....



Beloka Dawn

Laurence Webb

He rolls the cow at daybreak, as a pink glow trails the sky,
She's held to life for five long weeks, he's given up wondering why.
The last of half the herd to go since bushfires flamed the park,
But she won't give in, and he won't give up, and he rolls her after dark.
He lost them in explosions before the raging bushfire's path,
And he saw them die of shock and lack of feed in the aftermath.
They perished deep in winter snows, too weak to fight the cold,
Then they were paralysed at calving, and the wild dogs took their toll.

His eyes raise to the ridges, grey and wasted as the moon,
And he gazes at the grassy flats where he aches to take them soon.
The finest feed in thirty years, but the grass will waste and die,
They locked him out before the snowmelt with a scientific lie.
Before the thaw revealed the grasses, those advisors far away,
Had predicted desolation, and they banned him, come what may.
But the fires have roamed these ranges now for thirty thousand years,
The bush responds as it always has and defies the expert's fears.

For fifty years he's mustered stock to mountain summer feed,
And roamed it with his mattock, to dig out briar and weed.
He helped the first bush walkers to find the shelter of his hut,
And guided rescue parties to find lost tourists, torn and cut.
If he's locked out, the rest of us will lose sights we've never seen,
For he alone knows all the tracks, the valleys and the streams.
So now his cattle eat the paddocks out along the valley floor,
First muster missed in fifty years – will he muster any more?

He used to spray the blackberries to give native plants a chance,
But now they clog the gullies and no more the wildflowers dance.
His granddad lit cool autumn fires that crept slow along the ground,
But now litter lines the forest floor and the hot fires leap and bound.
Both banned by city officials, living fifty years apart,
A legacy of ignorance of the bush, that breaks his heart.
He feels a bitter anger at mismanagement at hand,
For in a strange way like the Koori, he is wedded to this land.

A mournful bellow wakes him, it's the cow that must surely die,
His face turns to the mountains where his spirit will one day fly.
And he remembers the pain and heartbreak that his forbears came to know,
When they were taxed for crossing borders and their shorthorns died in snow.
But they gamely battled onward, and overcame their loss,
For it's fighting city officials spawned the spirit of the Southern Cross.
So he rolls the cow at daybreak and she rises gamely to her feet
For love, persistence and stubbornness are bloody hard things to beat!

Bushfire at Bindi

Rowena Turner

How little did we know with the dawn of 2003,
the upheaval we were about to face, how difficult our lives would be.
We all became acutely aware of the north horizon and its lie,
for by 2.00pm great mushroom formations exploded into the sky,
like huge thunderheads billowing up, tinted with a brown stain,
I could feel a growing anxiety and a deep gut wrenching pain.

Standing alert, watching, feeling the ancient human instinct called flight or fight.
The encroaching enemy is looming, waiting, descending when weather conditions are right.
We had to prepare to save ourselves, our livelihoods, stock and our land,
our peaceful valley was so far from town, there'd be no fire trucks to lend a hand.
Thursday, Jan 23rd was a very hard day, the truck arrived in the morn,
it was David Hallet (a generous helper) who found us looking all rather forlorn.

He was trucking our horses, ponies and tack, we couldn't bear to deal with them burnt,
In drought as well, he insisted on caring for them, how generous he was we soon learnt.
To see the horses go on this day was sad, but the hardest blow was yet to come,
down to Ensay I took the children and met up with my dear old Mum.
Bags packed with our valuables we loaded her car up, she would head to her place,
I said my goodbyes to them all, reassured them and put on a very brave face.

As I turned, we parted ways and I drove back into the smoke, this day was taking its toll,
the children and horses were in excellent hands, but the tears were beginning to roll.
I stopped in Swifts Creek to buy more food, there was an unusual feeling in town,
friendly but brief, a strained urgency was upon every one, they were all centering down.
Withdrawing into their own worlds to prepare for an unknown battle,
and heading south to safety were lots of horse floats and many semi loads of sheep and cattle.



With nightfall came an atmosphere heavy and smoke crept into every small place,
white ash was falling onto our shoulders, descending from somewhere high up in space.
Air movements were eerie and direction was fickle, strange and unusual patterns were made,
our senses were sharpened to wind direction and weather, but for inches of rain we prayed.
A generous offer to come and assist, cattlemen from Bennison Plain, Brian was on the phone,
how grateful we were, it was moral support and better than facing this all on our own.

Australia day dawned, the north wind had sprung up, creating an enormous fan, from Glen Wills to the Valley, Dinner Plain to Omeo, the fire just got up and ran. Ripping through bush land, scorching the wildlife, leaving an earthscape so stark, I wondered now, where is the biodiversity of the wondrous National Park. Well it's up in smoke, high in the sky and dead for generations to come, because that day our sky went scarlet, then black, as the smoke just blocked out the sun.

The whole sky was a ruby glowing with heat, things were happening just too fast, D.S.E "Red Flag" went up, but lost contact with dozers, this had been predicted in the past. Smoke affected radios, everyone scattered, like ants to safety they did flee, a dozer driver, his offsider and D7 came to shelter which was most reassuring to me. We sat in the garden, plans in place, extra helpers and a bulldozer to give us a boost, then at 1.00 pm, just after lunch, the chooks headed off to their roost.

The brilliant red sky had turned to black, we'd lost power, I reached for a light, we sat in the garden with Brian's esky and prepared ourselves for a fight. Memories of my mother and late fathers stories came flooding into my head, the '39 fires, all that they'd been through and how at midday the chooks went to bed. Of Mum being in Omeo when the town caught alight, as the fire rolled in like the sea, and at no time ever before did their stories relate as much as this moment for me.



We sat in darkness and could just make out the horizon in the east, then Brian decided that tomorrow morning breakfast would probably be quite a feast. On the menu would be charcoal chicken and hard boiled eggs were a sure bet, we all had a laugh and it felt good that we hadn't lost our sense of humour yet. About 3.30p.m. the wind changed to the south and for us it was a good deal, the sky lightened off to a magnificent show of golden shades which looked almost surreal.

We were spared this day of being burnt out but one thing was for sure, the fire was now in Splitters range and we were in for very much more. With Anthony, Brian and Gavin to help, January 30 was the next shocking day we had met, it humbled me that these men left their families and put themselves under such threat. They offered their help and shared in our fears, anguish and justified concern, always having some timely advice for me, I was in uncharted waters, there was plenty to learn.

It blew a gale from the north-west the fire arrived in our sights by noon, it was coming off Splitters and into the white box, we would be all fighting it soon. Briefly we watched to the east over Carriage Range and could see an incredible scene, travelling at high speed the Gelantipy fire raced, leaving devastation where it had been. To the home paddock hill we went, and were aghast at the Bindi Rd "going up" red hot, huge explosions of smoke, the red glow of the box trees ablaze, a scary sight I kid you not.

We watched in awe, flames were up and dancing, shooting out of tops of the trees, eighty metres or more with the wind behind them, I was feeling weak at the knees. I glanced across at Gavin and Brian and saw looks of fear and grave concern, there was a horrible feeling in the pit of my stomach, "Please God don't let anyone burn". Nature had unleashed her element at her worst and so totally out of control, Simon and Anthony called for help at the Bindi Gap, so we got the fire units on the roll.



Another south wind change, which flared up the spotfires and headed them up our road, then five points of rain from nowhere, a reprieve, once again had saved our place of abode. That evening I noticed the strong, pungent stench of the moisture after the hot fire session, the valley was filled with a very strong smell that has left quite a lasting impression. With no power again, we sat exhausted, but there was still plenty of anxious nattering, and clear in my memory I do recall that the whisky bottle was given a fair battering.

We had three more fallbacks of this nature and by the time this ordeal came to an end, our nerves were getting frayed and tattered, but our lives we had to defend. Every night I rang the children and reassured them we were still well, one weekend (thanks to Gavin) I went to see them, but the trip out was hell. There was fire all around and the day was forecast to be all right, but just as I left the wind changed, the fire blew up, what a threatening sight!

Relieved to get to Bairnsdale, I felt I'd been through the third world war,
as I pulled in and got out off the vehicle, over to me Lauren and James tore.
They threw their arms around me, tears rolled down the cheeks of my face,
they asked of their Dad and we stood and cried tears of relief and held a lasting embrace.
Not ready to bring them home, still too much at risk I did feel,
Eight year old James had developed shingles with the stress of the whole ordeal.

They were starting school in Bairnsdale at the primary school '754',
and thank you to our friends who gave Mum a hand, ever grateful to you all.
So more days of fire back at Bindi, more memories I can recall,
of thick smoky days and no visibility, strange orange light and black leaf fall,
of roaring sounds to the east at 10pm on a reasonably calm night,
lying wondering how far away it was, by the roar the flames were quite a height.

Of ember attack warnings and lots of back burning to fill in all the gaps,
when it's all burnt out around in some form, then we'll be safe perhaps.
When Mount Bindi went up it roared like the loudest ocean I've heard,
I wondered about the wildlife I'd seen there and the populations of lyrebird
nestled in the blue gum gullies in the bark and litter knee-deep.
The fire here burnt black smoke for ages, then crowned up hill, it did leap.

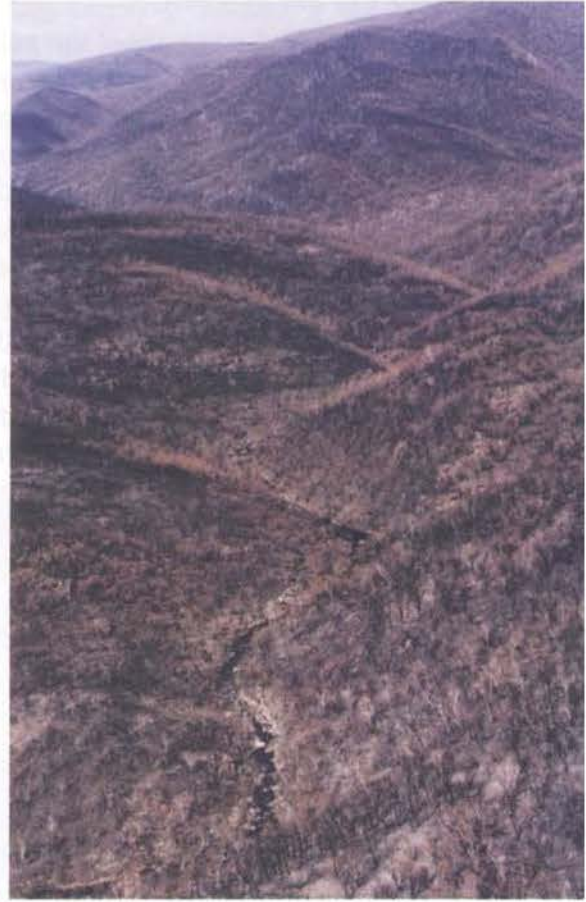
We lost four hundred acres of grass that day and all of our back fence,
with strike teams and a bulldozer as well, the day had been very intense.
Another fall back to the house and sheds, waiting for the fire we sat,
then Nigel jumped back on the dozer, doing a fine job he stopped it up the flat.
Sitting on the verandah at night, watching the red light of the fire glow through,
listening to the devastating sound of ancient trees crashing down every minute or two.

Knowing tomorrow we had to blackout, the tasks ahead were huge you know,
after four weeks our energy levels were running down, getting rather low.
The magnitude of these fires, and its arrival we did anxiously wait,
the onslaught and the aftermath, the tension at times had been great.
Many terrifying experiences and daunting sights have been seen,
people endangering lives to fight a fire that should never have been.

To the people who helped us here, I haven't mentioned you all,
With the fire and the fencing, you have made this event easier for us to endure.
To you and your families we will be grateful forever and so you can be sure to see,
we will always remember the time that you gave us, your kindness, courage and generosity.
The scars of the 2003 fires are deeply etched in our souls and we think back now and then,
still surfacing one year later, many people are still working on building their lives again.

To the generation of the future, think long and hard about how you manage the bush,
be wary of political agendas and the shallow "extreme green" push.
Always question the academic theory, and the manipulated scientific tale,
it can sometimes have little practical application, just let some commonsense prevail.
We need a balanced approach, common sense and science can go hand in hand,
for our future generations to enjoy, the unique flora and fauna of this land.

*Rowena was asked to 'write something' for Voice from her own memories of the fire,
rather than all the carefully drafted documents that the authorities have produced.
Once she started the words just kept coming. The photographs used were all taken at Bindi.*





**Visual Diary 2003 Fires
Aerial Images taken April 2003**

Clockwise from top left, opposite: Trees and ash, Benambra; Typical burnt river bed; Grazing was removed from the Washbed Creek/Mt Nelse area in the 1991 – an intense burn; James Turner and the “Welcome to the Alpine National Park”, Mitta Road, Bingo; Looking from Middle Creek toward Rocky Valley;

This page: What should be green is black at Washbed Creek; Trial plot Middle Creek looking toward Pretty Valley – note the intense burn area below and leading into the trial plot and how the fire stopped at the fence lines and didn't proceed onto the grazed area; the remains of Pendergast yards, Beloka; the ungrazed north end of the Bogong High Plains;

Overleaf: Retrieving survivors, Benambra; the fate of some of Bob and Vince Pendergast cattle, Benambra;

Next page: Dave Adamthwaite, volunteer fencer from Mystic Park at Bindi; volunteer fire fighters grabbing some zzzz; burnt mountainside; Graham Pendergast and all that is left of the yards at Beloka.

The back cover of *Voice* shows the height of the flames on the Bindi front.



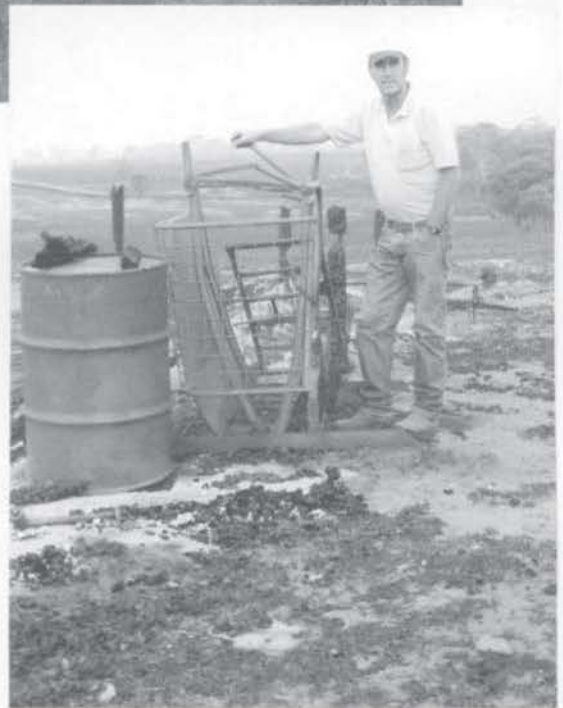




The fires of 2003 are indelibly etched in the minds of those who saw them coming. Unfortunately, some of us have *seen them coming* for many years and the *voice of the mountains* was to a greater degree ignored.



The fire stretched from Mt Buffalo in the west, through to Tubbut on the NSW border and beyond, before advancing on Canberra. According to DSE records almost 1.3 million hectares were burnt in Victoria alone including 75,000 hectares of farming land. There were 41 houses, over 200 other buildings, 3000 km of fencing and 11,000 head of stock lost. Much of this destruction in our own front and back yards.



Lightning storms on 20 December caused four fires in the Kosciuszko National Park near the Victorian border. Then during the evening of 7 January 2003 (a day of Total Fire Ban), additional thunderstorms swept across eastern Victoria and southern NSW. Lightning was responsible for starting an additional 80 fires in Victoria and over 40 fires in NSW and the ACT. Many of the fires were to eventually join together and form the Bogong Complex fire becoming Victoria's largest bushfire since the devastating fires of 1939. Over 6,000 individuals, 44 aircraft of various type, over 500 vehicles including 4wd, tankers and dozers were involved in the battle.

It was 59 days before the fires were 'contained' on 7 March and another two months, 30 April, before they were declared safe. This 'safe' declaration was only achieved through the efforts of **many**. We are all indebted to the **many** who put their own lives on hold to achieve this 'safe' state.

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The Year 2003

John Faithfull

As I look back through the year of 2003,
there hasn't been much luck here
for a little bloke like me.

And many have suffered also
as Nature was to blame,
the drought, bushfires and floods
all add to the flame.

Oh, I never want to see again
the sight of blackened smoke.
The hot and dry northerly winds
that nearly made us choke.

And the sun never filtered in
till the fire had passed so free.
How will I ever forget
the year 2003.

When rain hit the alpine hills
the gullies eroded out.

The charcoal and the ashes
killed the trout in streams about.

The loss of stock was enormous,
in this vast district of ours.

The wildlife and the sheep
and not to mention breeding cows.

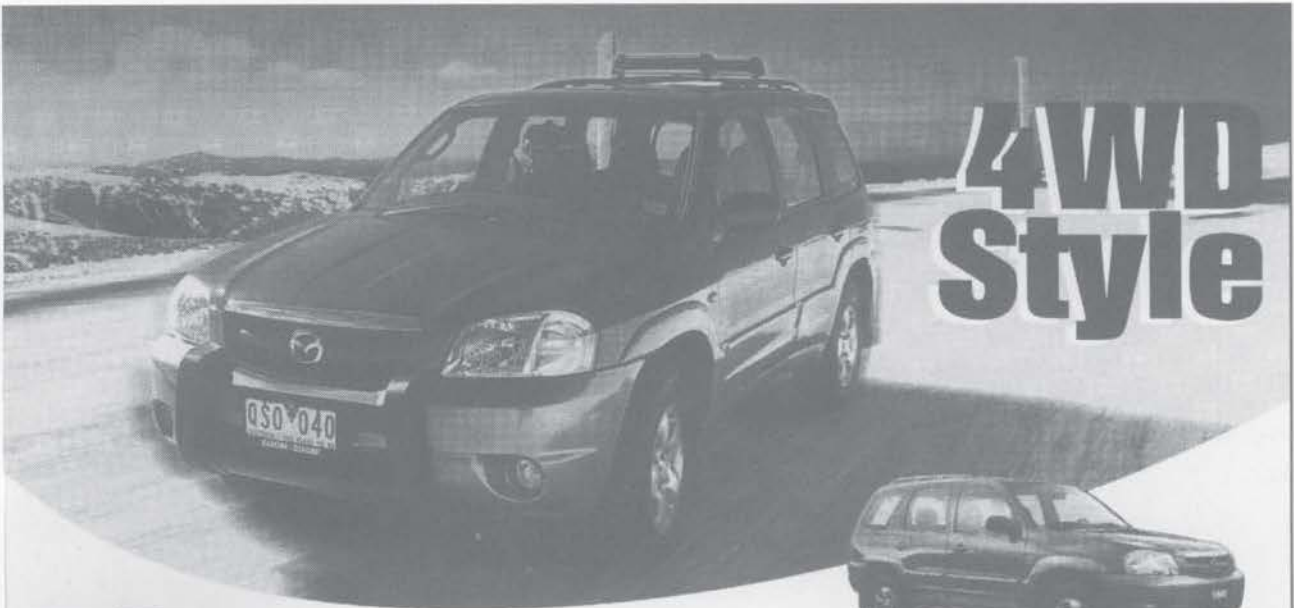
Fencing contractors from all around
came to help the farmers' plea,
and the community pulled together
in the year 2003.

Feeding out for months on end,
it'll take time for grass to grow.

Oh, the hardships we have had
in the region of Omeo.

I never want to see again the sight of blackened smoke





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Which is the damaged environment?



Cattle on the Bogong High Plains after fires 2003



Parks Victoria's boat harbour on the River Yarra at Richmond

The Last Pioneers

(dedicated to Pete McCormack)

*Did you miss them droving cattle down our stock routes long and wide,
When dusty man and beast were tested by a fierce, dry countryside?
Do you wish you'd seen the Clydesdales hauling furrows 'cross the flat,
Or straining bullocks bellow wool in from a flooded outback track?*

*We stand a still young nation; our past is near yet much we've lost,
Of the pioneering families who blazed the trail, and paid the cost.
And became a different people, shaped by hard and ancient hand,
Made dryly tough and independent, to love this withering land.*

*We have tamed the mighty distance, now the highway, not the track;
Our helicopters muster cattle out across the far outback.
We have cleared the land and fenced it, and the old, hard days are out,
But we haven't tamed the mountains, and we still need them in the drought.*

*For there's one link to the droving days still living on the range,
Which automation can't replace, or economics grow and change.
Where the cattle still are driven, slowly stringing up the track,
And the stockhorse and the cattle dog's nostrils flare at the stock whip's crack.*

*Where tracks carved by generations guide a tradition unchanged,
For we still have mountain cattlemen, to ride upon the range.
Still they muster through the autumn, tailing strays until they drop,
For the early snows cause havoc if the stock are caught "up top".*

*Of the leases in their hundreds, scarcely fifty now are left,
The Caledonia fires closed three, and the greenies want the rest.
A hundred and fifty cattle, a five hundred acre lease,
It isn't economic, and it ain't a life of ease.*

*So if you're lost in our mountains, find a mustering hut to hide,
When only bushman's skills can find you, pray once more the cattlemen ride.
Then spare a thought for a way of life with its future so unclear,
And pray that we don't lose for good, our last pioneers.*

Laurence Webb



Peter Francis John McCormack

15 September 1933 - 11 April 2003

Mansfield needed a larger Catholic Church on Wednesday 16 April to allow room for the hundreds of mourners who attended to farewell a man with a big heart, Peter McCormack. Peter McCormack was a man of the bush.

Family friend Father Michael Shadbolt presented a moving eulogy which, in part, we reproduce here.

'Peter Francis McCormack was born in Merrijig on 15 September 1933. He was the second child of Eddie and Frances McCormack. Phyllis was his older sister and Eddie and Cyril, his young brothers.

He grew up in the Mansfield district within view of the splendid mountains beyond Buttercup. He went to school at Merrijig and did his secondary schooling at Xavier College. After that he returned to work on the family farm at Merrijig where he stayed for the rest of his life. As with all people on the land in this district, his life was largely determined by the recurring cycle of sheep to be drenched and shorn in due season and cattle to be driven to the High Country in the late spring. He never wanted to retire from the area, indeed he always said he would have to

be carried out in a box. Sadly that day has come.

Peter was an active sportsman in his younger days. He played footy for Mansfield, on the backline. When his playing days were over he continued on as a trainer for the club and became a Life Member. He was also good at tennis and represented Mansfield in this sport as well.

Peter met Judy Reardon and they married here at St Francis Xavier Church in June 1957. Peter and Judy had four children and seven grandchildren.

Peter was always deeply involved in his local community and became more so after the children had grown and left home. He was a member of the CFA since the age of 16. For years he was a member of the Merrijig Hall committee. Peter was also a member of the Mountain Cattlemen's Association. This of course was to be expected. He was not only a prominent cattleman but a member of a pioneering family of cattlemen and women who came originally to Merrijig from Tipperary in 1860. He loved the district, he loved the bush and for all its hardships and disappointments he loved the life on the land. It was very much in his blood.



Peter was a man with a no nonsense, laid-back disposition. Like most bushmen he had scant respect for social rank. Peter loved his Church however and was a good and practicing Catholic right throughout his life. A measure of his commitment was his membership of the Knights of the Southern Cross.

Peter died after suffering a heart attack while helping feed the drought affected cattle on a neighbour's farm. He complained at first of feeling dizzy. At the time no one realised what was to follow. His death has come as a shock. He was never sick. He seemed one of those people who would always be there, a strong and reassuring presence in the midst of life's troubles.

Peter McCormack was an excellent husband and father. He was a man without enemies, a friend to all and a fine citizen of this great country. He was every inch a man of the Australian bush, taciturn, loyal and generous. He was a cattleman of skill and daring, one of the greats of this mountain district, a 'king of the High Country.'

Peter McCormack was a long standing member of the Central Council of the Mountain Cattleman's Association and never missed a meeting. He was one of those treasured members who was always available to assist in any capacity and at any time. It was Peter who over the last seven years towed the marketing caravan to and from the Get Togethers and helped with the packing and unpacking. Peter always said "yes" when asked to help anybody. He will be missed both within his community and also within the MCAV community.

Adapted by Sue Reynolds from an article in the *Mansfield High Country Times*, and reproduced in part with acknowledgments and thanks.



John Robert (Grub) Woodgate
2 March 1940 - 4 September 2003

John Robert Woodgate known by all from early childhood as Grub, was the second son of Queenie and Eric Woodgate of *Elmor*, Buchan. His older brother Eric Verril has the nickname Golly.

Born on 2 March 1940 in Bairnsdale he was a happy smiling baby with blonde curly hair and dimples. As he grew he developed a unique personality and zest for life which endeared him to all he came in contact with for the rest of his life.

He was educated at the Buchan Primary School until the eighth grade then attended Bairnsdale Tech and boarded at the Church of England hostel. Many were the pranks played during this time. In primary school he had a mate Peter Moore as full of mischief as himself and their many escapades led Gran Kauffman, Nannie Moon and his mother a merry dance as it was war time with Eric Woodgate and Eric Moore in the services. Pop Moon manned the fire tower. After one episode when it looked like a switch was going to be used they ran up the

hill to Jack Armstrong's pig sty and took refuge among the pigs until the heat wore off.

He raised Nanna Kay's blood pressure by putting the dried up legs off the sheep skins in her rabbit traps in the back paddock. He was among those who played tricks on George Murray, the old saddler.

Grub inherited from his grandfather Frank Moon a lifelong passion for racehorses. Frank and Toby Nixon of Orbost were always busily trying to breed a Melbourne Cup winner. Being the right weight he was an eager apprentice jockey. On the river flat behind the saleyards under the willows there was a line of old horseyards, a racehorse in every one. Others involved in racing were Angus Hodge, Basil Bryant, the Cameron, Lavell, McLeod Syndicate and more horses in Bill Stafford's stable. Down there plotting, scheming and drinking went on and Grub was absolutely delighted at the skulduggery of the Buchan Racing fraternity. He was enthusiastic about track work and rode on all the courses in the area.

Having left school at about 15 he and Golly worked the farm where he learned to shear and they gradually brought more property on which to breed sheep and top quality cattle.

Grub was a great athlete and a good sport and always gave 100% effort. Over his life he played football, cricket, tennis, golf and badminton.

Into the town came a young school teacher - Valerie Craig.

Grub took up another pursuit - romance. Val always walked with a purpose, Grub strolled behind. Nanna Kay remarked "He'll have to walk faster than that if he wants to catch her". Either Grub lengthened his stride or Val slowed down because on 7 April 1962 they married. Three children were born - Leigh, Craig and Lauren.

A new era emerged. Grub began to be very community minded and served on many committees - President of the Pony Club, President of the Football Club and Secretary of the Race Club were some of his executive positions.

He began to train and race his own horses searching for one fleet enough for Melbourne.



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With the mountain cattlemen he fought for their rights in the high country and the family shared a great love of bush racing and dog high jumping with 'Bog the Wonder Dog'.

In conclusion Grub survived pneumonia as a small child nursed by the skilled bush nurse Daisy Maud Fitchett Charles in an age when there were no antibiotics. He had a carefree childhood and experienced everything he loved in life - the all night parties, the camp fires and sing alongs, *Please Release Me* being his theme song. He loved to dance. His speciality being the twist. Fishing was a favourite pastime. He loved to ride in the wind at *Bald Hills* and walk the green flats at *Seehusens* and to breed quality mountain calves to top the sales at *Gelantipy*. He took great delight in the company of his grandchildren James and Ellie. He found good in everyone.

In drought, flood and any activity which required a cool head and organisation he had complete confidence in Val and it is comforting to see his attributes in his children.

His sense of humour and his smile will be missed by all but he will not be forgotten by those he called friend and in the hearts of his family.

Robert Andrew Dunsmuir

10 February 1917 - 5 November 2003

By the time Bob Dunsmuir was 20 he had developed a love of the mountains.

In his early days Bob helped pack the packhorses on the *Skyline Tours* run by Bill Gillio into the high country - a pastime he enjoyed immensely. In 1938, while shearing at Stratford and living in a boarding house, Bob met Jean Barker, niece of the proprietor. They courted and were married in Sale two years later.

Throughout these years Bob and his brother Stan, were running their cattle and would go droving together through Cobbanah to Castleburn Creek and the head of the Little River. Then the lease came up for the Moroka run. Bob, Andy Estoppey and Stuart Hare were successful in obtaining the lease and later Bob joined the Gell and Cummins families on the Wellington run.

The men joined forces over the years to build their huts, including Moroka Hut which

Slim Dusty

We also acknowledge the death of country music legend, Slim Dusty, on 20 September. He was 76 years old. Slim supported the cause of the mountain cattlemen, he attended the Get-Together at Katherine Station in 1986, where he is pictured consoling Wayne Brown after a minor horse accident, and later wrote and released a song *Cattlemen from the High Plains* in 1988.



was built in 1945 by Bill Gillio, Archie Timms and Eric Bateson; Guy's Hut built by Jack Guy and Dunsmuir's Hut built by Bob and his son Gavin on the Wellington Plain.

The snow came early one winter surprising them all. Leaving Moroka before daylight, Bob made his way around Gable End and then on down arriving safely home around 11.00 pm that night and counting himself lucky, while others were still making their way home.

Throughout all the years, the serious business of wintering, mustering, droving and preparing for sale continued. The Dunsmuir cattle usually fetched good market prices, a reflection of his good animal husbandry.

Bob was a cattleman through and through, a horseman, an axeman and an all round bushman and will be sadly missed by his family.

With thanks to Margaret Armitage for access to her manuscript notes.

The Old Gentleman

Twenty-five years ago a young man lost his life in a timber cutting accident. He willed his only possession of value – his guitar, to his sister, Cathy Culligan, to help make her dream come true. This is her story.....

Laurence Webb

*“Have you written of love?” She asked, by the fire,
And I didn’t know quite what to say,
With her eight year old smile, so free from all guile,
Said “I can tell you, I’ve seen it each day.”
“It’s the love that lasts a whole lifetime through,
And stays on with the ones left behind,
My mother can tell you, ‘twas a love that she knew,
Just ask her, I know she won’t mind.”*

*Angry rain hammered hard on McCormack’s hut,
Lustrous bush glimmered green all around,
She laid down her camp oven, and with eyes half shut
Sank wearily with us to the ground.
“Yes, he passed away, six months to the day,
As the Old Gentleman he was known”.
And she told me a story spanning twenty-four years
Of a girl, and a stockhorse of her own.*

*“My dreams were so real, so true in the night,
I’d wake up, rush out in the dawn.
My own little pony, bathed by pale morning light
But walk back, my hopes dashed and forelorn.
To be one of eleven, in a bush town like Tolmie,
Not much of a chance did I stand,
But when my brother died, his guitar came to me
And his place in my dad’s country band.”*

*“Every Friday night in the Merrijig pub,
Smokey Saturdays in Mansfield town,
I played that guitar and a fortune saved up,
A thirteen year old’s dream for to own.
And at last, Ron Purcell brought a Palamino in,
He said he hadn’t had to look far,
For they swore black and blue that the horse rode to him
While he drank at the Mount Buller bar.”*

*“Then a freedom I found on the old timber tracks
With the wind fanning out through my hair,
For whatever my troubles, on old Pal I’d relax,
Without worries, without fear, without care.
And my best friend and I, what adventures we’d share,
Rediscovering old tracks in the bush,
In a cool tranquil clearing, for our horses we’d care,
Then eat lunch, squashed to sausage-cake mush.”*

*“As I grew up a woman, my workmate he’d be
Taking kids out for rides after school,
Sometimes five on his back, tying ribbons with glee,
Always trusted, always safe, always cool.
As a wife, I rode him in three of our homes,
He godfathered all of our foals
As a mother, he taught my three children to ride,
Always trusted, always safe, always cool.”*

*“Then I’d seldom ride my old Pal any more
Just at Christmas, as a reindeer dressed,
He was the children’s to ride, and they rode him with pride,
Over 30, but to them, still the best.
Three weeks ‘fore he died we had one last fling,
Took me back to a time without care,
To be just for one moment that thirteen year old girl
With the wind fanning out through her hair.”*

*“Now I’ll never see my old Pal stand again,
In the paddock for his morning feed.
With the frost in his whiskers, sun filtering his mane,
And walk back, all refreshed and relieved.
But I’ve a lifetime of memories to treasure inside
And my children will tell their children too,
As they visit the place where he peacefully lies
And to the Old Gentleman, say thankyou.”*

Rising from the Ashes

One positive happening as a consequence of the fires is the formation of the Victorian High Country Huts Association. Fiona Magnusson and Dianne Carroll both have strong ties to the high country and along with many others including David Oldfield, saw the loss of the huts as devastating. At a time when many were struggling to keep going this new association was born.

What has happened cannot be changed, but we ensure the huts that are scattered throughout the region are retained, repaired, protected, preserved and where necessary, rebuilt for the generations of the future. This would ensure that they enjoy the remaining evidence of our heritage as others before us have.

The Association's charter is to:

1. Publicise the Association's existence widely. It is a non-political group whose mission

is to care for high country huts that still exist and any future huts that may be rebuilt.

2. Conduct a comprehensive inventory of hut status, both in National Parks and on State land, primarily in the bushfire affected areas, and then in non affected areas.

3. Lobby all stakeholders to have damaged huts repaired, and burnt huts that are in strategic safe havens, eg Ropers Hut, rebuilt.

4. Once we have determined hut repair / rebuild needs and obtain the appropriate authority, set about getting our hands dirty, canvassing for donations of materials and labour from other stakeholders, eg 4wd, bushwalking and ski clubs, and applying for grants.

Individual membership of the association is \$25 per annum and enquiries should be directed to Mr E Godward, 43 High Street, Yackandandah.

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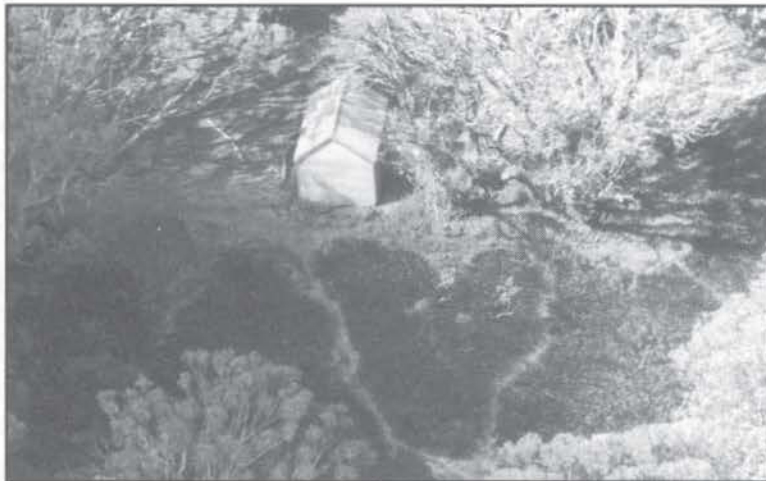
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WE HAVE OUR OWN HIGH COUNTRY ACCOMMODATION ON
THE LAND OUR FAMILY HAS HELD FOR OVER 130 YEARS.

The group was largely responsible for the co-ordinated rebuilding of Horsehair Hut just three months after it was lost. The following is a list of the known huts that were lost as a consequence of the fires.

- Batty's Hut
- Beloka Hut
- Bogong Aqueduct Hut
- Bogong Creek Huts
- Bon Accord Hut
- Briggs Logging Camp Hut
- Buckwong Huts
- Burnside Hut
- Carmody's Hut
- Charlie Creek Hut
- Dunstan Logging Huts
- Federation Hut
- Gibbo River Mussurie Hut
- Gibbo River Searls' Hut
- Honeymoon Hut
- Huggins Hut
- Long Plain Hut
- Macfarlane Flat Hut
- McNamara's Hut (Buckety Plain)

- Mitchell Hut
- Mt Benambra Fire Tower Hut
- Mt Leinster Hut
- Mt Murray Logging Huts
- Mt Selwyn Hut
- New Yard Flat (Sykes) Hut
- Quintet Mine Huts
- Red Hut
- Red Robin Mine Accommodation Hut
- Red Robin Mine Spargo's Hut
- Rocky Plain Hut
- Roney Mac's Hut
- Ropers Hut
- Sheever Spur Logging Hut
- Springs Saddle Hut
- West Humffray Hut
- West Kiewa Logging Camp Hut



Saved ...

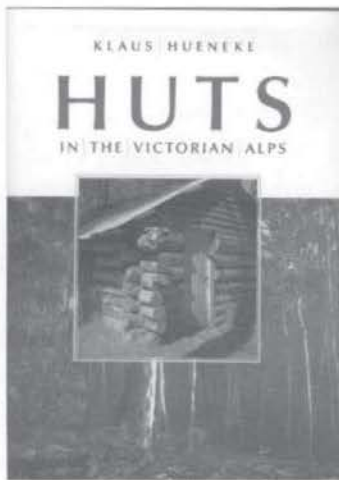


Safe...



Lost

On the Bookshelf



Huts in the Victorian Alps - and the people who built and care for them by Klaus Huenke

The Huts of the High Plains: Bogong, Dargo & Hotham Regions by Fiona Magnussen

We are fortunate that these two authors have each compiled their books when they did for they now are our most recent record of some of these huts.

Klaus has been working on this book for the past seven years and successfully put together a publication that fits nicely with the rest of his books. It is attractively designed and gives a mixture of history and anecdotes. To quote his endpapers *This is the life story of 120 of the best known and most accessible huts in the Victorian Alps. Written in a friendly, easy to read style, it is based on personal impressions, interviews, journal articles, books and historic photos. It is designed to engage and entertain whilst at the same time retaining historical accuracy.* I would have to concur that it is a good read. The book is 256 pages, hardcover, index, bibliography, appendix, heavily illustrated and is available from Klaus at 2 Lambell Cres, Palmerston, ACT 2913. Phone 02.6242 0995. The cost is \$45 plus \$7 p&p.

Klaus has also been involved in the publication of a **Huts Calendar 2004** (\$8.95) which features 25 huts from all of the high country including Tasmania. Victorian huts include Silver Brumby, Roper's, Wallace's, Dibbins, Moroka, Honeymoon and Spargo's. Photos are by Robin Rishworth and Klaus Huenke. It is the first calendar devoted solely to huts.

Fiona Magnussen has also produced a book on the huts of the Bogong, Dargo and Hotham areas. Containing large black and white pictures of each hut, map references, access assessment and written directions to each hut, this pocket sized (A5) book of 184 pages is a guide for hikers, skiers, riders and drivers visiting this region of Victoria's High Country.

Detailed descriptions of each hut's construction and furnishings as well as stories about the builders, owners and occupiers over the years are included, as a record of the heritage that is part of the fabric of each hut. Up to date information regarding the impact of the 2003 fires on each of the huts, where known, is included, making this book a historical record of the 22 huts that were lost in this region alone.

The book is available from Fiona at \$21.00 plus \$5 post and packaging at Staffback Pty Ltd, 12 Sladen Street East, Henty N.S.W. 2658 or email - fiona.magnussen@bigpond.com Phone 0269293627.

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McNamara Memories

The Hut Log Book Part 2

In this issue of *Voice* we conclude the log books from Charlie Mac's hut that come to us courtesy of the Omeo Historical Society and Coral Kracke who meticulously transcribed them. Much of the log is on loose paper, some dated and some not. This goes toward explaining the duplication of dates that occur with different descriptions for the day as this is how they have been originally written. As far as possible all original spellings have been retained.

1950

Tues 18th going into Bundarah showery morning taking in Bulls and bullocks Chas Mc, J.Mc, P.M. & J.T.

Wed 19th took 110 head of cattle to Omeo

Wed 25th came to Bundarah from Omeo

Thurs 25th came to Dinner Plain to muster horses Pat Mc & Claude Davis arrived

Friday 27th went across to J.B. for horses & brought to Dinner Plains

28th went out onto Plains for horses got 5 head at Mt Jim picked up more at Round Plain.

30th Sun took horses into Bundarah & put into Higgins stayed Bundara overnight & mustered cattle to bring to Dinner Plain. J. Thomas 17 years

1st May 1950 C. Davis & P. Mc went to Cobungra on 1st May

2nd May brought 50 head of cattle to Dinner Plain Keith Greenwood arrived at hut J.Mc, C. Mc & J. Thomas

3rd May went to Telegraph mustered cattle back to paddock went Rocky Plain in afternoon. J. Mc went into Elbow left 5 bullocks in paddock.

4th May put few head of cattle in paddock going into Bundarah left 7 head of strangers in paddock 2 Blair 3 Fletcher 1 Maddison 1 Hardie. Chas & Jack Mc & J.T. came to Dinner Plain

23rd May J.Mc brought pack team Peter & Chas Mc came via Milling Flat mustered cattle on way getting cows & calves to take away for grass cold day got two unbranded calves at Rocky Plain.

24th May J.Mc Chas Mc & Peter Mc went out as far as Nigger Head salt camp got 26 head of cattle also ten head at Round plain 1 steer 1

cow & calf of Westerns frost in morning cold day

24 May mustered cattle around hut got big bullock put cattle to take away in paddock. Chas Mc, Jack & Peter

25th May leaving going to Bundarra with mob of cattle weather good Chas Jack & Peter Mc

came out here to Dinner Plain on the 3/12/50 brought 40 head of TM cattle & 8 head 23 left in paddock J.Mc, C.Mc & D. Ison

5/12/50 came out to here with cattle from Bundarra picked up cattle in paddock & took out to Telegraph.

1951

On the 23rd Jan turned out 40 head of cattle up to Elbow. Jack & Chas Mc wet day 310 points Bundara.

On 4/1/51 brought 157 head of cattle from Bundara about 20 strangers in mob J.Mc C.Mc & D. Ison.

5/1/51 branded 35 calves 21 bulls 14 heifers. took cattle to Rond Pln Jack went to Bundarra Mon 8th went across to Rundell Pdk & strained wire put out 30 head of 2.s cattle. Jack came from Bundarra.

Tues 9th mustered & branded 24 calves 14 bulls 10 heifers also 2 yearling bulls & 1 three year old heifer.

Wen 10th leaving going to Bundarra.

Tues 27th Jan brought horses from Omeo to here on way to High Plains Doug Ison & Chas Mc

Wed 28th Mustered cattle around hut took out to Round Plain salted cattle on way picked up horses & took out to Mt Jim saw about 30 head of other horses on plain.

Thurs 28th going into Bundarra way to Omeo
Doug Ison & Chas Mc nice day

1953

Chas McNamara called here on the 12/7/1953
walked from ½ mile down creek to much for
horse beautiful fine day came from Bundarra
snow 3ft at hut here

Barry & Chas McNamara called here 16/9/53
came across from Horsehair saw 24 head of
cattle nice fine day still a lot of snow around
going back to Horsehair.

Chas & Jack Mc called here on 24/9/53 came
via Rocky Plain picked up 30 head of cattle on
way taking them into Bundarra nice fine day
snow going

1954

Chas Mc called here on 11/8/54 not much snow
came from Bundarra via Rocky Plain saw 15
head of horses & 8 cattle at Rocky Plain

C. Mc called here on 8/9/54 mustering
springers to put in Bundarra fine day cloudy
snow all gone from around here saw 1 Blair 2
Roany Mc at Rocky Plain.

Chas Mc & J.Mc(snr) came here from
Bundarra went out as far as Round Pln saw a
few cattle & some horses fine day 21/9/54

J. Mc (snr) & Chas Mc brought 83 head out
here 2 Fletcher steer & heifer, 1 steer of
Coopers 1 heifer Westons nice fine day 1/10/54

J. & C. Mc turned 85 head out 21/10/54 1
Cooper 2 Blair fine day.

B. & C. Mc came here 22 Oct 1954 on way to
Horsehair & Omeo windy & cold

Turned 179 TM cattle & 70 calves out here on
21/12/54 1 Weston 1 cow & calf & heifer Blairs
1 Steer 1 spotted heifer & 1 cow & calf of Ben
Coopers 1 black polly of Ray Cooper 1 heifer
Fletcher – 2pm

brought 50 cows & calves to Flat 1 roan
cow & calf of Fletchers 1 Black bullock of J.
Ryders. nice fine day going across to Horsehair
Barry & Chas Mc 22/12/53 Brought 129 grown
cattle & 72 calves from W Creek to Bundarra
27/12/54 J. & Chas Mc Brought 42 cattle from
W Creek to Horsehair

1955

1/2/55 put 24 head of cattle Rundell pdk 14
cows 10 steers

3/2/55 J. & Peter Mc brought 14 cows & bull
across to Dinner plain & mustered cattle picked
up 30 head of TM cattle on river at Two Hut
spur & took out to Telegraph & salted wet
afternoon put blind bull in paddock 3/2/55
Went to Telegraph took 2 bulls out & some
other cattle saw 20 unbranded calves. going to
Horsehair & into Omeo Chas Mc 4/2/55 put
lame bull in paddock J.C.P. Mc & A. McMahon
& A. Willis & A. Connelly here on the 16/2/55
to muster horses went & camped at Dibbins 17
& 18th came back here on 19th taking horses
across to Horsehair on 20th

1958

10/2/58

J. & B. McNamara came from Horse Hair across
to here brought 1 load of barb wire

11/2/58

Very wet day sat in hut all day.

11/2/58

Went to Horse Hair brought back a load of salt.
Jack stopped home Saw about 35 TM cattle
down at Rocky Plain. Very fine day. J.B.
McNamara

Barry, Chas & Jack Mc(snr) came from Omeo
to Dinner Plain 26th mustered cattle took to
Round Plain & salted. Splitting posts & fencing
finished 28th 2/58 going to Omeo very hot
weather

Barry, Chas & Jack Mc came from Omeo to
here 12/3/58 picked up cattle at Rocky Plain on
way over & took to Round plain & salted
13th Very foggy & wet doing fence around
paddock.

14th doing fence going to Omeo beautiful day
fog in morning. Chas Mc

Jack & Barry Mc 17th March

Chas Mc 19th working on fence wet day going
to Omeo 21/3/58

came from Omeo to Dinner plain 24 March 58
dingoes in sheep at Horsehair. 25th Jack &
Barry on fence Chas Mc went across to
horsehair to see sheep also pick up some cattle
26th went out to Nigger Head salting & must ...
[original page torn here]

branded calves & steers for Omeo Rodeo.
cattle up in paddock finished lining rough
night 27th March

[original page torn here] day fine morning leaving going to Omeo C.B. & J.Mc 28/3/58 Chas Barry & Jack (snr) came from Omeo to Dinner Plains 31st March 1958 Jacks Birthday 88

April 1st mustered cattle & took to Bundarra for Rodeo & sale 50 head Geo Faithfull stayed night at Bundarra with us on his way to Omeo

2nd In Bundarra mustering cattle to bring to Dinner Plain.

3rd brought 80 head of cattle out from Bundarra & took on as far as Round Plain

Good Friday going to Omeo for Rodeo

Sat 5th Doug Ison Barry & Chas Mc came here from Omeo

Turned sheep on road 389 8th April 1958

8th April on way to Bogong High plains muster

9th Went out along top mustered cattle, on way out met E. Weston & Ian McKay at Nigger Head camped at head of Cobungra with Carl Fletcher & Ray Lack.

19th came to Dinner Plain with cattle Carl Fletcher came into Dinner plain with us – beautiful day.

13th went over to Horsehair looking for cattle went on to Omeo.

14th came from Omeo brought 15 head of cattle from Horsehair rained.

15th taking cattle to Bundarra for sale very foggy wet night D.Ison C. & B. Mc

17th April C. Fletcher & R. Lack left Horse Hair late afternoon stayed one night Dinner Plain Chalet. Saw 2 cows & calves (Mc's) at salt camp in the river.

18th April Left Chalet early with cattle.

3.9.1958 B. McNamara J. Thomas Came up from Elbow Spur to Dinner Plain

J. Thomas camped one night 16.9.58

Oct 15th 1958 Barry & Chas Mc called here saw 16 head of cattle at Rocky Plain going back to Bundarra

1961

C McNamara took two bulls from Dinner Plain to Andys yards for Carl Fletcher saw about 180 TM cattle along top leaving for Bundarra 2pm on 20 Mar 1961 from Dinner Plain

Chas McNamara called here 21st Dec 1961 on a recco tour of inspection grass etc., cold day going back to Bundarra 12AM

undated

Gone to Round Plain with stock will be back for lunch cook some spuds (J. McNamara)

Place Names recorded in the log-book of Charles Franklin McNamara, mountain cattleman, Omeo

Andy's Yards	Horse Hair Plain (<i>also spelt Horsehair</i>)
Benambra	
Big Hill	JB Hut
Bindi	JB Plain
Bingo	
Black Flat	Kings Flat
Blue Duck	
Bogong High Plains	Millings Creek
Brandy Creek Spur	Millings Flat
Bucketty Plain	Mt Jim
Bundara (<i>also spelt Bundar, Bundarah and Bundarra</i>)	Mt Nelse (<i>also spelt Nelts</i>)
Bundara River	Nigger Head
Burnside	Nigger Head Creek
	Nigger Head Salt Camp
Callaghan's Paddock	
Cobungra	Omeo
Cobungra River	
Cobungra Station	Paling Spur
Cope Hut	Pretty Valley
Dibbins	Rocky Plain
Dibbins Turn-Off	Round Plain (<i>also spelt Rond</i>)
Dinner Plain	Round Plain Spur
Dinner Plain Chalet	Rowe's SheepYard, C.
Dinner Plain Creek	Rundell Paddock (<i>also spelt Rundle</i>)
Elbow Spur	
Ensay	Tawonga
Flour Bag (<i>also spelt Flower</i>)	Tawonga Roadside
Flour Bag Spur	Telegraph Plain
	Tin Hut Paddock
	Two Hut Spur
Glen Wills	
Grassy Flat	Wilson's Creek
	Wombat Flat
Higgins Paddock	
High Plains	Young's Yards

A list of the people recorded in the log-book can be found accompanying the log-book recorded in *Voice of the Mountains* No. 26 (2003)

Is it that place?

J.L. Rawson

Bells and birds
keep in tune,

the crack of a stockwhip
breaks the early morning dew.

“Push up,” “Come behind,” “Get out wide”
as the voice of the lonely stockman
heads over The Knocker for Sunnyside.

Big roans
one by one

brisket swinging
as they weave through the glitters and
colours of the leaning snow gums.

Hot plates and dunnies
tracks for cars
Brit-van, sealed roads, white lines
has it gone too far?

Remember the corner where a swaggie would tea,
he'd think it five star under the New Jubilee.

It was only the sixties
when we saw all that.
I wonder how long
before they seal - the Knocker Track.

Sheepyard Flat 2003



This is likely to be the last time we gather at Sheepyard Flat and this, together with the absence of horse events made for a memorable Get-Together. Trouble with insurance coverage curtailed events involving horses but we came up with some other forms of amusement and a good time was still had by all even if some of the 'mannequins' paraded under sufferance!

Little did we know what we were in for in the next few weeks when the fires took hold and 'took over', and in many ways changed our lives forever.

Some of results from the weekend included:

Pee Wees Whip Cracking

1st Emma Higgins
2nd Luke Higgins
3rd equal Matthew and Brendon Purcell

Junior Whip Cracking

1st Chris O'Connor
2nd Daniel O'Connor
3rd Jason Belcher

Juvenile Whip Cracking

1st Caleb Jenkins
2nd Stephanie Riley
3rd Carly Purcell

Ladies Whip Cracking

1st Diana Hurley
2nd Freddie Bowers

Open Whip Cracking

1st Tyrone Spencer
2nd Eamon Jarrott
3rd Matt O'Connor

Bull Roping

1st Rhonda McCormack

Small Dog High Jump

1st "Sir Chadwick"
2nd "Maggie"
3rd Wal McCormack's dog

Large Dog High Jump

1st "Mate" owned by Jim
2nd "Jack" owned by Travis Scott
3rd "Tasha" owned by Julie

Dog Race

1st "Jack" owner Travis Scott
2nd "Chloe" owner Travis Scott
3rd "Darcy"

Bushman's Challenge

- 1st Gerald Carroll/Derek Faithfull
- 2nd Kane and Craig Lovick
- 3rd Dave White/Travis Scott

Ladies Stirrup Throw

- 1st Sharon Lockhart
- 2nd Rhonda McCormack

Ladies Hay Stacking

- 1st Nicole Commerford and Cassie McCormack

Mulga Bill's - Open

- 1st Ben Lovick

Mulga Bill's - Junior

- 1st Brian Bennett
- 2nd Matt Williams
- 3rd Brian Bennett

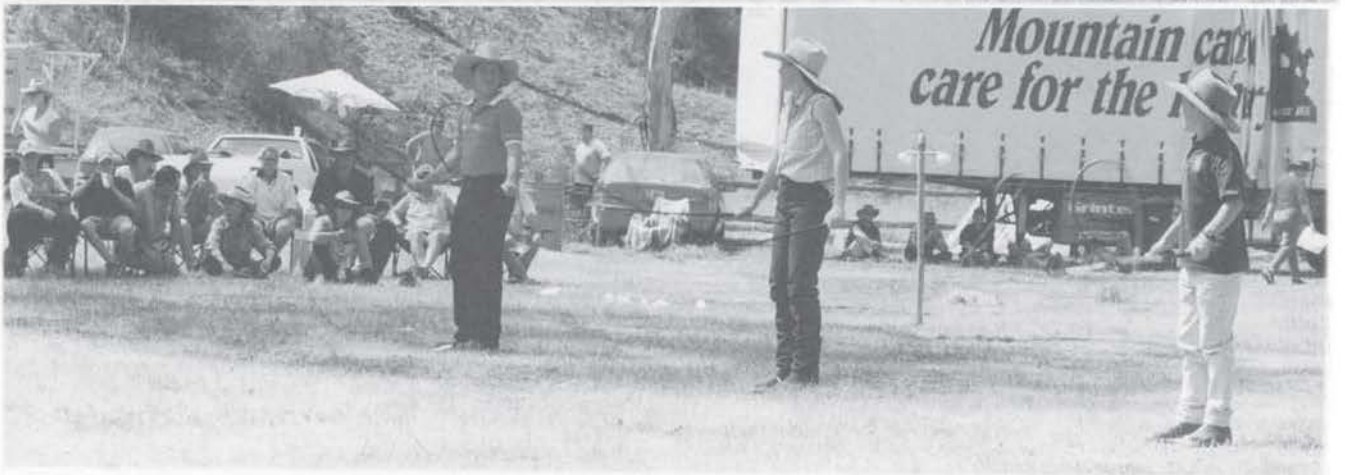
Tug O'War - Mens

- 1st Moyhu Maddens

Don Kneebone Winner

Laurence Webb

Congratulations to all and if you are competing this year - good luck!







Sheepyard Flat 2003





The Runamuck Cup

Laurence Webb

*A blazing white sun lit the old Gibbo run,
swirling ghosts raised by dust from the utes.
Kelpies guarded their swags, bright eyed kids led their nags,
Parents dozed in their hats and their boots.
'Twas the final communion, of the cattlemen's reunion –
welcome break from that summer's hard luck.
'Fore headin' back to the drought, stood their mates one last shout,
and ran a race called the Runamuck cup.*

*First the atmosphere warmed, as the syndicates formed,
To bid a horse for their gang's star rider,
And the Mansfield mob did a hell of a job,
Signing ten Cookes and half of Benambra.
'Twas their crack rider's task – check the horses for class,
to ensure that they bid for a speedster.
Took his place with a grin, in the auctioneers ring,
With a jump jockey ready to ride her.*

*Then the bidding went brisk, as a new horse they'd whisk,
To be knocked down for less than a ton,
And the boys turned to pray, as in came the big bay,
That she'd be the racehorse they won.
But jaws dropped in surprise, as before their shocked eyes,
The bidding went past the five hundred !
For the gelding they vied, but the owners voice cried,
- And out bid 'em – and with eyes closed they shuddered.*

*For the last horse led in, and their last chance to win,
She had spirit, and strength in her carriage,
But the syndicate wept, for what could you expect,
From a Shetland and Welsh Pony's marriage ?
At a proud ten hands high, who could do more than cry,
She's no match for the gelding or bay,
Then a figure stood tall, and them hushed with his drawl,
"I can ride her to win, there's a way."*

*'Twas Dave Stoney no less, that made this bold jest,
with his long legs as tall as the pony.
"Tis no ordinary race, and we'll lose on the pace,
but there's a chance for the lean and the bony."
So they mustered their steeds, and the last bets were seized ,
As the starter brought his motley field up,
Then off and away, 'cross the freshly cut hay,
Raced the cattlemen, for the Runamuck Cup.*

*Fast the horses broke rank – a wild dash to the bank,
With Dave last and forlorn on the course,
As they churned up the stream, we heard one wag scream
"that's the plan, Dave, you spare your horse !"
In a wide sweep they rushed – he was lost in their dust,
As they circled the scrub thick and rank,
For halfway on their run was to round a tall gum,
Then tear back to the river's muddy bank.*

*But Dave's pony ran straight, like a bull at a gate,
And his cunning plan began to unfold,
He cut under the bush, spun around in a rush,
Then splashed mud into the streambed cold.
Now, each rider must scrag a pile of stones in a bag,
Which Dave on his mount could do mounted,
While the field splashed on foot, in waters muddy as soot,
And he led onto the straight when it counted.*

*Well, a fifty yard lead is all most horses need,
And those little legs pounded like crazy,
But the gelding and bay, they were pounding the hay,
And he soon ate their dust, thick and hazy.
Now first past the post will win races most,
And brave Lightning galloped third in their paths,
But they poured out the beers and we heard his mob's cheers
"no, we won, 'cos we had the most laughs !"*

A Final Word on the Fires

The anguish of the January fires still surfaces a year on. The waiting was worse than the fire events we had to face. The thick smoke and the times when the men were out on the fire front - were they safe? - a wind change, could they get back to home base in time. The children getting away and the horses. I think with gratitude that will never leave me of the people who came to stay and help. The bulldozer drivers on the front line did so much there are endless thankyou's.

Janet Turner

For Sale

1 trustworthy work horse (otherwise known as a Viscount tandem caravan), white in colour, leads well (fits onto a tow bar), and carries a fair sized pack well. Currently stabled at Merrijig the van is 7'9" wide, 18'6" long (approx.), late 80s vintage) partially gutted with 13" tyres, registered till August 04.

Asking \$1,200 ONO

Interested parties should contact

Bruce McCormack 0427 752 886
or Pauline Venn 5159 9332

Wanted

Marion Hare at Maffra is desperate for a copy of *Voice of the Mountains* No. 7. It is the one with a stockman mustering Hereford cows and calves at the Bluff on the cover. If you can help please ring her on 5147 2640.

Interested in going to Tassie?

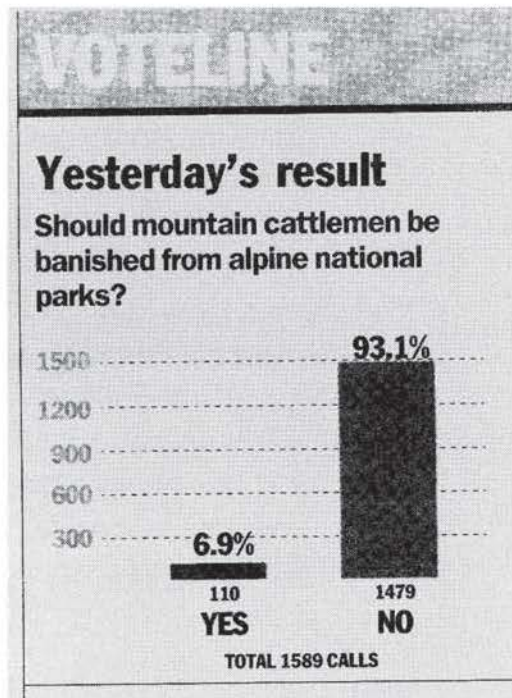
On the 6/7 February our brothers in arms in Tasmania are holding their Get-Together at Westbury. Some of our members are even taking their four legged friends to test our skills against theirs! Bruce McCormack is the one with all the information - bail him up this weekend and find out more from him.

Congratulations John Cook

That stalwart of the community John Cook had an Australia Day Award bestowed upon him last year. Congratulations and thank you Cookie from the MCAV.

Herald-Sun Voteline

A wonderful vote of confidence for the mountain cattlemen appeared on 26 Nov 2003 when the simple question was put before the public.



David and Dianna Guy invite you to stay at the

Wonnangatta Caravan Park

Powered Sites, Kiosk, Mechanical Repairs and Petrol available

Phone 5140 1265 for reservations

RMB 2315, Waterford, Stratford 3862

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Mountain Cattlemen's
Association of Victoria Incorporated held on Friday 21 November 2003 in
the boardroom of the
Victorian Farmers Federation, Farrer House,
24 Collins Street, Melbourne commencing at 11.00 a.m.**

Present

Simon Turner, Doug Treasure, Rusty Connley, Pauline Venn, Rowena Turner, John Cook, Ron Briggs, David Oldfield, Ross Brown, Bill Cumming, Harry Ryder, Frank Ryan, Bruce McCormack, Chris Stoney, Kim Osborne, Bruce Commins, Anne Paterson, Roger Hollis, Laurence Webb, Sue Reynolds, Colin Reynolds and Tim Barker.

Apologies

The Hon. John Thwaites, Brian Higgins, Fiona Magnusson, Lee Magnusson, the Hon. Graeme Stoney, Neville Wright, Clive Hodge, Jack Hicks, Charlie Lovick, Chris Commins and Philip Commins.

Minutes

Harry Ryder/ John Cook

"That the Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting as circulated in *Voice of the Mountains* No. 26 be taken as read and confirmed."

CARRIED

Annual Report

The President, Simon Turner and Secretary Tim Barker spoke to the Annual Report of the Association which had been posted on the website and was circulated at the meeting.

1 Introduction

We all know that this has been an extremely difficult year for the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria. The fires in January 2003 burnt 1.2 m hectares of public land including almost 400,000 hectares of the Alpine National Park. Losses on private land were considerable and many of our members lost land, buildings and livestock.

Forty-three of the 63 areas licensed for grazing in forests and parks were affected by the

fires, with a total of approximately 167,000 hectares or 54% of the total area licensed for grazing partially or totally burnt by the fires.¹

The fires were bad enough but this has lead inevitably to long negotiations with Parks Victoria (PV) and Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) about the access to licensed areas. At this stage it looks like PV will be requiring us to stay off burnt licence areas for at least two years.

The major events for the MCAV were the fires and the access negotiations. This report focuses on these issues. Although this is a report of the 2002/03 year, this material reflects the on-going nature of these issues up to November 2003.

Subsequent to the fires we have had several important field inspections.

Together with Jack Hicks, Harry Ryder, Peter Faithfull and Tim Barker we spent a day on the Bogong High Plains with Mark Stone, the Executive Director of Parks Victoria. Then, at Mark's recommendation, another full day was spent with half a dozen senior Parks Victoria executives in the same area. Later we spent a further full day with the Emergency Services Commissioner, Bruce Esplin. On Cup Day (November 4) we met with the Minister for Environment, Mr. John Thwaites and staff from his and the PV office together with one of the scientists from the Scientific Advisory Panel. This inspection was based on Cobungra. Since then several inspections have taken place with licenceholders and representatives of Parks Victoria and DSE.

2 2003 Alpine bushfires

2.1 The Association's bushfire submission

The following are the main points to be drawn from our experience in the 2003 Alpine fires and were included in our subsequent submissions.

- It is abundantly clear that there has been inadequate fuel reduction burning.

- There have been sufficient days when this could have been undertaken.
- The valiant efforts of local fire crews were inhibited by poor management.
- This poor management resulted in fires that could have been put out in the first few days, burning in a destructive manner for weeks.
- Generally, licensed grazing areas that were grassed and grazed did not burn.

It needs to be noted at the outset that during January 2003, the cattlemen were in fact fire fighters and held various positions of command in their local brigades.

Some cattlemen were devastated emotionally and financially by the fires. This is especially distressing because cattlemen believe some of the fires could have been extinguished in the first few days. For those cattlemen in particular, it is now particularly galling to read government material referring to the "benefits of wildfire". There is a temptation to move on from the damage and look to the future. However, those who suffered extreme circumstances need to be acknowledged and assisted in their own personal recovery.

During the fires, and to a lesser extent since, in the rash of criticism about inadequate fuel reduction burning, some thought more focus should be on acknowledging the valiant efforts of firemen. That is true. It is also true that it was the local firemen (who are also local farmers and cattlemen) who were the ones being critical about the inadequate fuel reduction.

Also, it is not so much a matter of applauding the efforts of firemen but asking the question, why did they have to be fighting a fire that should have been controlled earlier? Sure it was their finest hour but why did they have to be there in the first place?

Fuel reduction burning

- There has been very little or no fuel reduction burning in the past twenty or so years.
- Where there had been some fuel reduction burning, this was generally unsuccessful with only small areas being burnt.

- Over the past few years there have been a sufficient number of days, particularly in the autumn, when it would have been appropriate to undertake fuel reduction burning.
- There are some who say, "You could never have stopped a fire like that" - referring to the worst blasts of fire on the "blow-up" days. Cattlemen think that if fuel reduction burning had been adequate, the fire attacked in the manner that locals, including the predecessors of DSE and PV, have operated before, including the use of firebreaks, backburns and times of fire fighting, they would not have had to face such furious fire. Also, the fire would not have spotted so far and frequently in front of itself.
- Prior to the alpine 2003 fires, some local cattlemen have made their views about the need for fuel reduction burning, known to local authorities including the NRE, PV and CFA, but were generally ignored. Other cattlemen have felt that it was pointless raising this issue with the relevant agencies.

The impact of cattle grazing on fires

- Cattlemen generally observed that grassed and grazed areas of their licences did not burn.
- When the fire came up onto high plains areas, it trickled around and went out.
- The fire did burn on former licence areas that have been excluded from grazing and especially in areas where heath (kerosine bush) has flourished since the removal of grazing.
- The cattlemen do not claim that grazing prevents fire, only that it reduces fire. This has also been the view of predecessors of the Victorian Environment Assessment Council.

Comments on fire suppression

- Not enough was done to put out fires in the very early stages. Some of the fires

could have been extinguished in the first few days.

- The local fire crews fought the fires in the usual brave and valiant manner. It is important to note that the cattlemen *were* the firemen. For the cattlemen to be critical of local fire fighters would be criticism of themselves
- Management of fire crews was totally inadequate. There is no implication that the management was maliciously inadequate. It is generally acknowledged that the managers did their best. It was just manifestly obvious to cattlemen/fire fighters and other local experienced volunteer firemen that this was inadequate.
- Major mistakes were made by ignoring local knowledge.

Fire impacts on land adjacent to licensed grazing areas

- Land adjacent to licensed grazing areas was generally extremely vulnerable to fire and was burnt in a very destructive manner.

Fire impacts on private property

- Where the home property of mountain cattlemen was burnt there was generally little or no fuel reduction burning in the adjacent public land.

2.2 Interim Report of the Victorian Bushfire Inquiry

The bushfire inquiry was conducted by Mr Bruce Esplin, Emergency Services Commissioner, Victoria; Dr Malcolm Gill Honorary Research Fellow, CSIRO Centre for Plant Biodiversity Research; Professor Neal Enright School of Anthropology, Geography and Environmental Studies University of Melbourne.

As previously reported, we spent a full day on the Bogong High Plains with the Emergency Services Commissioner, Mr. Bruce Esplin and felt he had a good understanding of our description of how the fire developed and the manner in which areas burnt.

It is important to record the interim recommendations of this Inquiry.

1. That the Department of Sustainability and Environment immediately review the prescriptions and approval processes for prescribed burns to ensure that more of the annual number of suitable weather days for prescribed burns can be exploited.
2. That in preparation for the coming fire season, the CFA:
 - Modifies its operational procedures to ensure that local knowledge is flexibly and appropriately incorporated into tactical and strategic fire management.
 - Modifies its operational procedures to allow for more flexible management of strike teams.
 - Continues to work with its Brigades to complete the integration of AIIMS-ICS with the group structure.
3. That DSE reviews procedures to ensure that all Incident Controllers and Incident Management Teams have full access to those Departmental, Parks Victoria or appropriately experienced and qualified community members who can provide local knowledge and expertise in the development of fire suppression strategies and that advice from the fire ground is incorporated into decision making.
4. That Government initiates a review of the fencing policy for boundary and internal fences damaged as a result of a fire.
5. That Government develops a consistent policy for the rehabilitation/restoration of private assets damaged or consumed in authorised fire suppression activity.
6. That the Premier requests that the Minister for Water critically review the fire prevention planning and fire response strategies for Victoria's water catchments.

2.3 Bushfire report's discussions on grazing

It was of some surprise to us that the Esplin Report contained a chapter that focussed solely on



Simon Turner, Chris Stoney and Kim Osborne at the Annual General Meeting

the fire impacts of alpine grazing. It stated:

8.22 The presence of fires across the High Country in 1939 when grazing was heavy, the shift from grassy to woody understoreys in the forest, the shift away from succulent herbs to grass in some places, and the fire-proneness of even eaten-out pastures, all suggest that 'grazing does not prevent blazing'.

Conclusion

8.23 There is currently no scientific support for the view that 'grazing prevents blazing' in the High Country.

8.24 The Inquiry notes that High Country grazing has a long tradition in Victoria with strong community, cultural and heritage values. The Inquiry believes that the issues of High Country grazing, other than how it relates to the mitigation or otherwise of unplanned fires, is outside the scope of the Inquiry. The Inquiry notes however that opinions are diverse and passionate. Given this, we commend constructive debate by all parties and stakeholders in this issue to provide a common way forward.

Recommendation

8.25 That, according to available scientific evidence, a decision regarding cattle grazing in the High Country should not be based on the argument that 'grazing prevents blazing.'

In comment on this we note that the report

talks about "grazing **prevents** blazing", the MCAV sticker says "grazing **reduces** blazing". There is a big difference between *prevents* and *reduces*.

The Esplin Report contrasts sharply with the conclusion of the federal bushfire inquiry² which found

The Committee recommends that the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre monitor the effects of grazing on mitigating the return of woody weeds to recently fire effected areas across various landscapes including alpine and subalpine.

The Committee recommends that the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre conduct further research into the long term effects and effectiveness of grazing as a fire mitigation practice

2.4 Replacement of huts

Parks Victoria invited the Association to a one day workshop, on August 26, to discuss the replacement of burnt huts in the Alpine National Park.

Chief Ranger Chris Rose, wrote "As you are no doubt aware a number of high country huts were lost in the summer fires that burnt across the Alps, destroying huts within National Park as well as State Forest and private property. The aim of the workshop is to bring together a range of community groups and State agencies with an interest in protecting and managing our high country huts to discuss and work through a number of related issues."

Members were advised of the outcomes and Sue Reynolds represented the MCAV at a subsequent meeting of Alpine Advisory Committee on October 28. There was some bureaucratic fumbling and philosophical manoeuvring on the Committee, but the final result appears to be that huts are being rebuilt. We note that the rebuilding of huts is provided for in the grazing licences.

3 Access to high country grazing runs for Summer 2003/04

We are now in the process of negotiating with Parks Victoria on if, and how, fire affected runs will be accessed in Summer 2003/04.

3.1 First advice to licence holders

In June 2003, Parks Victoria advised affected licence holders

“As a grazing licensee within the Alpine National Park whose license area has been either totally or partially burnt by the fires which occurred from January to March this year, I wish to advise you of my intent to make a decision under clause 23 of your license as soon as practicable to allow you to plan for the 2003/04 grazing season.

In July, Ian Christie, Regional Manager Parks Victoria, advised the Association that,

“I intend to make a decision under Clause 23 of the grazing license as soon as practicable, to allow licensees to plan for the 2003/04 grazing season. The process for making the decision will be open and transparent as agreed previously.”

3.2 The Scientific Advisory Panel

In mid 2003, PV advised the Association about its intention to have a Scientific Advisory Panel review the issue of returning cattle to fire affected runs. The MCAV was invited to nominate a person for appointment to the Panel. The Association declined. The reasons are set out in the following correspondence between Parks Victoria and the MCAV. It is important that this exchange is on the record and that members understand the reasons for declining membership. The following amalgamates four letters - two from Parks Victoria and two to Parks Victoria. Items from the second letters are marked: (2)

3.3 Letters from Parks Victoria

“Parks Victoria proposes to establish a Scientific Advisory Panel to advise it on the return of cattle grazing to areas of the Alpine National Park licensed for grazing and affected by the 2003 wildfires. The rationale for establishing the panel and the role of the panel are attached.

“The Panel will be chaired by Professor Nancy Millis and will consist of up to four other eminent scientists.

“In addition to Professor Millis, Parks Victoria has invited two scientists to the panel: Dr Graham Harris (CSIRO) and Professor Jamie Kirkpatrick (University of Tasmania). I would like to invite the Mountain Cattlemen’s Association of Victoria (MCAV) to nominate an eminent scientist to become a member of the panel. A nomination will also be sought from the Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA).

“As a consequence of the fire, much of the burnt area is likely to be particularly vulnerable to disturbance and recovery of the vegetation and ecosystem function of the area may be reduced or inhibited if grazing returns to areas before recovery has occurred. This may be particularly true for threatened species and communities that are sensitive to grazing or trampling, such as Alpine Bog Communities and Snowpatch Communities. This may have implications for water supply and water quality, as well as the provision of habitat for significant flora and fauna.

“The National Parks Act 1975 requires Parks Victoria to protect the natural values of the park, while simultaneously permitting cattle grazing to occur under licence. Under the provisions of the alpine grazing licence, the Regional Manager is authorised to direct licensees to undertake management actions considered reasonable to exclude cattle from areas of special conservation significance or in areas requiring rehabilitation. There may be a need to implement alternative management actions that may include fencing, reduced stocking, excluding cattle and other management techniques for a period of time in some areas to enable recovery of areas of special conservation significance or requiring rehabilitation following the fires.

“The impacts of the fires are likely to have been variable across the fire area. This coupled with differences in environmental



Bruce Commins, Anne Commins and Laurence Webb at the Annual Meeting with Frank Ryan in the background.

factors including climate, topography, geology and vegetation across the fire area means that the vulnerability of different areas is likely to vary. Parks Victoria must therefore develop a process for determining where and when grazing can return to each licence area while allowing for recovery of the vegetation and ecosystem function to occur.

“Alpine grazing generates a great deal of community interest. Debate on the appropriateness of grazing in the Alpine National Park is highly-contentious, with grazing and conservation groups holding strong and opposing opinions. This high level of concern means that Parks Victoria’s management of grazing in the Alpine National Park following the fires will be subject to a high level of scrutiny. Parks Victoria must ensure that the process it uses to determine where and when grazing may return to licence areas affected by the fire is credible and that the information used to inform decision-making is based on sound science.

“It is envisaged that some licence areas may have had little impact from the fires and that grazing may be able to return to these areas in the grazing season of 2003 - 2004. Some licence areas may have been burnt to the extent that grazing is not likely to return prior to grazing licence renewal in August 2005. Some other licence areas

may have been burnt such that grazing may not return in 2003 - 2004, but maybe able to return prior to licence renewal. The return of grazing to licence areas may also be influenced by the ability to implement alternative management strategies such as fencing or reduced stocking rates and the likely effectiveness of these strategies in allowing recovery of the fire-affected area.

“A three-staged decision process is proposed. The first stage will be a strategic decision to determine which (if any) licence areas:

- are likely to have grazing return in 2003-2004,
- will not have grazing return prior to licence renewal, and
- may have grazing return after 2003-2004 but prior to licence renewal.

“The second stage will be to make decisions for licence areas to which grazing does not return in 2003 - 2004. The third stage will be to determine when grazing may return to licence areas after licence renewal. For each stage, there will also be the need to determine whether alternative management strategies can be implemented.

“Licences to graze cattle in the Alpine National Park are granted under Section 32AD of the National Parks Act, 1975. The fires however, may have changed the level of risk that cattle grazing poses to the natural values of the Alpine National Park and to the recovery of those values following the fires.

“The Panel will provide Parks Victoria with advice on:

- information required to develop a credible, scientifically-based decision-making process;
- information available to assist in developing the decision-making process, and the reliability and usefulness of this information;

- methods to collect additional information to develop and inform the decision-making process from:

- the existing literature and data sets and
- field-based survey and monitoring;

- costs associated with data collection and analysis;

- how to use the available and newly collected information to develop a decision-making process.

“The Panel will also provide support to Parks Victoria in the development and implementation of the decision-making process through:

- identifying values for which recovery is at risk from grazing following the fires;
- reviewing available information on known and likely risks to values following fire, likely recovery rates of values, and how fire severity, vulnerability of values and grazing interact;
- reviewing proposals for development of a decision-making process and guide the process;
- reporting on the advice given, the rationale for the advice given and on the reliability of the decision-making process implemented.

“While the decision will be made by Parks Victoria’s Regional Manager East in accordance with the provisions of each licence, the Minister may ultimately have to determine the conditions and timing under which grazing will resume in the park. Accordingly, Parks Victoria is obliged to ensure that its advice is based on reasonable. (2)

“One approach Parks Victoria could take would be to simply base decisions on the lessons learnt from the 1998 Caledonia fire and exclude cattle from the entire area affected by the fire, with a suitable buffer area to ensure the recovery of burnt areas is not affected by straying cattle. (2)

“Should you choose not to participate by either mechanism Parks Victoria will appoint an agricultural scientist of appropriate standing and continue with the process of decision-making as previously advised. (2)

3.4 Letters to Parks Victoria from the MCAV

Bias in science

Biases are now too deeply ingrained to expect a purely dispassionate approach to this issue. It would be nice to think that scientists are above bias but that is not the real world. After all, if scientists were above bias, why would it be suggested that Parks Victoria nominate 2, the MCAV 1 and the VNPA 1. If it was really believed that bias did not exist amongst scientists, we could assume that you would be prepared to accept that the MCAV should nominate the whole four. We are not implying that the bias would be malicious but we are suggesting that scientists could look for evidence to prove their previously adopted assertions.

The suggestion that Parks Victoria appoint 2 members, the VNPA 1 and the MCAV 1, seems to us to have us riding for a fall.

VFF or PLCV, not VNPA

The MCAV rejects the suggestion that the VNPA be invited to nominate a member of the Panel. The VNPA has never moved to have a public land resource or recreation group added to the absurdly unbalanced National Parks Advisory Council. The VNPA is a lobby group - nothing more, nothing less. Why not invite the Victorian Farmers Federation or the Public Land Council of Victoria to nominate a person to the Panel? When the VNPA implored its members to assemble in Birrarung Mar recently it managed to attract a mere 200 souls. When the VFF did this, in the same place in the mid 1980s, it mustered 35,000. Given the understanding within the VFF about animal husbandry, cattle impacts and conservation, we think the VFF is better qualified to be asked to nominate a scientist.

The stated aim of the VNPA is “removal of cattle grazing from the Alpine National Park at

the end of the current licence period." (VNPA Website) This being the case, what is the point in the VNPA nominating a scientist when the proposed Terms of Reference state that the "*Panel will not provide advice on whether cattle grazing is an appropriate activity ...*" How could the VNPA's nominee discuss the on-going management of an activity to which the VNPA is implacably opposed.

Philosophical positions

It is becoming increasingly obvious that those within Parks Victoria with a philosophical and fundamental objection to alpine grazing will see this as an opportunity to remove this activity and will grasp at any processes designed to ensure this result. We need not mince words about the veracity of this assertion. The law requires Parks Victoria to manage alpine grazing, not to work assiduously to achieve its removal. Government policy does not support the removal of alpine grazing. All current expressions of Government policy as outlined in the attached note, support the continuation of alpine grazing.

Endless inconclusive and costly scientific measuring

A scientific review would inevitably end up with an endless, tedious, inconclusive process of monitoring measuring transects and intersects.

These scientific issues are still not resolved. The Caledonia experience should rule this out as being prohibitively expensive. We understand the costs of this exercise was upwards of \$250,000. To suggest a similar process would be an outrageous waste of taxpayers money.

One of the greatest lessons of the Caledonia experience was not to let scientists become bogged down with endless discussion and argument. We are appalled that you want to repeat the mistake so soon, over such a large area, with such a large potential cost. The project would be a profligate and scandalous use of the public purse.

Local pragmatic discussions

As we have said to you, the members of the MCAV are expert in animal management and they

have an intimate knowledge of their licensed cattle runs. We both know that a sensible and pragmatic discussion about each run, involving Parks Victoria and local cattlemen, should be able to resolve the issue in a much more common sense manner.

In a year when we are constantly told that Parks Victoria can not afford this and cannot afford that, we are astonished that it wants to waste scarce funds on a project, the results of which, you and I know, we could write now.

Parks Victoria should embrace the Government's triple bottom line (2)

It occurs to me that it is ironic for us to disagree on the management of alpine grazing. You have a legislative requirement to conserve natural values and we proclaim to "*care for the high country*". How could we possibly disagree?

We recognise that you have a legislative requirement to conserve natural values. However we would like to present a case for our position which embraces the Bracks' Government triple bottom line policy. As you would be aware, this clearly stated policy requires recognition and accommodation of economic and social outcomes as well as environmental outcomes and overrides all government policy and actions.

We raised the prospect of this element in our earlier letter, when we said that social and economic issues, and not just environmental issues, should be taken into account. This Government has been very clear in requiring an adherence to its triple bottom line approach including economic, social and environmental objectives.

The Government's *Growing Victoria Together* states, "*Growing Victoria Together balances economic, social and environmental goals and actions. ...That is the heart of our balanced approach - a way of thinking, a way of working and a way of governing which starts by valuing equally our economic, social and environmental goals.*" It notes that one of Victoria's strengths is a "*vibrant cultural life.*" Part of Victoria's "*social infrastructure ... are ... cultural resources which are the basic building blocks of prosperous and sustainable communities*".

In the Deputy Premier's second reading speech on the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Bill (27.02.03) he said, "*The government is requiring its departments to have an increased focus on triple bottom line (economic, social and environmental) objectives, particularly in the management of their own resources. Getting this balance right is one of the important criteria for good government in Victoria.*" (Our emphasis)

We believe this has a crucial bearing on this matter. This is not an issue of environment alone. The social issues include the cultural factors which, to date, are being ignored in this review about the return of grazing and this directly contradicts clear and expressed Government policy.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that any community needs to have cultural links to the past. The Victorian Government's triple bottom line is guiding us in this direction. If we don't have links to the past, we think the page we are on is the whole story and fail to comprehend that the current page is but one of many in the book - past and future. These links to the past are critical because they provide navigation points to the future. It is time to recognise the past, embrace its iconic images and give our community breadth of vision. When we find that one of the icons of the past is still alive and flourishing, like the traditional practices of the mountain cattlemen, we should support them as we would a national treasure.

A review of the social and cultural issues, in accordance with Government policy, could well result in this matter being viewed as "*How can grazing be facilitated within the conservation of natural values*" rather than the expected "*How can we utilise the aftermath of the fires to get rid of cattle grazing*".

We would be interested in being involved in the work of the Scientific Advisory Panel, if, at the same time, similar work was put into a review of the traditional social and cultural practices in grazing cattle on the high plains. We would see this work being along the lines of the work by anthropologist, Joan Knowles in her work, "*Traditional Practices in the Tasmanian World Heritage Area*".

In particular, the Mountain Cattlemens Association of Victoria (MCAV) endorses Joan Knowles' first recommendation which stated, "...

it is suggested that the Parks and Wildlife Service should recognise the existence of traditional practices zones in the World Heritage Area and work towards establishing joint management of these areas, especially in the case of communities located adjacent to the World Heritage Area. ..."

All four recommendations are contained in an appendix to this letter. It is acknowledged that Parks Victoria's actions are in the spirit of the third recommendation but the MCAV considers that the first (above) is required by law to be fully embraced.

The involvement of someone like the former Senator John Button or the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability (when appointed) might be useful in reviewing social outcomes on this issue. Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003 states that the objectives of the Commissioner are to- "*(d) advise the Minister in relation to any matter relating to ecologically sustainable development referred to the Commissioner by the Minister under section 10(2);*"

The MCAV considers that this review of access to grazing licences should include social and cultural outcomes, given the following factors which will tend to widen this issue out to beyond simple access following the bushfires:

- It is widely acknowledged that within Parks Victoria there is an attitude which opposes alpine grazing.
- We note that you think "*... the Minister may ultimately have to determine the conditions and timing under which grazing will resume in the park.*" We see this as preparing the way for our reaction to the expected refusal to allow a return to grazing. It clearly predicts a political dispute requiring involvement of the Minister.
- You suggest that "*One approach Parks Victoria could take would be to simply base decisions on the lessons learnt from the 1998 Caledonia fire and exclude cattle from the entire area affected by the fire, ...*" Our view is that the main lesson of the Caledonian experience is the gross waste of taxpayers money and the emerging mathematical errors which

might show that a licenceholder was incorrectly prevented from grazing cattle on his run.

- The negotiations surrounding the renewal of seven year licences is due next year and there is an expectation that this will be taken as an opportunity to further diminish access. (2)

Conclusion

On the above grounds, the MCAV does not believe the establishment of a Scientific Advisory Committee is appropriate and will decline the offer to nominate an appointment.

3.5 Further meetings with Parks Victoria

The Association has continued to meet with Parks Victoria in the on-going process of regaining access to licensed areas.

Secretary Tim Barker met with PV in Melbourne in August, PV representatives met with the MCAV Council at Omeo in September and there was a full membership meeting with PV at Dinner Plain in October. On each of these occasions it was clear that access to some areas would not be possible for at least two years. At the same time, however, we should note that it will be grazing as usual in those areas untouched by the fires.

At these meetings PV acknowledged:

- There is a need to move as quickly as possible to allow run holders to settle on their management strategies.
- Some runs are partially burnt and grazing will depend on stocking levels and cattle management strategies.
- It is not expected that fencing will be part of management strategies.
- Financial assistance will be made available to run holders who can not access runs.
- Total buyouts of runs is not contemplated.
- Because of the vast size of the area involved, it is not feasible to utilise the detailed measuring methods used after the Caledonia fires.

- The cultural and heritage aspects of alpine grazing are acknowledged and celebrated. However, the decisions on returns to grazing will be based on environmental issues.

3.6 The Scientific Advisory Panel report

At the October meeting at Dinner Plain, Parks Victoria presented the Scientific Advisory Panel report to MCAV members.

Subsequent to the MCAV declining to nominate a representative to the Committee, Parks Victoria appointed a additional person, Professor David Kemp, Director, Centre for Rural Sustainability, University of Sydney, Orange

“The Report discusses the impacts of the these fires on the natural, or conservation, values of the Alpine National Park, and assesses the risks to these values within the park, and the change in risk over time, in relation to a return of grazing to licensed areas. It considers these issues in terms of the catchments and aquatic ecosystems, the montane and low country terrestrial ecosystems, the high country (alpine and subalpine) terrestrial ecosystems, and the grazing resource.

“The Report also considers the issue of monitoring, and a decision framework based on the development of environmental benchmarks that could be used in the management of a return of grazing in the Alpine National Park, and associated costs.

“Recommendations

“The Panel concluded that the 2003 fires had significant impacts on a wide range of ecosystems, and hence natural values, within the Alpine National Park. Regeneration within these ecosystems will take years to decades, depending on the ecosystem. Specific recommendations are, that:

“1 Grazing should be excluded from the areas of the Alpine National Park burnt

by the 2003 fires for at least the next two summer seasons. Grazing of unburnt and lightly burnt areas within the fire boundary in the alpine, subalpine and montane sections also poses a risk, as cattle will move into adjacent burnt areas to preferentially graze regenerating plants.

"2 During those two years Parks Victoria should develop a monitoring program, according to the principles and methods indicated in the Report, so that rates of regeneration and likely grazing impacts on various ecosystems can be determined for these ecosystems.

"3 The data generated from the monitoring program should be used, in conjunction with past experience in the management of grazing licences, to develop a decision support system to guide any decision to allow cattle to return and the management of any attendant risks.

"4 An adaptive model should be employed where cattle are first introduced to restricted areas, based upon the new benchmarks to be developed and progressively expanded over the licence areas, and only when monitoring shows impacts are within benchmarks set.

3.7 Media Release - Australians want high country and alpine grazing to continue for generations

In October, the following media statement, which encapsulated our feelings at that time, was released

"Australians will not let the return of cattle to the high country and alpine leases be threatened by unreasonable argument by narrowly focused conservationists"

The President of the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria, Mr Simon Turner, said this today, "Alpine grazing has existed for more than 150 years and has worked under all political parties and all governments.

"The ALP's 2002 pre-election policy was silent on the issue of alpine grazing. Therefore it

must be assumed that the Government supports the status quo as outlined in the National Parks Act."

Mr. Turner said, "Alpine grazing is strongly supported by the Bracks Government's triple bottom line policy. This clearly stated policy requires recognition and accommodation of economic and social outcomes as well as environmental outcomes and overrides all government policy and actions.

"The MCAV has always argued that social and economic issues, and not just environmental issues, should be taken into account in considering the future of alpine grazing. The Bracks Government has been very clear in requiring an adherence to its triple bottom line approach including economic, social and environmental objectives.

Mr. Turner said, "There are reams of scientific reports on alpine grazing and many of them are repetitive. We know the scientific discussion, but that is just one part of the policy mosaic. Whether or not alpine grazing continues is not just a matter of environment.

"The Government's *The Sustainable State* pre-election statement promised to "Require government departments to have an increased focus on triple bottom line objectives of **social, environmental and economic outcomes.**" (Our emphasis) This was signed by Mr. Steve Bracks, Premier of Victoria, and his energy and conservation Ministers.

Mr. Turner said, "It is becoming increasingly apparent that any community needs to have cultural links to the past. The Victorian Government's triple bottom line is guiding us in this direction. If we don't have links to the past, we think the page we are on is the whole story and fail to comprehend that the current page is but one of many in the book - past and future.

These links to the past are critical because they provide navigation points to the future.

"It is time to recognise the past, embrace its iconic images and give our community breadth of vision. When we find that one of the icons of the past is still alive and flourishing, like the traditional practices of the mountain cattlemen, we should support them as we would a national treasure.

Mr. Turner said, "Some claim that alpine grazing is ecologically damaging. We say, compared to what? Is it damaging compared to the ecological impact of the city of Melbourne? Is it damaging compared to the ecological impact of other farming methods?"

'An essay by Tim Flannery, Director of Adelaide Museum, *Beautiful Lies - Population and Environment*, in *Quarterly Essay*, Issue no. 9, 2003 encapsulates the position presented by the mountain cattlemen. There is one quote which characterises the cattlemen's regard for criticism by city based organisations. Flannery says, "*Today some of the very best innovative practice in environmentalism is to be found in the bush. Now it's the environmental practices of those inhabiting the nation's vast urban feedlots - the teeming cities - that lag so dismally behind.*"

"A University research survey³ conducted in 1996 found strong support within the community for retaining managed grazing within the Alpine National Park. The abstract stated, "*These results provide support for the Victorian Government's current management policies for grazing on the Bogong High Plains.*"

"This survey showed that over 90% of respondents had heard of the mountain cattlemen, and 71% were willing to contribute financially in order to retain the presence of mountain cattlemen on the Bogong High Plains.

"The mountain cattlemen's appeal to the urban community has lost none of its strength over the past decades. In fact, interest and support for the mountain cattlemen is growing. Each year thousands of people attend the MCAV *Get Together* to support the mountain cattlemen.

Mr. Turner said, "Tourism operators, Shire Councils and Tourism associations in the eastern highlands draw on the history and images of mountain cattlemen in attracting tourists.

"It needs to be recognised that the seven year alpine grazing licences don't just end. The agreement upon which grazing licences are based, (Hansard 25.5.89) states, that the licences "subject to good performance will be renewable".

"Alpine grazing is a generations old activity and we expect it to go on for many more generations. Australia would be less of a place if it was lost, Mr Turner concluded.

3.8 Meetings with the Board of Parks Victoria

In October, we recently met with the Board of Parks Victoria at Bright and spent almost 2 hours going through our concerns with the management of fire, rehabilitation provisions and the management of national parks. This was a useful meeting and was the first time we have met with the Board of this organisation.

4 Mansfield Get-Together a success despite the absence of horses

The Mansfield Get-Together was a success with about 1200 people paying to come through the gates. When we add juniors to this number it is about the same as for recent Get-Togethers. Our Council review of the Get-Together thought:

- Given the situation regarding the fires it was considered to be a successful event.
- It was good to have cattlemen manning the bar. This meant that those attending had the opportunity to meet and talk to local cattlemen.
- The auction of the bar (\$3000) and other goods and services (\$3500) was a great idea.
- Some thought that not having horses was a refreshing change and that this allowed the introduction of other events. It was agreed though, that the complete absence of any horses from any future Get-Together would have an adverse impact on numbers. It was agreed that we will need at least the Cattlemens Cup and the packhorse event. We are already examining insurance options for next year
- The panel was a good idea and some excellent feedback has been received.

The Get-Together for 2004 will be held at David Guy's property, "Kilbride" Dargo, on the banks of the Wonnangatta River. It will be on Friday 9 January to Sunday 11 January. This year we confidently expect to have the normal horse events.

At the Council meeting the President thanked the Mansfield Branch for their efforts in conducting a very successful get-together.

5 Native title

Members applied to the District Registrar of the Federal Court of Australia to become parties to an application by the Gunai/Kurnai People, (VG6007/98). Several members made application direct to the Federal Court and through the Victorian Farmers Federation.

The Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria is working with the Victorian Farmers Federation and the its legal representative Williams Love Lawyers from Canberra.

6 Protecting the bush with 13 2874 Bush Telegraph

Following persistent lobbying by the Public Land Council of Victoria, the Government has established a phone in system, similar to Crime Stoppers to help protect the bush from illegal and unacceptable behaviour.

We are now able to use the 13 2874 Bush Telegraph number to report incidents involving damage to the bush.

7 Public Land Council of Victoria access submission

The PLCV has presented a submission to Government seeking to strengthen access to public land. Its main recommendation was for an investigation into commercial and recreational activities. The Council argued that the investigation could be conducted by the Victorian Environmental Assessments Council (VEAC) or an appropriately qualified academic. The investigation should consider whether commercial and recreational activities can be permitted, under a range of creative, effective and appropriate public land management techniques in various categories of public land. In particular the investigation should consider arrangements under which commercial and recreational activities can enhance the public land estate.

8 Web site - mcav.com.au

The Association has made greater use of the website in keeping members and associates informed of activities, policy developments and activities.

9 Heritage Victoria

We opened discussions with Heritage Victoria with a view to having the places, practices and cultural associations of the mountain cattlemen listed. This would assist us in maintaining access to the high country leases.

10 National Parks Advisory Council

Membership of the National Parks Advisory Council has always been a problem for us. Two positions are becoming vacant. Applicants must be urban residents. The two non-urban resident positions become vacant at a later date. The following people subsequently nominated and were supported by the Public Land Council of Victoria.

- Ian Hamilton, President of the Public Land Council of Victoria, Director of Tread Lightly and closely involved in four-wheel-drive issues for many years.
- Mark Blundell, Vice President of the Public Land Council of Victoria, deer hunter and National Secretary of the Australian Deer Association.
- Sue Reynolds former Secretary of the Mountain Cattlemens Association of Victoria. Sue lives in Mansfield. We note that the Act requires two of the persons appointed under this section to live outside the metropolitan area. It does not state that 2, all or any must live in the metropolitan area. Clearly all four could live outside Melbourne.
- Milton Oliver, a four-wheel-driver highly qualified with considerable experience in the business world and in leadership positions and closely involved with Four-wheel-drive Victoria.

11 Memorandum of Co-operation

Following years of tension between the Association and Parks Victoria, we started developing a Memorandum of Co-operation to be signed by both parties.

The Memorandum will formalise current arrangements, guarantee some consultation and would allow the Association to operate more on



Doug Treasure and Professor Peter Attiwill

the "front foot". As with many activities of Parks Victoria, this process was placed on the back burner following the 2003 bushfires.

12 Support of Associates

The support provided by associates was mentioned several times at the March meeting of the MCAV Council. There is no doubt at that cattlemen derive great comfort and strength from the strong supporter base amongst the associate membership. Our associates may not hear from us every week but the support that they provide is regularly mentioned. You will note in the discussion regarding the get-together that it was thought highly appropriate that cattlemen should man the bar and provide an opportunity for all members of the Association to become better acquainted.

Treasurer's Report

Tim Barker presented the financial report of the Association.

Tim Barker/ Doug Treasure

"That the Treasurers report be adopted."

CARRIED

Marketing Officer's Report

Pauline Venn presented the Marketing Report.

This has been a successful year for marketing, with a predicted increase in gross profit on last year. Care was taken not to be over stocked with merchandise at the conclusion of the 2002/03 financial year and this is proven within the marketing accounts. Stock purchases also came in marginally less than 50% under budget. Annual sales produced a good result aided by MCAV on line sales. Get Together sales, though not reflected

in the accounts, were down, probably due to site competition and a decline in patron numbers.

The Sheep Yard Flat Get Together may have been devoid of horses but this did not stop supporters keen to purchase a genuine MCAV article from our extensive range of goods. The new 2003 products such as the Polar Fleece Vests and oil skin utility bags were popular.

I would like to thank Sue Beeton for offering her time to assist in the marketing tent in between auditions for the Don Kneebone award and also Kim Rawlings for being my tireless 2 I C throughout the weekend. The marketing raffle managed to raise more than \$250 and the winner of the hamper was Mrs V Quigley with Red ticket B32.

In addition to the Get Together sales, mail order and trade shows accounted for an additional 13% in the yearly figures. Marketing hit the road twice in the year with appearances at the Mansfield Agricultural Show in November 2002, and the Omeo Back to Back Wool Competition in June 2003.

Future mail order forms such as the Christmas 2003 form will introduce several more new marketing lines such as gents' ties, spare wheel covers, customised mini thermoses, as well as two new oil skin novelty products bearing the MCAV logo.

The 2004 ceramic port crocks have once again been designed with the Get Together host branch in mind and this year feature "Guys Hut on Bryces Plain". The crocks will be filled with a Vintage Port, bottled and produced at the Mt Markey Winery from the Omeo Region. For the first time tastings of the Vintage Port will be offered in the marketing tent at the 2004 Get Together as a purchase incentive.

Previous years have proven successful in offering pre-release orders of the crocks. This practice has, and will continue to assist those who cannot make it to the Get Together and those who want to be assured of not missing out as the supply is limited to 10 dozen and cannot be repeated.

On a personal note I would like to pay a tribute to a true gentleman and great Cattleman who passed away this year being the one and only Peter McCormack.



Some of those attending the MCAV meeting at Dinner Plain in October 2003

Pete was the person assigned the task of safely transporting the merchandise in the cumbersome MCAV caravan to every Get Together I have served the Association, beginning at Gibbo Park in 1997. On a couple of occasions the weight of the load he was hauling and gradient of the road caused his vehicle to over heat thus delaying his journey, but he never failed to deliver the goods, once even transferring the merchandise to a horse float to ensure its safe arrival. His cheery smile, generous gestures and effortless support to me will be deeply missed.

Pauline Venn/ Ross Brown

“That the Marketing Officer’s report be adopted.”

CARRIED

Setting membership and associate membership subscription fees

It was AGREED that membership subscriptions for members and associates remain unchanged.

Fixing Honorariums and payments

It was AGREED that the honorariums and payments be

- President \$3,000
- Senior Vice President \$1,000
- Special Projects Officer \$1,000
- Marketing Officer \$1,000
- Secretary \$25,000

Election of Office Bearers

President - Simon Turner, nominated by Rusty Connley, declared elected.

Vice President - Bruce McCormack nominated by Ross Brown, declared elected

Special Projects Officer - Jack Hicks nominated by Simon Turner, declared elected

Special Projects Officer - Harry Ryder nominated by Bruce McCormack, declared elected

Special Projects Officer - Brian Higgins nominated by Bill Cumming, declared elected

Secretary - Tim Barker nominated by Simon Turner, declared elected

Treasurer - Doug Treasure nominated by Bruce McCormack, declared elected

Marketing Officer - Pauline Venn nominated by Simon Turner, declared elected

Appointment of Auditor

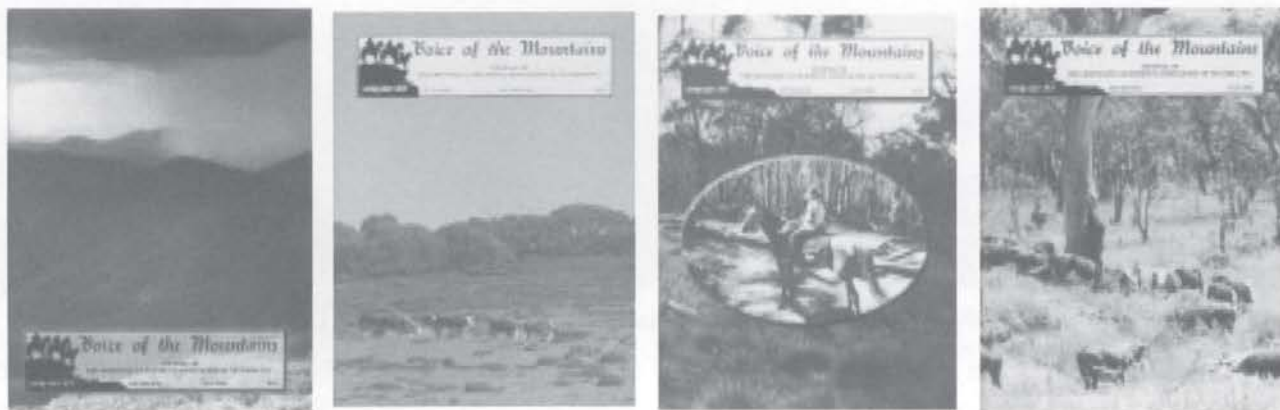
It was AGREED that Terry Quirk be re-appointed as Auditor.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 12.15pm

Notes

1. Source PV, Scientific Advisory Panel Report.
2. *A Nation Charred*, Inquiry into Recent Australian Bushfires, House of Representatives Select Committee on the Recent Australian Bushfires, October 2003
3. A research project titled “*Analysing conflict between cultural heritage and nature conservation in the Australian Alps: a CVM approach*” by M. Lockwood, P. Tracey and N. Klomp of the Johnstone Centre of Parks, Recreation and Heritage, Charles Sturt University, Albury.

Back Issues and Acknowledgements



A consolidation of back issues of *Voice of the Mountains* has taken place and this is probably the best time to fill the gaps in your collection. We currently have the following available.

Volumes 10 - 11 @ \$4.00

Volumes 12 - 23 @ \$4.50

Volumes 24 and beyond @ \$6.00

Available by post from the MCAV, P.O. Box 5083, Burnley 3121

As editor I would like to record my thanks to all who have helped and given assistance in the production of *Voice of the Mountains* this year. Tim Barker, Simon and Rowena Turner have been on the other end of the phone at all odd hours, written material and contributed photographs; the McCormack, Woodgate, Dunsmuir and Brown families, John Faithfull, Laurence Webb, Sue Silvers, Pauline Venn, Margaret Armitage, Neil Barraclough, Omeo Historical Society, Kelvin and Jackie Prendergast, Brian Higgins, Michael Batty, J.L. Rawson, Janet Turner, Alma Angus, Graham Conway and Neil Cox have also assisted.

Some of the best photographs in this issue came to me anonymously so if they are yours - thank you.

A huge thank you is due to my work colleagues and particularly my employer, Stephen Baggs, who has given me the time and open access to computer facilities, e-mail and the like and hasn't objected when I've been disrupted from my work to attend to *Voice* matters (especially the printing).

Every year we push the envelope with E-Gee Printers, particularly this year, and they are yet again thanked in advance for their tolerance, patience and ability to make the deadline.

Had it not been for these people - there would be no *Voice of the Mountains*.

If you have something to contribute to the next edition please feel free to send it to me, Debbie Squires, at P.O. Box 816, Bairnsdale 3875.

