



Voice of the Mountains

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THE MOUNTAIN CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA INC.

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No.30 (2007)





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

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CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Office Bearers 2006/2007 | 2 |
| President's Message 2007 | |
| A word from Doug Treasure | 3 |
| Fires claim more of our history | 5 |
| Howittville Firestorm <i>Kelvin Healey</i> | 8 |
| Impressions of the Fires at Castleburn <i>David Treasure</i> | 9 |
| Saving Bennison <i>L. Ralph Barraclough</i> | 11 |
| A Consequence of Fire: The Licola Floods <i>L. Ralph Barraclough</i> | 12 |
| Burning Issues Revisited <i>Neil Barraclough</i> | 16 |
| Waiting on a Fire <i>Laurence Webb</i> | 18 |
| Disconnection: A Social View of Fire Management in the Mountains | |
| <i>Rod Incoll</i> | 20 |
| Labour guilty of fuel reduction burns cover-up | 25 |
| Letter to the Editor | 26 |
| End of an Era <i>Duane L. Langley</i> | 27 |
| Where the Fires were | 28 |
| Glenfalloch Station <i>Linda Barraclough and Minnie Higgins</i> | 30 |
| On the Bookshelf: From Drovers to Daisy Pickers | 32 |
| Who will call "Salt" now? <i>Lyric Anderson</i> | 33 |
| Alpine Park in Peril as Weeds Take Hold <i>Don Story</i> | 34 |
| Cattlemen "on the road" again: 2006 | 37 |
| Tributes | |
| Alex Traill | 42 |
| Ian Balmer | 43 |
| Jack Purcell | 44 |
| Cattlemen's Call <i>Joy McAuley</i> | 45 |
| Rose River 2006 | 46 |
| A Word from Hon. E.G. Stoney | 54 |
| Our Sponsors | 55 |
| Back Issues | 56 |
| Acknowledgments | 56 |

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COVER ILLUSTRATIONS

Front Cover: The fire advancing on Howittville stock as photographed by Wayne Van den Dolder.

Back Cover: The background images of the smoky atmosphere were taken in the Dargo area by Wayne Van den Dolder, while
the inset photographs show Jim Treasure riding up a blackened Dargo Road and smoke rising from near Dargo photographed by
Kathy Junor.

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President's Message 2007

DOUG TREASURE

The past year has been an anxious one for many of us in rural Victoria.

I believe it should have been an anxious one for all Victorians. However our urban cousins are much more isolated and insulated from “the ELEMENTS” than those of us who live closer to where we are all fed from, the soil.

It has also seen a growing public awareness of how we should manage our natural resources, as stream flows decrease, and stored water supplies are depleted.

If the big dry we are experiencing continues, our community will be forced to confront issues that cannot just be left to someone else to sort out.

My late father, Jim Treasure, who was environmentally and politically savvy, often said, ***“We will never have a revolution in Australia while we have beer and football”***. It was Jim’s way of saying that Mr Average has it so good that he does not worry much about tomorrow.

Well I think that Mr Average needs to take heed of what is going on.

The approach that we can turn on the telly for our entertainment, drive to the supermarket for our sustenance, keep up the consumer spending, use fossil fuel as if it were there forever, needs to be addressed.

The growing public awareness is good, but what is the outcome?

Up until now the public conscience has wanted someone else to ***“DO SOMETHING”***.

They say, ***“The government should do something”***.

This has resulted in government policies that are conceived to placate the comfortable voter.

To quote that modern day, grand man of the mountain, Ian Stapleton, from his book, *“Secondhand and Solid”*, *“politicians are people who walk backwards in front of a crowd”*.

In other words they are followers of public opinion, not leaders of it.

Kicking a few cows off the high country fits comfortably into this approach for many politicians.

I would debate that well managed high country grazing would be the most environmentally friendly form of agriculture the world has seen in 11,000 years of formal agriculture.

Yes, in a reasonable democracy majority rules, but only with correct checks and balances for such things as human rights and environmental survival. An uneducated majority of voters has no right to allow the “lock-it-up and let-it-burn” approach to public land management. This approach has resulted in massive flora and fauna decimation, as seen in the fires of 2003 and 2006-7.

As an association, we are much attuned to what is happening regarding public land management.

I believe we have a top down system which is too much controlled by Spring Street.

This past year we organized the ride to Parliament House in November, which attracted a large body of rural support, and we have sponsored the **“PEOPLE’S FIRE REVIEW”**, which is currently in progress.

These activities are to draw attention to the bad, from the top down bureaucratic decisions made regarding our natural resource management.

I believe that we need to look at history to see how those before us fared in management.

The Aboriginals had an understanding of land management that today we dismiss in policy making. They knew that there were cycles which had to be respected. They worked with the elements rather than trying to be **“in charge”** of nature the way our western culture seems to want to do.

Our early settlers initially, and the high country cattlemen in more recent days had a similar approach.

How is it that early mountain cattlemen families survived fires when the only fire control they had was a hessian bag, a bough off a tree and a box of matches?

The Aboriginals before them had less control measures.

They knew how to use fire at the correct time. They did not put out all the natural fires until the fuel build up was so massive. Now all the Elvis helicopters available, and the thousands of well trained fire fighters with millions of dollars worth of state of the art fire fighting gear, cannot be effective once it gets away under bad conditions.

Good natural resource management where fire is concerned has diminished when the local people were told **“we can do it better”**.

To take the locals out of the bush and attempt to manage the bush from afar under a foreign regime, is taking the (local) man out of the management.

Disposable resources are being outstripped by disposable income, and as a community we need to act.

However change will not come easy, as many do not want to see past the long tradition that the tap will always have water in it, food will always be plentiful and cheap, and that we will always have plenty of disposable income to pay for excessive consumerism.

Thank you very much to the many people who have contributed to the MCAV in the many and varied ways that people help. We all have different skills, and our association is well served in so many areas.

The MCAV has a valuable role in keeping alive traditional links to the past, and also being a spring board for activities and ideas that promote good public land management.

Best wishes,

Doug Treasure

President
Mountain Cattlemen’s Association of Victoria
April 2007



Fires claim more of our history

An overview of recent loss due to the fires



Weston's Hut, photographed above in the 1950s, was one of the casualties of the 2006/2007 fires. Lists are still being compiled to give an accurate picture of the losses this time around but the following structures have been confirmed destroyed.

Pinnacles Fire Hut
Snowy Range Airfield Hut
Traralgon High School Camp
Post yard, Licola
Barkly bridge, Glencairn
Golden Point Hut
Christians Hut near Mt Selma
Bluff Hut

Howfield Refuge/Pikes Hut
Mt No. 3 Refuge near Mt Stirling
Riches Hut
Cooper Creek Hilton
Dandongadale Hut
Ryans Hut
BlairsHut, Simmons Gap
Westons Hut and
Craigs Hut

Already discussions are taking place about the rebuilding of several of the huts. The Department has recommended that Riches, Westons and Bluff Huts be rebuilt. It is also believed that Mt No. 3 refuge will be replaced as will Cooper Creek Hilton.



Above: Bluff Hut before and after the fires. (Graeme Stoney)

There was much publicity given to the announcement that already \$300,000 had been set aside for the rebuilding of Craigs Hut, much to the amusement of many cattlemen and associates.

Graeme Stoney is also keen and committed to the rebuilding of their Bluff Hut. Bluff Hut was built in 1956 by his father, Eadley Stoney, Jack Ware and other cattlemen. The iron for the hut was packed up by Graeme when he was fifteen years old along the dangerous bridle track to the hut site. The jeep track was not put through until 1960 when Pat Kelly, another mountain cattleman, was working for the Forests Commission. The hut was extended in 1982 to accommodate back country skiing trips. It was also the base for Chris Stoney's trial rides for years. The Stoney's lease was taken by the Government in 2005.

Graeme is keen to see the hut rebuilt for the use and enjoyment of the wider community and is thankful for the offers of help to do so from friends and connections. Ironically, Charlie Lovick, Graeme and others cleaned up around the hut in the days before and thought it was safe. However, the intensity on that day was incredible. As the fire came over the saddle it was like a volcano and nothing in its path



Blairs Hut, near Simmons Gap.

would have survived.

Two other landmarks were also destroyed. The historic, and classified Barkly River bridge, that gave access to Glencairn and the Post Yard at Licola.

The Barkly River bridge was eventually built in 1931 after years of begging by local families. The contract for the bridge, built from timber on the site, was for £416. Being of rough timber construction it was one of the last of its type in the Shire of Wellington. Given the hazards of floods and log trucks it is amazing it survived so long. It was a powerful symbol of the struggles of the families at Glencairn.

The Post Yard was built c1874 and consisted of sawn logs, around two hundred of them, standing side by side to form the enclosure of about two acres. At some points living trees had been incorporated. The early photograph on the left shows a hut and internal yards that had look since disappeared, but the exterior wall was very much still evident.





The Barkly River bridge. (Linda Barraclough)



The Post Yard at Licola. (Photograph by Con Gleeson, courtesy Centre for Gippsland Studies, Monash University)

Howittville Firestorm

KELVIN HEALEY

Lindsay Miles and his nephew Wayne Van den Dolder said they feared they would be burned to death as a fireball rocketed through the Howittville valley where they were caught there during the recent fire. “We were in God’s hands,” Lindsay said.

Wayne said he thought of his wife Clare and son Jack, 3, at home in Tanjil South, in the Latrobe Valley, as the wall of fire approached. “I never want to see anything like that again. I was terrified.”

The men were on their property at Howittville thirty kilometres northwest of Dargo on Sunday 10 December, when they became trapped by fire while trying to save their herd of cattle.

That afternoon the wind picked up and the fire hit. “It was too late to run,” said Lindsay. Wayne described the blaze’s horrifying approach. “Once the wind came up the whole bush exploded,” Wayne said. “We could hear it coming . . . it sounded like three hundred or four hundred touring cars coming down the valley. It was a fireball across the top of the trees.”

The pair had rigged a sprinkler system to the roof of their hut, the only building on the property, but believed it was unsafe to shelter there against the fire.

Deciding the best chance of survival was on clear ground, they drove their four-wheel drives into

the middle of a paddock and stopped among their herd of cattle. “We sat in the vehicles in the middle of the paddock with the cows,” Wayne said. “We stayed there until the fire went past the hut. It went clean across the top of the hut but because we had sprinklers the hut didn’t catch fire.”

The vehicles barely protected them from the radiant heat as the fire roared over the valley and along its ridge lines. “You could feel the heat,” Lindsay said. His nephew said, “It was extremely hard to breathe.” Lindsay went on to say he tried not to panic and basically just hoped for the best. “We couldn’t do anything else. We had nowhere to go.”

Wayne said it was twenty minutes before the fire front passed and they knew they had survived. They then quickly returned to the hut and began putting out spot fires and burning embers around it. “As soon as the main front went through we went back to the hut,” he said.

Their eighty five Herefords also managed to survive the fire.

After spending the night ensuring no embers reignited the fire, the following day the relieved pair made the ninety minute drive to Dargo where they told of their escape. Wayne was anxious to be reunited with his wife and son whom he had been unable to contact to reassure of his safety.

As reported in the Herald-Sun 12 December 2006.



During the fires Wayne Van den Dolder captured images of the fire at night and from the paddock where they sheltered showing two spot outbreaks on the hillside. (Wayne Van den Dolder)

Impressions of the Fires at Castleburn

DAVID TREASURE

That Sunday night we stood on our front verandah; it was after dinner and we had hoped to settle down and go to bed, but behind Black Range we could hear the fire, a steady roar and the glow was getting more and more intense until it looked almost like daylight. The trees were silhouetted on the top of the range although we could not yet see flames: someone said, "we are really in for it now." Sometime Monday the flames appeared over the top of the range and we could see them reaching out above the trees probably less than a kilometre away in a direct line. A blackness had developed across the whole area; it was headlights on in the vehicles and lights on in the house, as it was almost completely dark.

The fires had started burning some weeks before with a chain of lightning strikes stretching from Gippsland to the North East and had moved rapidly during that time to link up into one massive fire front the likes of which few people had ever seen. These were of course made worse by the dreadful season we had, at the time in December 2006 humidity was at an incredibly low point, temperatures were high and fuel build up in the bush right across the whole Dividing Range was at an astronomical level. This could mean, of course, only one thing and that thing was now happening.

Up until this point we hadn't seen a sign of CFA or Department people in the form of fire fighters but we eventually, through various appeals for help for a tanker to come to assist us, and finally Jenny ringing the ABC and being put straight to air, we saw some assistance arrive. The Department people said when they arrived "look we are here to help, but if it gets too hot, just remember we may well be called back to Dargo".

As the fire advanced down over Black Range and Mount Budgee we continued with our frantic preparations of cleaning up, moving stock, raking up and removing every bit of flammable material from around hay sheds, houses, buildings, yards and various other assets in an attempt to reduce the fuel available for the fire when it came. At that point there was little consideration that it would not sweep right through and take whatever it could.

The south westerly that had been pushing the fire from down in the Valencia Creek area across the Freestone up the McDonalds Creek began to drop and then it was replaced by an easterly which pushed the smoke away and after a few hours we had reasonable visibility again and we were able to see up to half a kilometre, which was a great relief because it is always better to be able to see the actual fire front. It was only moving very slowly against the wind and down hill.

It was then that the Department decided to back burn from our firebreak which ran just inside the paddocks right down the western side of the property, and began to light back from that line.

The back burning continued through Tuesday and Wednesday. Thursday was forecast to be a bad day with northerlies getting up again and temperatures rising, the fires were coming down around Gibraltar Point to our north west across the back of Waterford, and were expected to reach there about the same time, so Thursday was the critical day and finally it arrived.

The northerlies did begin in the morning and we began to patrol the firebreak. There was about a kilometre and a half of fire break which hadn't been lit in the north western corner of the property near Castleburn Creek, the reason for that was there was a team lighting a back burn down Traills Track to link up with the Castleburn line but until they came off that range it was not safe for the Department people to light the last section underneath them; as a result is was not done.

We spent much of Thursday patrolling that line and watching the fire advance down off the range north of Castleburn Creek we knew that once it got down to the Creek and crossed with the northerlies behind it, it would funnel up this valley with enormous force. We were still reasonably confident because of the number of men and machines around that we had a good chance of holding it, but Thursday evening, to our surprise, as one of our family went down patrolling the area, we found that the fire had actually jumped the line and there were no Department or CFA people to be seen. They had been called back to Dargo for safety reasons; the

response from the men on the line was “you’re not calling us back again”; but that was how it was so there were only three of us with a couple of Toyotas and little farm tankers to stop the fire as it came up to our little grader width fire break.

There had been a southerly change forecast for that evening. We heard it had reached Stratford, we weren’t sure how long it would take to get here but we assumed maybe forty minutes. We began to hold the fire behind the line as it was advancing up to the hill, as it spread we had to spread ourselves thinner and its chances of jumping across were increasing. Eventually the wind changed, we could feel the colder southerly wind on our backs, it was quite strong and began to push the fire back a little and slow its advance. We were able to hold it along that line. With bush fires you need a bit of luck and we certainly had a bit of luck then, if it had been a couple of hours later there was no way we could have held it and especially with that break in the burn there was nothing to stop it.

We didn’t realise it at the time, but Thursday was the turning point for us. Unfortunately the fire advanced further east and did some awful damage in other places, the crisis point was past for us and while there was a period of patrolling edges for quite some time afterwards that was the climax and the main danger period passed. The fire also swept around to the north of Dargo and while it moved through very quickly, it did some terrible damage, particularly up in the woollybutt forests up towards the head of Jungle Creek, around the head of Smith’s Creek, Grady’s Creek and the Hibernian Spur out towards Mt Ewan. Some beautiful woollybutt forests there will never be seen again in the same way by anyone that is alive today. It is going to take a generation or two for that to recover, and the loss to wildlife is so that many weeks later you can stand in those burnt areas along side of the road and listen and you will hardly hear a sound, not a bird, not an animal, nothing. Over such a vast area the losses of our native fauna must be enormous.

In the aftermath the Mountain Cattlemen’s Association is seeking to get an enquiry going, it is not a witch hunt, it is not about seeking blame, but simply to find a way to manage things better, and as part of that process we certainly need to have a more positive approach towards fuel reduction and the way we go about it. Having seen the system myself from both ends I can understand the difficulty in changing the process.

There has always been a tendency within the Department to seek a scapegoat whenever a fuel reduction burn gets out of control, and that in itself is wrong. Ministers are overloaded and overworked with electorate, parliamentary and other commitments and often don’t have the first hand knowledge to know exactly what is happening and what should be done. The mixture of all this leaves us with a difficult blend; it is not good enough to blame somebody for not doing the job when the price of failure is so high. These are some of the things the enquiry should address. The ecological future of our state’s forests and mountains very much depend on the wisdom of the outcome.

The dead ash forests reach starkly towards the sky like sentinels bearing witness to the holocaust just past, and those who love the bush are heavy hearted because this may be only the beginning of what is yet to come.

Meanwhile, the erosion pours down the hillsides and into the streams and our rivers are moving lines of filth which will run like that for many months to come, whilst the people in our cities, eager to help but oblivious to the extent of the carnage, save pieces of paper for recycling to save our forests.

In March 2007, the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) announced they would continue to build fire breaks in Gippsland, despite criticism by the Victorian National Parks Association.

The department is building big fire breaks to protect the Thomson Dam catchment from further bushfires with scant regard to the cost involved. Money for the protection of Melbourne’s water supply seems to be readily available.

Yet at the same time in the *Bairnsdale Advertiser* it was reported how the same department was filling the recently created fire breaks with the backfill and dirt that had originally been pushed aside.

Why are rural Victorians subjected to such discrimination when Melbournians’ water supply is protected at all cost? You don’t have to be a scientist to realize that windrows of dead timber will work like a wick feeding any future fire into

Saving Bennison

L. RALPH BARRACLOUGH

Like other places, Licola, suffered heavy losses from the 2006-7 fires. One area that was an exception, was the private landholdings on the Bennison High Plains. This was mainly as a result of the outstanding efforts of Kevin Higgins. Kevin had little more than home made drip torches and fifty year old knapsack sprays and was often on his own for long periods. He saved his place, his neighbour's, the Marist Brothers' school camp and then went over to save the Surveyor's Creek Forestry camp that the DSE thought was already burnt and too dangerous to even go near.

The Higgins family came to Gippsland as gold miners in the mid 1800s. When the gold ran out they took up land and began a long tradition as mountain cattlemen. From private land on Bennison, surrounded by the Alpine National Park, Kevin runs a trail riding business. This business was burnt out from a fire in the park in 1998.

On 1 December 2006, lightning started a string of fires amongst the huge fuel build up on public land. It soon became obvious that the fire fighting efforts were being concentrated on saving the Melbourne water catchments while fires threatening places like Bennison, Licola and Dargo were just going to be let burn. As soon as Kevin was cut off he started using age old traditional methods of burning back. The lack of suitable control lines to burn from was the biggest hurdle. In one night over four kilometres of drip torch lines were put in from wombat and deer tracks and old roads.

These lines held for 14 hours with no patrolling until two gusts of wind blew a spark onto unburnt ground. He fought the fire all day to stop it getting to the Marist Brothers' Chalet. Knapsack sprays were all that was available but would not put out a fire in snow grass of a day time. There were no control lines to burn back from once the fire got onto the snow grass plains, all that could be done was try and retard it until night time dew fell.

For six days, Kevin, sometimes with several mates, fought day and night to hold the fire off. At times the control lines were less than a couple of hundred metres ahead of the fire front. At Heyfield there was a yard full of DSE vehicles and slip on

units not deployed. All pleas for "just one" of these at Bennison to establish control lines fell on deaf ears. Logs were dragged up and down the snow grass in a failed attempt to make a break to drip torch from. One night I took up a Land Rover with a pallet tank and pump, but this was too top heavy and dangerous to be effective.

With no control lines of any description to burn back from on the western boundary and a raging fire coming in from the valley below, all the work establishing controls on the other three sides was going to be of little use, unless the western side could be controlled.

Fortunately the Marist Brothers had a satellite phone in their building. With this Kevin established contact with David Packham, a highly respected bushfire scientist of over forty years' standing. David had also been the "Supervising Meteorologist" for bushfire weather forecasting for eight years with the Bureau.

David was able to give Kevin very accurate forecasts of impending wind changes from the fire and aviation forecasts of wind at various altitudes. Kevin was able to translate these into localised effects from the various valleys leading up to Bennison, then run out drip torch lines allowing for the forecast wind change to blow the fire back onto itself to put it out. This approach worked extremely well and resulted in what is probably the biggest unburnt area surviving within the whole fire parameter.

The remarkable success of the Bennison effort, against huge odds, was the combination of outstanding local bush knowledge passed down from five generations of the Higgins family and the best scientific advice available mixed with long standing traditional fire fighting methods.

Want to be kept informed about what is happening in our fight to regain access to our leases? Then send an email to the secretary and get your address put onto our email database so you are kept informed -

barker@vicnet.net.au

A Consequence of Fire: The Licola Floods

L. RALPH BARRACLOUGH

The Licola area has been hit hard by both the 2006-7 fires and flash flooding. On 14 December 2006, a very hot fire raced down the valley taking out the farmland and surrounding bush. So hot was this fire it burnt out areas at Glencairn and Glenfalloch that had never been burnt since settlement in the 1860s. The historical post yard a kilometre from Licola, built around 1875 to keep marauding dingoes from sheep, was completely erased. The classified Barkly Bridge was burnt down leaving the people of Glencairn to once again ford the river, something from which they had been spared for over seventy five years.

Since settlement, the Licola and Glencairn communities had been so successful in fighting bushfires they had never lost an occupied house or shed, not even in 1939. For most of our history fires had been fought with little more than matches, boughs, wet bags, axes and with the luckier ones having rakes. Later on a handful of knapsacks were included.

The fire that came into our valley originated from spots landing on Whiskey Knob, thrown from the Jamieson fire. This had been left to burn as the main effort was concentrated around saving the Melbourne water catchments. The Whiskey Knob fire burnt amongst very high fuel loads until it got to the junction of the two Barkly Rivers, then roared up the hill behind farms at Glencairn to throw spots igniting the farmland as close as three kilometres from Licola. There was so much fuel on the public land that fighting the fire was out of the question and trying to save homes and sheds was all that was possible. A number of places were either left to burn or defended with no outside help.

The small communities were well prepared, everyone had rebuilt knapsack sprays (there were over fifty), many had home made drip torches (over thirty were made), there were quite a few small tanks with pumps on farm vehicles, as well as pumps on dams, tanks and rivers. The CFA volunteers who came up on strike teams did an outstanding job in preparation by helping burn out breaks on the North side of homes and sheds. The DSE did a faultless

job in assisting with the supply of heavy machinery for making fire breaks. Local landholders with bulldozers and heavy equipment worked tirelessly to assist others who did not have this. Never before had the Licola community seen such a spirit of co-operation within the community in the two week lead up to this fire.

The flash flooding that followed started in January. The road into Licola was closed for two days until it could be reopened. The road into Glencairn and the Tamboritha Road into the Alpine National Park were also made impassable having tonnes of mud and silt deposited from eroding gullies that formed alluvial boulder fans in later storms. The fire had been so intense from the fuel there was nothing left to hold the soil together. On the evening of 20 January, a massive mudflow from the National Park swept away a caravan, site hut and wrecked a home being built to replace a burnt house on Greg and Pam Ryan's place on the Wellington River.



Ralph's property "prepared" for expected flooding with the abatement wall of drums in place.

At my place on Target Creek, three kilometres from Licola, I had been preparing for a flood for six weeks. Over sixty 200 litre drums full of water had been placed around buildings to deflect a flood. Equipment like generators and chainsaws in sheds were stacked up on piles of pallets. In the three days leading up to the flood on the afternoon of February 23, vehicles were dragged up from the flats, files and other belongings were removed from the house to higher ground. Boxes were stacked on



Two hours before the peak of the flood swept through the property. Tonnes of rock and soil washing into Target Creek.



*Taken from the road above Ralph's home, just after he had escaped from the floodwaters at about 6pm.
The peak has just passed through.*

the table, stove and sink. Other boxes were stacked on stools. All this was allowing for a flood of six inches through the house, about twice as big as the biggest flood since the block was selected at the end of World War I.

No warnings were issued from any of the agencies of the risks faced. The flood that came down put debris almost up to the spouting. The water came straight over the tops of the 200 litre drums so fast that I nearly went with it. The current was so strong the side of a boat was ripped out just trying to hang on, a Land Rover engine block was washed five meters out of a shed into the garden. The floor lifted up in the house tipping all the stools over allowing boxes to be washed out the door. The local people at Licola knew I was in trouble when my worldly possessions were seen washing under the Macalister River bridge. Tonnes of mud and charcoal were deposited in and around my house. In Licola two buildings were written off and the shop so badly damaged from a mudflow it may also have to be written off. The Jamieson Road out of Licola has been so badly eroded it could take millions of dollars to repair.

The thunder that accompanied this storm was totally different to any heard before. Just short sharp bangs but at least ten times as many as any previous storm and just seconds apart.

Approx 90% of the run off came from probably less than 25% of the catchment. The storm appeared to follow burnt crowned forest along the top of Cobb Spur. There is massive erosion in the heads of gullies

with little catchment, this evidence will be around for a long time to come.

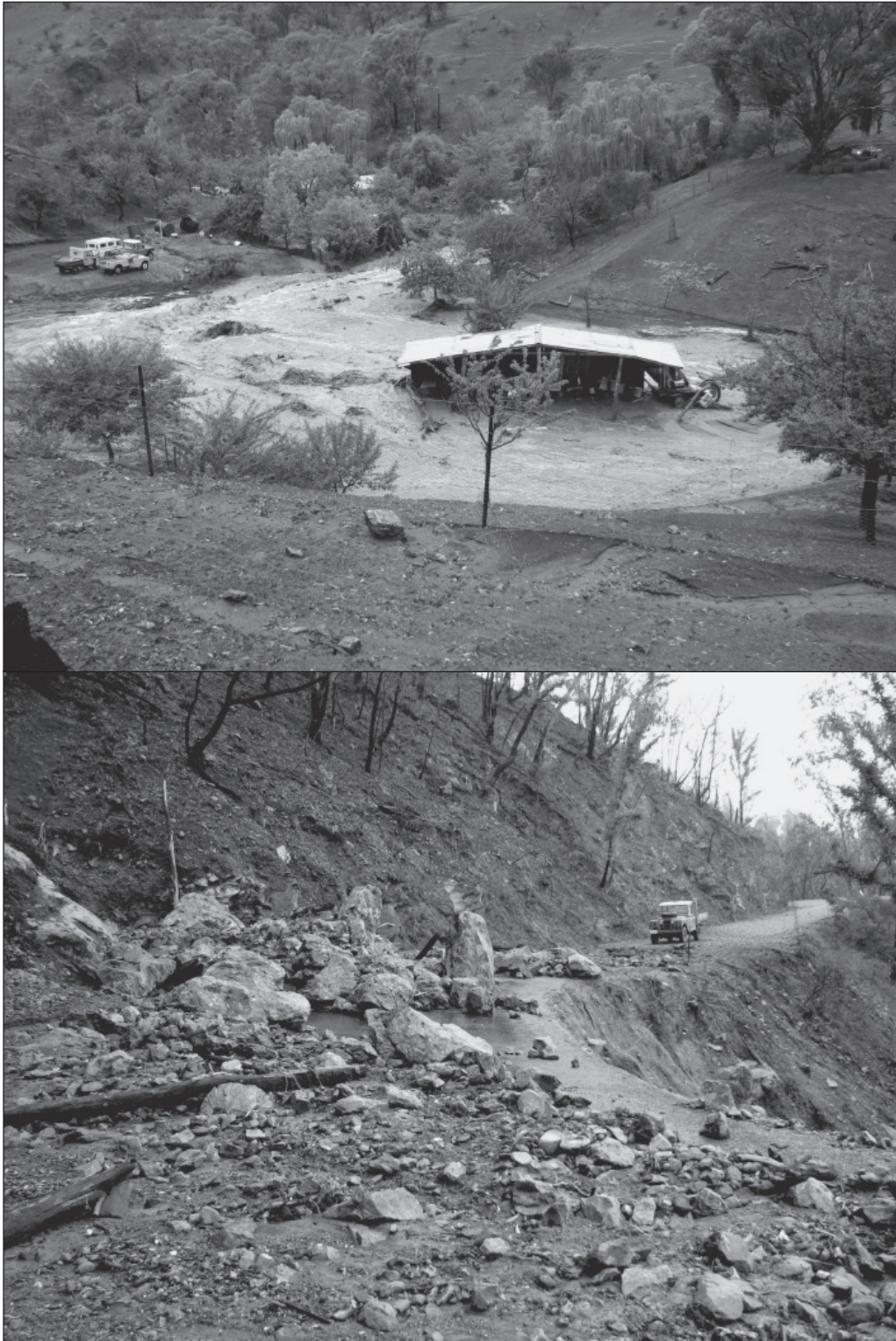
Massive storms like we are seeing following fires are dangerous and not natural. If they were natural there would be more evidence like eroded streams and alluvial boulder fans. The environment is being wrecked by environmental mismanagement. Serious questions need to be asked as to how a deluge of this nature from a larger storm in the headwaters of the Macalister, or Avon Wilderness will be managed to prevent loss of life downstream.



The next day.....

Above: The Landrover that Ralph was trying to use to escape when the peak of the flood hit.

Left: Some of the flood abatement wall ended up washed into the back of the Landrover trapped in the shed. Tonnes of debris and soil were dumped on the property.



*Top: Taken from the road above the house, half an hour after the peak had passed through.
Above: The Licola-Jamieson Road about 10-15km from Licola on Saturday 24 February.*

Burning Issues Revisited

NEIL BARRACLOUGH

In *Voice of the Mountains* (1988) I wrote about the beneficial effects of the protective burning done by the mountain cattlemen prior to the 1939 fires. It was written back then in the hope we could learn from history. In that article I documented how land management was divided between state forests managed by the Forests Commission and Crown Lands. The best areas of timber and most important water catchments were in the control of Forests Commission and the areas of lesser interest and more isolated areas left under Crown Lands control.

The Forests Commission did everything in their power to stop the protective burning of the cattlemen, however in the isolated areas of Crown Lands along the Great Divide many continued the predominately autumn burning up till the fires of 1939. The areas under Forests Commission control were mostly devastated, the areas of Crown Lands the cattlemen had been protecting mostly saved, the post World War 2 mills of Heyfield, Dargo, Swifts Creek and others are a testimony of this.

I pointed out that it was timber industry pressure that stopped the cattlemen's burning over fifty years before greenies had ever been thought of. Where are we now, nearly twenty years after that article was written?

The Forests Commission, Crown Lands and National Parks had all been merged, now with other departments also (making financial accountability harder), and it has gone through several name changes to now be DSE (Dept of Scorched Earth?). In the early 1990s voluntary packages were offered to regional middle level staff; those who could find employment outside of the department were able to take the package - we lost some good operators.

Since then we have seen three major fire seasons with the Caledonia fire of 1998 and the massive one million hectare plus fire seasons of 2003 and 2006-7. Experienced bushmen I have spoken to have attributed the inability of the DSE and Parks Victoria to contain these fires not only to the massive fuel build up but a failure to understand the need to

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back burn from a containment line, and bureaucratic limitations on being able to back burn. There also seems to be a culture within Parks Victoria that as these have been lightning strikes they should be allowed to follow their natural course. The loss to the environment and economy of these intense mega fires will never be understood but a brief look at a bit of the obvious is needed.

The ash species, Mountain Ash (*E. regnans*) and Alpine Ash (*E. delegatensis*) are obvious examples. In the early eighties I took a drive through the area around Tanjil Bren and saw mountain side after mountain side with the odd remaining massive mountain ash stag amongst acacia species, hillsides devoid of any living eucalypts. I asked a local oldtimer about it and he said they were areas that copped two out of the three fires of 1926, 1932 or 1939, the mature trees killed, the seed germinated and the regeneration killed before setting seed. Equally devastating, but not as obvious, gone would have been a multitude of other species also. This devastation didn't happen in areas where the more regular burning of the cattlemen protected the mature trees from intense fires.

We can only wait to see if areas that were hit by two of the recent three big fires have suffered the same fate; areas clearfelled in the last twenty years that have had one of these fires may be similarly affected.

There seems to be a perception in the debate on protective burning that the areas burnt in these fires might somehow "be right for a while" because it has all been burnt. Old bushies will tell you infrequent hot fires are followed by very thick fire promoting scrub, unlike the grassy understorey gained through regular autumn burning, why?

Much has been said about Aboriginal burning however it's likely we'll never understand its complexity. It's likely that areas of fertile soil were managed more intensively, burnt regularly, likely in late summer when the tuberous plants they depended on were dormant and the fires reduced their grassy competition. These are the areas that would have been first selected. Areas of lower fertility were likely not burnt as frequently, but burnt in a mosaic pattern and far more frequently than they are today. This is the likely fire history of the less fertile areas that have missed selection for agriculture and the bush we have today.

The understorey of our bush should be thought of as two competing ecosystems, grass and scrub. Grass has evolved to burn regularly to eliminate the competing scrub, but not evolved to burn intensively. Scrub has evolved to burn infrequently and hotly to eliminate the grass. Aboriginal burning may have favoured the grass on less fertile areas but was infrequent enough to allow some of the scrub species creating a mosaic and concentrating the hunted animals on the recently burnt areas. European management has favoured the scrub with ecologically devastating consequences.

Anecdotal accounts that have been passed down (and mentioned in the Royal Commission into the 1939 fires) say that because of the number of cattlemen away during World War 1 the burning stopped to the point that the overgrown bush was hard to get back under control in many areas. (The loss of manpower to WW1 also greatly contributed to prickly pear taking hold in Australia). The bush will be a far worse overgrown mess following these intense fires than it was with the conditions that caused them and our managers don't have the knowledge of the returning bushmen from WW1. The bush is in a mess.

There are two powerful lobby groups involved, the "Green" movement and the clearfelling based timber industry. Clearfelling is justified by the belief that it represents the devastation of infrequent, intense fires, and our greenie friends don't seem to have much idea what they are going along with but parrot the word "science". Where are our politicians in all this? There doesn't appear to be a politician anywhere that will support what the older cattlemen have all told me, and has been painfully obvious, that the cattlemen's burning protected the ash species and the environment creating mixed age stands, disproving the myth of the timber industry. The level of thinking of the timber industry has done to the timber resource what the level of thinking of the environmental movement has done for the environment. David Suzuki said "If the people will lead the leaders will follow"; the bush desperately needs leadership from the people.

Anybody wanting a copy of the 1988 Voice of the Mountains article can get it from me by email at neilbarra@yahoo.com. Bushies without email can write to me at RMB 1477 Stratford 3862.

Waiting on a Fire

The sluggish breezes barely stir the soupy, smoke tinged air,
the hazy sun is like a moon that shouldn't still be there.
The family sits in quiet calm, or so they'd have you think,
and say inconsequential things, and pour another drink.
The drumming of Grandma's fingers beats the droning of the flies,
the phonecalls answered "Yes, we're great"; the people telling lies.
They've worked and farmed here all their life, you'd never call them liar,
so make allowance for them today, they're waiting on a fire.

The winds have waved erratic fronts from lightning's scattered pyres,
the local pub displays the map that marks the line of fires.
They've all joined up to make a ring from Tolmie to Jamieson town,
and waiting for their final move, we bring the cattle down.
They should be mustered up today to snow fed mountain streams,
but sweet green grass and drought relief are this year only dreams.
These mountains that were refuge from their paddocks brown and bare,
are nurturing a firestorm 'neath clouded wreaths of grey despair.

The hoses spread upon the grass, the mops and tubs in line,
are tried and tested once again, to pass the tensing time.
The pumps are checked and plans rehearsed in strained pretending calm,
apologies in advance are made for tomorrow's lack of charm.
A radio plays the ABC, our lifeline through the hours,
it names the spots of greatest risk, and then it mentions ours.
If you believed the papers Mansfield town is vacant now,
but stubborn people joke, as Johnny Lovick herds his cows.

The media ask "Why don't you leave?", they jut a defiant jaw
 "We've farmed here over hundred years, 'n' we'll farm a hundred more.
If we lose this place we're finished, there's nothing else we know",
 and the fire is brighter in their eyes than any a bushfire's glow.
Tomorrow may bring a cooling change, and soothe our waiting fears
 but the TV predicts a firestorm, the worst in a hundred years.
So tonight we're laughing at the pub, with a spirit you must admire,
 we're scared, but wouldn't be anywhere else, than waiting on a fire.

No one slept much here last night, the bark of every dog,
 and neighing horse and moaning bull, you can't sleep like a log.
The cloying smoke smell wakes you up, your heart is beating fast,
 we try to dream of cool and green, but it never seems to last.
The morning brings the hot north wind, the smoke is whipped away,
 we yard the cows and bloody swear, 'cause it's too late to pray.
And finally it's coming, there's a grey-brown plume in sight,
 my stomach knots up angrily, like I'm going in to fight.
Uncle Donny pulls his boots on, and snarls "I hate a bloody fire"
 We start the pump, and board the ute, we drive towards the pyre.

But now the wind is at our backs, the change has come through fast,
 and the fire backs off to somewhere else, we breath a sigh at last.
For though it's like a furnace with the dial at forty one,
 we've played at wind change lottery, and today looks like we won.
Tonight my swag is someone's home, someone who didn't win like us,
 tomorrow the lottery starts again, but no-one makes a fuss.
The weeks go by, the fires spread, the stakes keep getting higher,
 the strike teams back-burn every night, thank God they never tire.

"It's eight weeks and you're back", she said, "and you ask if we're alright".
 "The fires have stalked this rim of hills, I've seen them every night.
They fought alone in the Howqua hills, with just experience and a mate
 we smelt their smoke each morning, but, all we could do was wait.
I've sent children up for cattle when the snows have come in fast,
 then waited up for their return, when dusk had long since passed.
I drove the herd in eighty two, down dreary roads when things were dire
 but the longest days I ever knew, were waiting on a fire".

Laurence Webb

Disconnection : A Social View of Fire Management in the Mountains

ROD INCOLL

Fire is the essence of Australia. Aborigines were the first wave of disturbance to come to ancient Australia. They integrated with the landscape and with fire, and a new equilibrium was reached.

Europeans were the second wave of disturbance. Displacing Aborigines, they changed the landscape massively to establish their way of life. Fire was a tool of conversion, but increasingly also a threat to their assets. The Europeans did not identify the essential nature of fire and few understood the use of it.

Following serious bushfire losses, technology showed Europeans what the Aborigines already knew: fire is the essence of Australia; but it can be tamed and managed.

Increasing urbanisation has disconnected people from the environment.

Far from being central to their lives, it is foreign to them. As reliance on natural products declined, “the environment” became just another political battleground. Today, marketing the environment is about cuddling wombats and walking formed tracks in urban parks.

Government priorities reflect social pressure. Fire management is seen as “negative”, “hard”, and demanding resources well beyond the political returns that can be expected.

As urbanisation increases, society has become disconnected from both land and fire. Glossy posters and empty phrases have replaced action on fire management programs. Massive environmental disruption from uncontrolled high intensity bushfire has become today’s reality.

DREAMTIME

Coming of Eucalyptus

There is evidence that native gum trees or Eucalypts have evolved since the Tertiary period, some 1.5 million years ago. As the climate warmed, the frequency of “natural” fires caused by lightning or volcanic activity increased.

Fossil pollen and charcoal evidence shows that Eucalypts have become the major Australian tree species because they have successfully adapted to fire and drought.

Features such as thick, fire resistant bark and the ability to regenerate from bark or basal shoots following fire damage meant that eucalypts survived fires that killed other plants.

Eucalypts have evolved quite different ways of dealing with fire with Woollybutt being a common alpine eucalypt. A ground fire in spring or autumn does not harm these trees, on account of the thick bark on their “woolly butt”. However, a hot summer fire through the crowns kills them outright. A few days after the fire, when the ground has cooled, the seed capsules open and seed falls to the burnt ground.

The seed must then spend time under snow before it can germinate in the spring. This explains why the woollybutt (alpine ash) is usually found in stands of the same age.¹



Woollybutt, Alpine National Park, West Kiewa in March 2006, burnt in 2003 fire

Other alpine plants have different fire adaptations. The Snow gum (*E. pauciflora*) is fire hardy and re-shoots from the base, often surviving intense bushfires, as seen in the next photograph. This explains its often multi-stemmed appearance.



*Snow gum, basal shoots, Alpine National Park,
Razorback March 200, burnt in 2003 fire.
(Burnt 2003)*

There are a range of rare and unique species in the high plains area; all have successfully adapted to regular exposure to fire. Sphagnum moss beds can be found in the headwaters. These are seriously damaged by fire and take decades to recover if burnt out.

Warning. Should another widespread bushfire occur before the eucalypt regrowth has matured to the stage where it sheds seed, usually 8-10 years, then woollybutt (*E.delagatensis*) and mountain ash (*E.regnans*) forest cannot regenerate. The photograph below, taken in March 2006, shows that litter and grassland fuels have recovered sufficiently for a widespread fire to occur on a hot dry windy day. Fuel reduction burning should be started now, to establish a mosaic of burnt areas to moderate the impact of fires that will otherwise radically alter alpine ecology.



*Grassland and litter fuels "ready to burn"
– Alpine National Park 2006*

Aboriginal Use of Fire

Aboriginal people used fire for cooking and warmth, and carried a fire stick on their travels. Fossil charcoal evidence shows there were more frequent fires after Aboriginal habitation, thought to date back at least 60,000 years. Fires lit by tribes outside the peak of the summer helped to create a mosaic of burning, which influenced the development of vegetation types.

While knowledge of Aboriginal habitation and activity in the alpine area lacks detail, tribal journeys to the high country peaks to collect the Bogong moth from November to January each year are well documented. It is believed that hundreds of Aborigines gathered to feast on adult moths, which are rich in fat.

Aboriginals knew the location of useful minerals, (e.g., flint for tools), and would journey to collect material for their own use and trading.

Since summer is the peak fire period, a fire taking hold on a hot dry windy day in a drought year would cause an intense fire – no different from today. However intense fire spread would have been limited by the mosaic of different age burns not present in the environment at large today.

EUROPEANS: The Pioneers

Explorers

Early adventurers looking for new land discovered the high plains as early as 1835. Wonnangatta Station was selected and settled during this period and was actively managed until it was incorporated into the Alpine national park in 1988.

Goldminers

Gold miners followed most creeks and rivers to the source, panning and sluicing for alluvial gold from 1851. The surface gold soon ran out and companies were formed to win reef gold.

Herculean feats saw heavy machinery like boilers and crushers taken into remote locations without roads and few tracks. The township of Grant was established north of Dargo in 1865 to support reef mining through the area, which continued to 1915. Many quartz mines were established in the mountains, for example the White Star mine near Mount Useful and several large companies at

Walhalla. Timber was used to fire the boilers and the forest within several kilometers of mining towns was clear felled for firewood. Much of the forest around Walhalla is regrowth from this period.

Sawmillers

The establishment of steam powered sawmills followed. These were often located in the forest and connected to the railhead by a tramway. Some mill settlements included shops, a post office, and a school.



Pit saw in the mountains
(Toolangi resident)

Graziers

Leases for summer grazing on the High Plains were granted by the Lands Department from about the 1870s on. The herds were taken up following snowmelt and removed in April-May depending on the season. The cattlemen, iconic bushmen with a vast treasury of knowledge of the mountains, have now been evicted, leaving a virtually unmanaged landscape to the forces of nature.

Tourism

While tourism has been touted as the savior of country towns following the recent displacement of traditional industries by the National Park, it has been a thriving local industry since the 1870s. There are records of English nobility and literati visiting Edwards Hill, a mining town on McEvoy's Track in the shadow of Mt Useful.

Alpine horseback touring was popular in summer. Many summer visitors rode through the high country. My father Alan Incoll ranged from Kosciusko to the Gable End during 1924–1927, recording a photographic heritage of the people and the times. Tourism was also a government service;

the Victorian Railways established the Mt Buffalo Chalet in 1910 after the construction of the railway to Bright.

The Pioneers and Fire

The pioneers relied on the landscape for resources. Bush timber and the skills to fashion it, were indispensable to everyday existence. Wood was used for building, fencing, cooking and heat; vegetables were grown or gone without; wildfowl, native animals and fish (later, rabbits!) were everyday fare. Rather than living in sustainable harmony with the environment like the aboriginals, the pioneers focused on “accumulation and advancement”. This was their vision for the future.

However with the exception of the bushmen and graziers, the central role of fire in the Australia landscape went unrecognised. Fire was seen as a threat to assets from which protection was required.

SETTLEMENT

Land Use and Fire Protection

The major Government interest at the time of first settlement was facilitating settlement, agriculture and mining to resource the growing economy. The Lands Department administered crown land grants and licenses. The Mines Department regulated and supported the mining industry.

Forestry as such took a back seat, variously being part of the Mines or Agriculture departments until 1907. Forestry was mainly about the collection of royalties for various forest products, although a few far-sighted souls saw the need for softwood plantations to reduce the cost of imports. Fire protection in those days was limited to volunteer fire brigades in townships to protect property. Extensive clearance of forests for farms need to feed the growing population, was encouraged.

A “selection purchase lease” was available to the ordinary person, to convert forested Crown Land to farmland. I spent many days as a young forester in the 1960s reporting on the forestry value of selection applications, most of which were granted, and chasing burn escapes in the surrounding forest as the land was cleared and the timber was burnt.



High plain to Mt Reynard 1927. (A.S. Incoll)

“National parks” at that time were crown lands administered by local volunteer committees with little or no funding. By 1930 there were 13 parks in Victoria covering some 126,000 acres.

Most were small, protecting features of local interest. While there were extensive bushfires in the first two decades of the 20th century, it was not until 1939 when 76 lives and 2 million acres of prime timber was lost that government attention was focused on forest fires.

The 1939 Royal Commission of the legendary Justice L B Stretton made it clear that resources must be allocated to the “fire problem”. The Forests Commission was given responsibility for fire protection outside townships (in practice, for many a township as well).

This was vigorously addressed under the guidance of forester Alf Lawrence, who became the first “fire chief” of the Department. Fire protection, including updated equipment and staff training, became part of the Commission’s culture. Burning done then was usually strip burning protecting towns or timber resources.



Result of high intensity fire on soil stability and streambed – Alpine National Park

The concept of wide scale fuel reduction burning was to wait a further two decades until research by Alan McArthur, then fire control officer with the Forestry and Timber Bureau, bore fruit in the 1960s. Technology, spurred on by serious bushfire losses, showed Europeans what Aboriginals already knew: fire is the essence of Australia; it is not an enemy and it can be understood and managed.

McArthur’s research was implemented by the Forests Commission, through a strategic burning plan for each of the 52 forest districts covering the State. Work was intensive and on a local basis. Plans focussed on asset protection. Assets included timber, water supply, townships and other built assets. The central core of natural fire ecology was not a primary consideration.

Change was in the wind. A pressure group concerned about government land allocation lobbied government for extensive park creation. “Selection purchase leases” ceased. Planning controls prohibited clearing of native forest even on private property.

The “Land Conservation Council” started a series of enquiries across Victorian public land. Dick Johnson’s *Alps at the Crossroads* in 1974 spearheaded the allocation of an extensive alpine national park. Dick was a realist who saw the need for wide scale fire management except in (relatively) inaccessible “wilderness areas”. An LCC “Special Investigation” reported that even there, fire management would be in place. Dick also understood the value of the cattle industry on the high plains; his vision included them in the proposed park.

Decisions were made that ultimately saw an extensive alpine park become a reality. Timber getting, with its experienced crews and heavy machinery, and the fire-wise cattlemen have all been excluded. In a further swing of policy, the 52 forest districts were combined with water, soil conservation, fisheries, and lands departments into eighteen regions in 1984. Drastic cuts to local expertise and resources (“savings”) were made in the new management model. Resources have been cut further since, and the area of parks and reserves has been substantially increased. The area of parks and reserves, has increased to 47% or nearly half of the public land estate.

A judgment about the effectiveness of “fire protection” in these parks and reserves does not require rocket science.

In 2003, some 527,100 hectares of forest was intensely burnt over 14 days in the northeast mountains. In autumn 2005, Wilsons Promontory National Park was burnt. In January 2006, almost all of the Grampians and the Moondarra Park were burnt.

These fires were damaging, high intensity fires, ripping out all life, and, following rain, the soil itself, silting up the gullies, creeks and rivers. Visiting the site of the 2003 fires in 2005, the absence of birds, insects, and other creatures was notable. Nature will respond; but over many decades, perhaps even centuries, a new equilibrium will emerge.

These fires were a heritage of the “fire protection” ethic - focusing on the protection of assets rather than working with the whole ecosystem. Heavy fuel built up over many years produced high intensity bushfires that were, and always will be, unstoppable.

Large-scale burning programs require understanding, commitment, determination and resources.

In Western Australia and the Northern Territory, effective fuel reduction is routine. Hundreds of thousands of hectares are under effective fire management. **Understanding, commitment, determination and resources are also the essential elements of an effective burning program in Victoria.**



Large scale burning south of Darwin

There is rarely a suitable burning day without smoke from fuel reduction.

As the following pictures illustrate, broad scale fuel reduction burning has been carried out in the alpine area. This aerial burn fuel-reduced 6000 hectares during 2-4 April 1976 in the McAlister and Caledonia catchments and the Butcher Country.



1 hr after lighting - McAlister



Three hours after lighting



Butcher Country - 3 pm



McAlister -towards evening

URBANISATION

Most Victorians now live in cities, and no longer depend on the landscape for any element of food, shelter, or comfort. Indeed they know little or nothing of it. Rampant consumerism has replaced reasonable self-sufficiency, with scant regard for tomorrow. Large 4x4 vehicles the pioneers could never have imagined, and more suited to scaling mountains than urban living, take kids that need more exercise round the block to school. People drive to gymnasiums and pay for exercise they once would have gained gathering the necessities of life.

Built on the enterprise of the pioneers, “accumulation” and “advancement” have indeed triumphed.

Humankind has become totally disconnected from the landscape. Today, marketing of the environment is a PR exercise about cuddling wombats and walking formed tracks in urban parks. Glossy posters and the rhetoric of street-smart bureaucrats have replaced meaningful conservation activity. “The environment” is just another point-scoring political battleground.

The root cause is apparent. Increasing urbanisation has disconnected people from the landscape. Far from being central to their lives, it is foreign to them. Fire is perceived as a threat – protection is sought from it. Fire management is “negative”, “difficult”, and demanding of resources greatly exceeding political returns.

As a society, we have become disconnected from an essential truth; fire is the very essence of conservation in eucalypt forests. **As a consequence, massive and continuing environmental disruption from uncontrolled high intensity bushfire has become today’s enduring reality.**

Notes

1. Foresters had no success regenerating logged stands of woollybutt until these “secrets” were discovered in the 1960s.

All photographs by the author unless otherwise stated.

Rod Incoll worked as a forester 1960–1984, in the alpine area 1973–1976, and as chief fire officer for several identities of the Department 1990–1996.

Labour guilty of fuel reduction burns cover-up

On 16 June 2006, Philip Davis, Shadow Minister for State Development, Country Victoria, Energy and Resources released what has proved to be a telling statement on the “achievements” of the Bracks Government and the Department of Sustainability and Environment’s attempts to cover-up the real figures relating to fuel reduction burns on public land. The minister subsequently requested the Auditor General investigate the performance of the Department of Sustainability and Environment on prescribed burns, how it reports on completed burns and targets.

Up until then DSE’s website had incorrectly claimed that 110,000 hectares of its 130,000 hectare target of bush had been burned that financial year. In fact “the Bracks Government not only failed to burn 130,000 hectares, but it never intended to hit that target,” Mr Davis said. This was despite the 2006-07 Budget papers tabled at the end of May also stating the target of 130,000 hectares was expected to be achieved. The Government then claimed that only 49,000 hectares were burnt, but attempted to

cover it up by falsely representing on its website that 110,000 hectares had been burnt. This information remained on the DSE website until it was publicly exposed by the Liberal Party.

Mr Davis is in possession of internal Departmental documents which reveal the DSE had no intention of reaching a burning target of 130,000 hectares of bush. They show DSE only planned to burn 83,000 hectares but had only managed to achieve 43,000 hectares to the end of May.

Mr Davis formally requested the Auditor General investigate the matter, because he believed the Bracks Government had wilfully engaged in the deception of the public, failed its duty of care to country Victoria, and neglected the management of parks and forests. “The Bracks Government is deceiving the public to cover up the fact its management of public land is seriously inadequate,” he said.

And just how telling did this turn out to be less than six months later?

Letter to the Editor

From Marian Sidwell, Bacchus Marsh

It's great to see the positive groundswell over our high country cattle and the right for them to graze within our national parks.

How short the memory.

With a crack of a whip at the opening of our Sydney Olympic Games, the world stood still as our horsemen and women thundered out onto the arena.

Our heritage, our very heart on display. That was Australia and the world knew it.

Along with our fire fighters, perhaps some of our state and federal parliament members may like to face a raging fire storm in a national park and try to rescue some of those cuddly animals they seem so keen to be seen cooing over on television.

I suggest they just stick to kissing babies and leave the real preservation work to real men and real women.

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End of an Era

It was dark and cool in the vast night when God decided to strike
from within the dense and massive clouds he threw his multiple lightning pike.
It hit the ground with blinding speed and sought the tinder bush,
the searing heat completed its feat and the flames headed North with a push.

The stockman astride his well-worn saddle saw this display of might,
the sparks they flew from his horse's shoe as he pounded down through the night.
He knew at once that he must ride hard to his mates at camp below
at the camp he reined in hard and fast, with "fire!" being his only bellow.

The stockmen knew what they had to do as they climbed on their mountain steeds,
they raced as a group on back to the coop where the cattle had had their last feed.
Two thousand head were soon being led to a two mile wide burnt scree,
for it was here that the land had been burnt as a plan if the animals need to flee.

With the smoke and the sparks filling the air from the South, the cattle were again on the move,
for the flames were high on the ever glowing sky, but the cattlemen were now in a groove.
They cracked their whips with lightning speed and drove their charges to flee,
by mornings light by way of their flight they were all in the lea of the scree.

For here the grass was green and lush and fire was stopped in its tracks.
The cattle were safe and horses relieved as the mountain men alighted their backs.
All around wildlife roamed, safe from the wild red steer,
thanks to man and his managing hand, the fire was no longer a fear.

In 2003 came another lightning spree, but the cattlemen were nowhere to be found.
The wildlife headed again to the scree where safety and sanctuary abound
but a sign here stood from a Greenie hood that lambasted the mountain man caste,
wilderness area is now proclaimed for this spot so damaged in the past.

As the animals read with a feeling of dread, the sign from modern man.
They mourned the day that had passed their way, of the man with the management plan.
They hunkered down, too tired to hop, knowing that all was lost,
their last thoughts as they burnt to death, "Where's the mountain man?" Oh! what cost.



Duane L. Langley

East Victoria Fires - Media Map



Disclaimer: This map is a snapshot generated from Victorian Government data. This Material may be of assistance to you but the State of Victoria does not guarantee it is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for error, loss, damage which may arise from reliance



Burnt Area: 22 30hrs 18/01/07
Hotspots:

-  Freeway
 Highway
 Road
 Burnt Area
 Tree cover



0 4.5 9 18
Kilometers

Glenfalloch Station



The original Glenfalloch buildings. The current homestead was built about 1912 to replace them, and they later burnt down. The current cookhouse building was then constructed on the same site, using some of the original stone.

(Con Gleeson photo, Centre for Gippsland Studies, Monash University)

Glenmaggie, Glenown, Glenlonan, Glen Oscar, Glendock, Glenlea, Glen View, Glencairn and Glenfalloch

Many have asked who were the early Scots that dominated this valley and left so many properties bearing names that conjure images of Scotland. Glenfalloch is just one of those properties.

In 1838, the Hunter brothers arrived in Melbourne and almost immediately took up land around Tumut and, in 1840, Devils River near Mansfield. Actively looking for new land, and

enthused by Strzelecki's report that good land could be found in Gippsland, they decided to go across and look for themselves.

They found a route through in May 1841, and upon finding that good land existed returned to Devils River and prepared to move into Gippsland with their stock. On their return trip in 1844, James Hunter noted in his diary that thick scrub had grown up where there had previously been open plain, a good indication that the area had not been burnt for some time. In Glencairn they found *feed grass up to the horses' knees and blacks camps every half mile.*

The next night they camped at the junction of the Barkly River and Glencairn Creek, then continued down the Barkly and Macalister to around Licola. There they *came into beautiful sheep country, fine open hills and beautiful grassed flats* around Glenfalloch but they never seriously considered laying claim to the Glenfalloch land.

It was not until January 1845, as they were riding to Melbourne that they met *a Mr Merrick taking sheep into Gippsland*. They helped brothers Maurice and Henry Meyrick cross an inlet near Westernport with their sheep and no doubt talked about the land in Gippsland. It was eventually Maurice who applied for Glenfalloch under the title of *Hunter's Country*. After Henry's death in 1847, Maurice sold the run to Malcolm Macfarlane, and he gave it the name Glenfalloch in memory of his birthplace. At that time Macfarlane was living in Glenmaggie and managing Heyfield for his uncle. Glenfalloch was run as an out-station under a manager.

Macfarlane in turn sold Glenfalloch to George Gibson Harper. Harper was a bank manager from Castlemaine and married to Elizabeth Cheyne. He was inexperienced in matters agricultural and pastoral, and in October 1868 turned up in person to run his station. Within six years, Harper's venture as a squatter had failed and he mortgaged the Glenfalloch run together with land near The Crescent at Glenmaggie, used as a lower-country base, and some useless runs he had acquired around Ben Cruachan. The financier was his brother-in-law, Dr Thomas McGrath also of Castlemaine. In turn he sold them to another Castlemaine pioneer, Edward Riggall of Joyce's Creek, who came to Glenfalloch in June 1874. At the same time James Cunningham McMichael appeared before the Lands Board in Sale to apply for a 320 acre selection on the Big Flat at Licola – a prime area in the middle of the Glenfalloch run. Battle was about to commence.

Recognising the implications of the McMichael selection at Licola, Edward Riggall promptly acquired the area around the Glenfalloch homestead as a pre-emptive right, before abandoning that tactic and settling on a 313 acre selection around the homestead. John McMichael joined his uncle at Licola and selected the adjoining block. Riggall then had his children, Mary, Richard and Sam take up selections on the land surrounding the McMichaels, tying up access to the water frontages. The battle

for the land continued with Maggie McMichael, James' daughter, selecting 120 acres at the base of Burgoyne Gap, making the stock route unavailable to the Riggalls.

The McMichael clan settled in with two of the girls, Maggie and Susan, marrying Tom and Alf Burgoyne. Members of the immediate and extended family took out selections in their own names. By 1900 almost all the Glenfalloch and Licola land was held by one or another of the McMichael clan or one of the Riggall family. The Riggalls had chosen their land carefully, allowing Glenfalloch to continue operation as a large station. Management was left to each of Edward's bachelor sons in turn with the assistance of Jim Norton, until the last son, Sam, married and ran Glenfalloch from The Crescent.

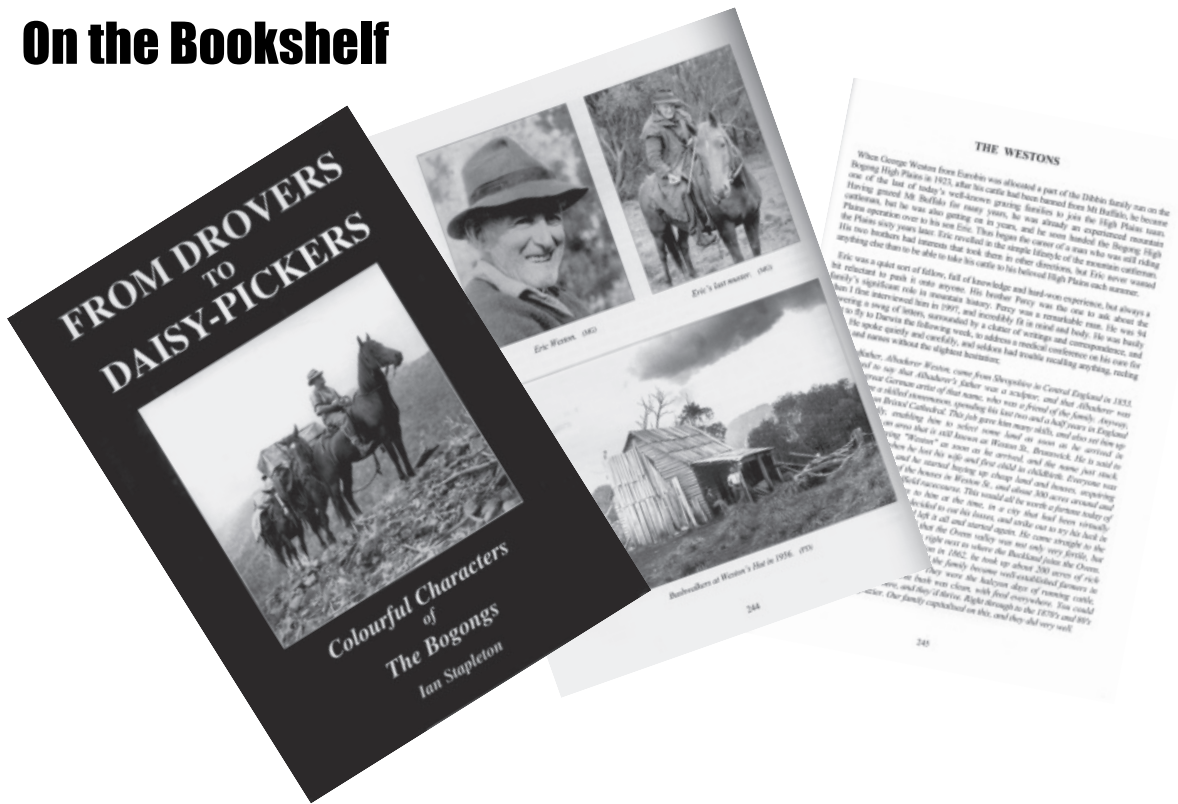
The station specialised in breeding beef cattle and horses for the Indian remount trade. At one stage 1,200 calves were marked each year, and never a bullock was sold under five years. Each summer they used the high country runs.

The McMichaels turned to pig production. Initially they tried sheep but found the dingoes too much for them. James McMichael built a huge yard of giant upright logs to pen the sheep overnight, but this was unsuccessful. The dingoes were able to leap across the palisade to reach and kill the sheep.

In 1911, after the death of his wife, James McMichael left the district and did not return. Following the death of Edward Riggall in 1914, Glenfalloch was sold to Robert Gilder of Mewburn Park, and the property has remained in the hands of this family since that time. The property was offered for Soldier Settlement, but was either rejected or the offer withdrawn. Today Glenfalloch includes all of the McMichael land.

This abridged history of Glenfalloch station comes from A Valley of Glens: The People and Places of the Upper Macalister River by Linda Barraclough and Minnie Higgins (Kapana Press, 1986). The book is presently out of print.

On the Bookshelf



From Drovers to Daisy Pickers is the third in a series of four books to be written by Ian Stapleton. It explores the lives of many of the colourful characters who once called the high country their home.

Ian is not descended from one of the high country families but he has lived, worked and gained the mutual respect of all involved in our high country heritage. His research is carried out diligently and he is trusted by the cattlemen to present a true and accurate picture of their history. And this book is no exception.

The stories that are told are done so through the recollections and writings of the older mountain people that Ian has been gathering for the past thirty years.

The first book in the series, *Hairy-Chested History* covered the Hotham to Harrietteville area and the second, *From Fraser's to Freezeout* covered the pioneers of the Dargo High Plains. *From Drovers to Daisy Pickers* explores the many characters of the Bogongs. The final book in the series will draw on characters from all over the rest of the High Country.

Ian has spent a considerable amount of time (and money) in designing a quality book. Together

as a set the three volumes are impressive on the bookshelf. They not only good quality to look at - they are good quality to read. Ian's casual and friendly style is refreshing.

The areas in this volume are Omeo, Glen Valley, the Kiewa Valley, Ovens Valley and the Bogong and includes names like the McNamaras, Faithfulls, Kellys, Huggins and Batty families; the Fitzgeralds, Ryders, Ropers, Blairs, Briggs and Westons.

Ian does not just concentrate on the present characters but has also detailed the characters that have contributed to our history. In some cases these names have only been known to most of us when they are associated to a hut or landmark. Ian has delved into the past to find out more about these people who left enough of an impression during their lifetimes to be remembered in place names today.

He is to be congratulated for having the foresight to produce this series. Hopefully the next volume is not to far down the pipeline.

For enquiries, or suggestions about this book or the series, contact Ian Stapleton direct at Feathertop Track, Harrietteville, 3741. Thanks for a great book and series Ian.



I'm a fifth generation member of the Treasure family. After last year's rally I wrote an article about the cattlemen's fight for tradition. I write better than I talk - I think that's been passed down through the generations. It's called: Who will call 'salt' now?

"Saa-aalt" - "saaa-ho", the mountains ring with the call of 'salt' as we ride through the snow gums in the crisp air with hessian bags of coarse salt strapped on the front of our saddles. The morning fog has mostly lifted as we come to a halt in the middle of the Omeo Plain. I dismount and undo the leather coat straps holding the bag and again call 'saa-aalt'. Leading our horses along we drop single handfuls every few steps.

In the surrounding bush the faint sounds of rustling leaves and snapping sticks and bark can be heard as the cattle hear the call and start towards us.

It makes your skin prickle as you stand in the middle of a snow grass covered plain and watch the white faces of Herefords appear out of the snow gums in stark contrast to the muted greens of the Australian bush. They sniff the air and some of them even trot in anticipation of the taste of salt.

Soon the plain is alive with cattle snorting with delight as they lick up the salt and then follow us along wanting more and more. Sometimes they get so close it feels as if they want to lick your face to make sure it doesn't have salt on it too.

My family has always used salting to quieten our cattle grazing the Dargo High Plains over summer. You can get a rough count of the cattle in the area and if you spend a couple of days salting in different areas you learn where they've decided the grass is best or which ledge of a spur offers them the most protection. It makes them easier to muster come Autumn and the yearlings willingly follow the older cows out of the bush.

Who will call "Salt" now?

LYRIC ANDERSON

My Pa taught me a lot about the high plains. Did you know you can tell a snow gum by its leaf? You can tear a snow gum leaf straight down parallel to the centre whereas leaves of other trees will only tear towards the centre. And that's about as much destruction as the cattlemen cause, a grandfather showing a little girl a trick about his beloved bush.

He's gone now, but Pa also taught me about burning the bush. How it was needed to keep the scrub and fuel load down. Small light burns that regenerated grasses which in turn cattle kept down...

All my Pa needed was a couple of people on horses, a couple of boxes of matches and to work in with nature's lightning. The way his Pa taught him.

Fire management these days is lost in paper. Pa didn't need big dollars or Elvis helicopters that can be grounded by smoke haze. Thanks for nothing but destruction - government departments. We've shed tears of despair for eighty years of neglect. The cattlemen also warned of events like the 2003 fires all the way through those eighty years. Letter upon letter was written to warn the government departments of the dangers. However, over-management in paperwork, little practicality, and poor land management led to what can only be described as a holocaust.

On the Dargo high plains, if practical forethought was allowed 50,000 hectares would have been cared for, but our way of caring has been made a crime. The cattlemen have had to turn political to try and defend and protect the mountains. We're not criminals. We don't sit in high rises surrounded by concrete and think about the bush. We're in it, we're doing it.

I'll tell you what - when I vote I don't want to contribute to consigning our way of life to the dusty shelves of history - the call of 'saaa-aalt' will become a thing of the past - I don't want that. I want the sixth-generation of Treasures to be taught the traditions like letting their horses have their heads to find the way home in the thick fog of an evening. I would love for them to pass that knowledge onto their friends and show them what the bush is really like. In this increasingly urbanised society I don't want anyone to forget that this is our living history...

Alpine Park in Peril as Weeds Take Hold

Before the fires the MCAV held grave concerns over the condition of Wonnangatta Station. Stock and Land reporter Don Storey investigated and found a deplorable situation. No doubt in a few short years the situation will be back to what it was before the fires.

The former Wonnangatta Station river flats within the Alpine National Park are a weed theme park, despite more than fifteen years under the control of Parks Victoria.

Fears have also been raised publicly that Parks Victoria has allowed fuel loads in the area to build to the point where there is a serious risk of a fire disaster.

Alpine, botany and fire specialists all say there should be a management burn as soon as possible. Park management should also re-introduce seasonal grazing of cattle as an accepted and valuable management tool.

A *Stock and Land* investigation into the health of the former high country cattle station has concluded that an urgent reassessment of the entire management of the high country to ensure adequate funding and resources is needed, with fire and carefully planned and managed grazing an integral part of the plan.

The poor state of the park is strong evidence of State Government underfunding of Parks Victoria.

Stock and Land went into the Wonnangatta Valley with mountain cattleman Chris Commins and Peter Attiwill, Principal Fellow, School of Botany and Senior Fellow, The Australian Centre, University of Melbourne, to see first-hand the state of the Wonnangatta Park and the nearby Howitt Plain.

Mr Commins has been into Wonnangatta half-a-dozen times since it became part of the ANP. He said each visit showed it to be deteriorating.

Unlike most of the 40,000 people who visit by 4WD each year, the group was there to do an appraisal of the management and ecological health. What was found backs the claims of mountain cattlemen, former foresters and others that Parks Victoria does not have the money or resources to adequately manage such a vast area.

St Johns Wort, blackberry and briars will soon dominate the Themeda (Kangaroo grass) flats if efforts aren't increased; and there is an ongoing and developing problem with Cape Broom.

The flats are criss-crossed with four-wheel-drive tracks, creek crossings turned into bog holes by some 4WD enthusiasts and hills scarred by others trying to get as high up a hill called the Widow-maker as they can.

Coming into the Wonnangatta Station area proper, the only visible sign of active management is a note taped to a tree warning visitors not to eat the blackberries because they were sprayed in February.

While the Friends of the Wonnangatta Valley are to be congratulated on their efforts at the former station homestead complex, the rest, in the eyes of Mr Commins and Professor Attiwill, is "a disgrace".

If environmental conservation within the Alpine National Park is the reason cattle were banned by the Bracks government last year, those who claim to represent the park's welfare should be embarrassed by its state.

Professor Attiwill said there should be an immediate assessment of the infestation of Cape Broom and other weeds and appropriate control measures taken.

He said the concept of banning cattle grazing to return the high country to its "pristine" pre-European settlement condition was flawed.

Defining "pristine" was impossible because it is such a subjective concept. Claims the high country is a "fragile environment" were equally flawed. The environment was under constant change, he said, with major influences beyond human activities.

On the way out of Wonnangatta up the Zeka Spur track, travellers pass through some spectacular woollybutt, peppermint and manna gum forest.

Fuel loads are very high, prompting Professor Attiwill to remark that an intense fire similar to 2003 or at the nearby Caledonia Range in 1998 would mean, "we might not see this again."

Travelling though the burned forest in the Caledonia Range was a sobering reminder of the damage from high intensity wildfires.

And up on Howitt Plain, a heath monoculture appears to be replacing the grasslands.

Mr Commins said Howitt Plain was “overgrown and rank” and “lacking in biodiversity” with fuel loads that would “crucify the snow gums”.

“What happened in 2003 was an eco-disaster largely of man’s making. This is another in the making,” he said.

Others have come to the same conclusions. Ralph Barraclough, captain of the Licola CFA Brigade went so far as to issue a warning to all people going into the Wonnangatta Valley on the recent Labour Day long weekend that it was dangerous to do so because of the risk of fire.

“There is a real risk to the safety of visitors to the area being trapped with little chance of escape in a fast moving fire racing down the valley,” he said in the warning.

Earlier in March two bushfire experts visited the area at the request of mountain cattlemen and members of the Licola Fire Brigade.

David Packham, a bushfire scientist for more than forty years, including eight years as supervising meteorologist for bushfire weather with the Bureau of Meteorology; and Rod Incoll, previously Chief Fire Officer with the Department of Sustainability and Environment’s predecessor organisations, came to similar conclusions.

With these fuel loads a fire in the prevailing conditions was “totally unsurvivable” for anyone trapped in the fire front, even in vehicles, Mr Incoll said.

The sides of the valley around the flats had fuel accumulations of around thirty tonnes a hectare that would cause a full crown fire (burning above treetops).

Mr Incoll was a forester from 1960 to 1984 and worked in the alpine area in the 1970s.

He said at the time of his visit the lack of a management fire within the park was puzzling, considering burns in similar parks nearer to Melbourne were a part of parks management.

“From a conservation viewpoint the most pressing issue is the lack of a recent low-intensity prescribed burn,” Mr Incoll said.

In 2003, more than 500,000ha of the high country and forests in North East Victoria burned. In autumn 2005, Wilsons Promontory National Park was burnt. In January this year almost all of the Grampians and the Moondarra Parks were burnt.

Mr Incoll said these fires were “damaging high intensity fires, ripping out all life and, following rain, the soil itself was silting up the gullies, creeks and rivers.

“Nature will respond, but over many decades, perhaps even centuries.”

He said the 2003 fires that razed the high country were the outcome of the “fire protection” ethic.

This ethic focussed on safeguarding assets, rather than working over the whole forest, with the community disconnected from forestry, mining and agriculture and the “essential truth” that fire is the very essence of conservation in eucalypt forests.

“Until a broad scale program of fire management is widely implemented across forested public lands, continuing widespread and serious bushfire will occur in the mountains,” Mr Incoll said. “You can rely on it.”

[How many times are we to be proven right before someone listens? -ed.]



Noxious weed infestions in Wonnangatta - an absolute disgrace.

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Cattlemen “on the road” again: 2006

REPORT BY LYRIC ANDERSON, KATHY JUNOR AND DOUG TREASURE

May, Dargo

Undeterred by snow they saddled up for another protest cattle drive on the Dargo High Plains. Susan Noble, a descendant of the Guy family who owned Wonnangatta Station for a time, with Lyric Anderson, Rhonda Treasure and others took to the track moving a small mob into the Park in protest of their eviction. The initiative for the protest came from the women of the Treasure family whose ancestor Emily Treasure rode onto the plains with her baby on the saddle bow and her other children strapped to chairs on a pack horse.



Susan Noble at McNamara's Hut (Kathy Junior)

October, Warragul

The “Farewell to Ian Maxfield MP” protest held at Warragul last Friday was a great success. Over 150 horses, horse riders and a good crowd turned up to protest the loss of access to public land. Our thanks to Mrs Jones for “hosting” cattlemen on her property.



November, Koondrook

Barmah to Koondrook Protest Ride October 31 - November 5, 2006.

20 November, Melbourne

About 250 horses and their riders made yet another trek through the city in November voicing country Victoria's dissatisfaction with the government on the eve of the State election.

MCAV riders were joined by people from all over Victoria including members of groups as diverse as irrigators and miners.

Complete with a police escort the horses, carts and carriages followed Northern Victorian irrigators who brought their tractors and trucks with large slogans reading ‘Ted cares - promised to pay for undelivered water’; ‘Save Lake Mokoan, save Murray Cod - grow legs or learn to fly in a future



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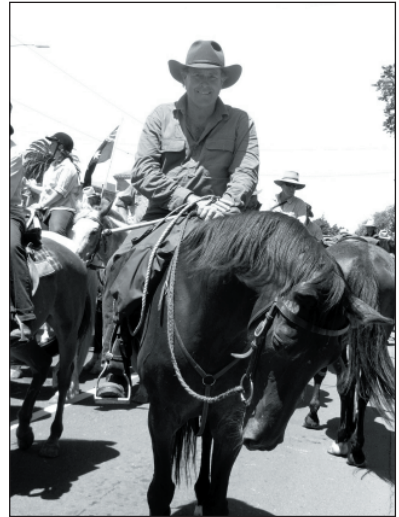
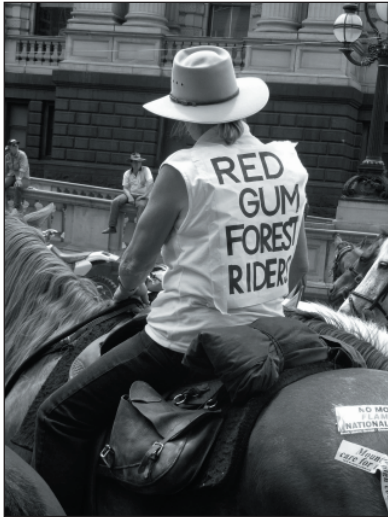
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wasteland Murray Cod will die' and 'Bracks tells water lies to buy votes'.

There were also representatives from the Timber communities of Australia, Prospectors and Miners, Four-Wheel Drivers, Barmah Forest cattlemen, Snake Island cattlemen and protestors from Daylesford's Wombat Forest.

Aside from the politicians, Liberal leader Ted Baillieu - affectionately known as 'Big Ted' - and the Nationals' Peter Ryan, Charlie Lovick and his daughter Kellie made speeches, one as the old timer and the other as the future, while Lyric Anderson spoke of the Treasures' traditions.

The Push for the Bush website has a image gallery that records the protest as well as a list of the different groups' demands, which include a review of alpine grazing bans and no more loss of forest grazing, and a change of attitude by DSE and Parks 'the Neighbours from Hell'.

The rally followed on from the successful protest at Warragul which ultimately was responsible for ousting the sitting Labor MP Ian Maxfield. He was also chair of the taskforce that ended cattle grazing in national parks - obviously he had to go!

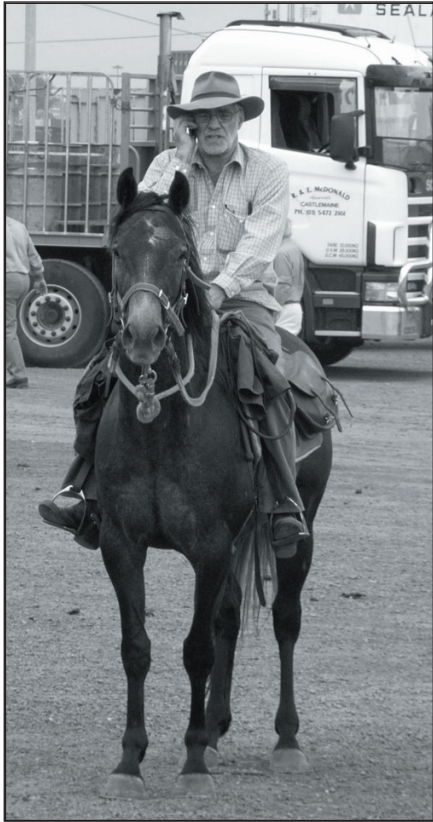
President Doug Treasure expressed the anger of the gathered protestors.

We have come here today in anger to send a message. The mountain cattlemen are angry. The irrigators are angry. Grass roots people who use public land for recreation are angry and worried. Farmers who live beside public land are angry and worried. People who use public land for commerce

are angry and worried. I want to tell you about the mountain cattlemen. To understand what happened, you firstly have to look at the political landscape here in Victoria. The Bracks Government needs green preferences to hold government. The green support is on the rise because Melbourne people who are worried about the environment think voting for the greens can be their contribution, so they feel better.

.... To kick a few cows off the high country and close public land access is political window dressing. This worsens the environmental situation by giving us greater fuel loads for wildfire, and management that is not natural. For seven years the Bracks government has been bringing in place regulations and legislation to keep in with the Greens it has been reducing access, taking farmers' water and reducing timber harvesting. But the icon the Greens wanted was the mountain cattlemen. The cattlemen were seen by the Greens as the barrier holding back the tide to close down the bush and





The "mobile" Graeme Stoney. (Kathy Junor)



The Treasure girls outside the Windsor Hotel, Melbourne.
(Kathy Junor)

closing down our public land is the Greens long term objective. They wanted East Gippsland – Bracks gave it to them. And he will keep giving our land to the Greens

The forest industry and bee keepers have been squeezed out like the cattlemen. In their hearts, the four wheel drive clubs know that they are next. The motorcycle riders know they are next. The horse riding clubs know they are definitely next. The irrigators know they are in deep trouble with water and fees. Those reasons and more are why the mountain cattlemen started "Push for the Bush". We have to fight what's going on and we have to fight it now. The people of Victoria were lied to about the mountain cattlemen.

Lie 1: Victorians were told the science proved cattle were damaging all the Alpine National Park. The facts are, the science was only done on a small treeless exposed area of the Bogong High Plains. Almost all of the grazing in the huge Alpine National Park was at lower levels in the trees. There is no

grazing science existing for those areas. firstly the government decided to cancel the Alpine National Park leases and then used science done in a small exposed area to justify it. I call it bought science. It was all planned in advance as was the spin which vilified the mountain cattlemen. Remember the doctored photographs - we won't forget them.

Lie 2: The government told Victorians there would be ten thousand cattle still grazing in adjoining State Forest. False. There are no more than four thousand cattle left and the Greens are now saying they want them out too!

Lie 3: The government told Victorians the mountain cattlemen's culture and heritage would continue. The reality is the mountain cattlemen as a group have virtually been destroyed. Some young people have left - the cattle have been sold and the horses have been turned out forever.

Lie 4: The government told Victorians the cattlemen would get up to \$100,000 each in payments. The truth is the payments are very small



to individuals, for example, in my case, I receive \$5,000 a year and it finishes soon. The payments don't even cover agistment costs and most cattlemen have had to sell cattle and do other things.

Today we have a stupid and very sad situation in the high country. Wonnangatta Station has grass a metre high and someone will be burnt to death there one day. The Bogong and Dargo High Plains have grass two foot high – it can't be grazed. Down below at Benambra and Dargo the cattle that are left, are walking around in dust. Cattlemen John Cook and Rusty Connley are here – just talk to them

about the starving cattle. And do you know the sad part for Victoria?

By the Government taking the leases it also took the mountain cattlemen's history and culture which belongs to all Victorians.

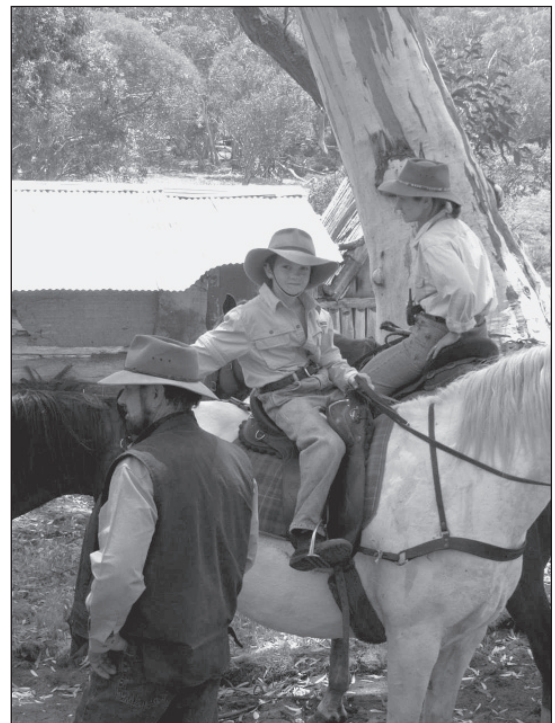
The Government took the mountain cattlemen's connection with the land, which in some cases goes back to the 1870s and then it turned around and trashed their reputation. ... We came here today to warn everyone about what happened to us and the way it was done – by stealth and deception.

Let's hope we don't have to continually drive home our existence. It's about time the government started to "listen".

January, Bogong High Plains

Phil McGuire led his cattle out of Mt Bundarra Station near Anglers Rest onto the high plains in what he believes is his legal right to graze them on his high plains lease.

With the support of other cattlemen Phil returned his cattle for one more year because of an administrative error in the original issuing of his licence. He saw it as an important action in defence of our heritage and culture.





Alexander "Alex" Traill

7 August 1933 - 26 February 2007

One of the best bushman to ever grace this countryside, Alex Traill was born Alexander James Traill, the second youngest of the nine children of Robert (known as Bob) and Flora Matilda (known as Tilly) Traill, in the family home at Waterford. Alex had one brother, Wally and seven sisters, Julie, Winnie, Normie, Ila, Jean, Una and Jessie. They, and their parents, plus another two young boys who came to stay, all lived happily together in the tiny house at Waterford. That was eleven children - and then, during week days, a few kids from Lower Dargo would move in as well, to enable them to attend school every day.

For Alex, school held no attraction and he wasn't a bit interested in attending on a regular basis. He was happy to leave it (and the accompanying teacher's strap) behind by the time he was about thirteen or fourteen, when he went to live and work on the Treasure property at Castleburn. He later joined Jack and Arthur Guy on their property at Riverford, where he lived for quite a few years.

There was a short interruption to his farm life when he was called up to do his National Service in Tasmania. This started Alex on his life-time habit of snacking on Minties and chocolate.

Dargo was famous for its dances and it was at one of these that Alex found himself dancing with a young woman whose uncle had a property at Crooked River and who occasionally stayed with the Guys. Her name was Joan and, although Alex was a seemingly confirmed bachelor, a friendship grew to love and he and Joan married in 1979. Alex and Joan moved a house from Yallourn to Waterford and began the back breaking work of restoring it. Before the year was out, they had the joy of welcoming baby Cassie into their lives. At first Alex was a little unsure of how to handle this tiny newcomer, but, by the time she could stand up and hang on, Cassie was his constant companion in the old Land Cruiser - out and about in the paddocks. And once he bought her a horse at the age of six, she became his little helper with the horses and cattle.

Stories abound of Alex's wild younger days. But there are just as many stories from later times of valued friendships with the mates whom he met up with at the cattle sales that he loved. He lived his life with enthusiasm for the countryside, his cattle, his horses and his friends. He loved to talk and possessed a happy (and loud) voice, often accompanied by his infectious style of laughter.

He will be missed for his sincerity; for the way he managed to never "stress out" and for his constant phrase of "It's just one of those things", when confronted with something people didn't quite understand. He will be remembered for his ability to break and shoe horses, for the Akubra hat he constantly wore and the way he used horses and not motor bikes for farm work. He might even be remembered for the packets of Juicy Fruit that were always to be found in the glove box. People loved Alex.

He and Joan (although separated) remained best friends. The love he had for his daughter, Cassie, and the way he was smitten by his little granddaughter, Makayla, will be forever remembered. Alex was a simple and sincere man with simple needs and a friendly, happy, relaxed approach to life.

He will be admired and remembered for the way he lived his life. He will be so very much missed by many people.



Ian Thomas Balmer

26 September 1923 - 17 August 2006

Ian Balmer, one of the best livestock auctioneers of his generation died in Melbourne, aged 82 years. He began his long career as an auctioneer in 1950 and sold at most saleyards in Victoria and NSW, but none he enjoyed more than the annual weaner calf sales in the mountains of East Gippsland, where he sold for thirty consecutive years and is credited with helping to make these one of the premier annual sales in Victoria. Ian was the first auctioneer in Australia to sell a pen of bullocks for more than £100 per head.

Ian was born in Bairnsdale, the second of six children in a family that had been in the livestock industry for generations. His grandfather Charlie Balmer changed horses for Cobb and Co at Omeo and then became a drover; his grandmother Bella was one of the well-known Guy family from Dargo and Wonnangatta station; and his father Tom was a drover, butcher and part-time bookmaker who served in the light horse in World War I.

Ian's mother Milla died when he was young and he and his siblings went to live with relatives and friends. When he was eleven, Ian moved on to live with an aunt at Ensay.

He worked with Australia Post as a telegram messenger and nightshift telephonist and joined A.

McLean and Co in 1939 as a junior clerk - booking the sales and licking the stamps.

Ian volunteered for the AIF in 1941 and he served in New Guinea and the Pacific islands with an anti-tank unit. After the war he returned to McLean and Co. in 1946 before gaining an auctioneer's licence in 1950.

The first true calf sale he remembered was in 1948 at Benambra. In those days the store sales were mainly all grown cattle but there were enough calves to have a calf sale at Benambra.

His talent in the role shone and in a couple of years Australian Mercantile Land and Finance company offered him a job as a junior auctioneer at Newmarket.

Ian moved to Pascoe Vale with his wife and family and became well known as an outstanding auctioneer until he retired from selling in 1976 due to ill health. He did not, however, retire from the industry.

Ian was an excellent judge of livestock and a better judge of how a market was progressing. The attribute he valued above all others in an auctioneer was courage: courage to start a pen of cattle himself and not wait for the buyers; courage to push the bidders as far as he thought they would go; and the courage to make a quick sale. As a result he had some legendary tussles over the years with buyers and would do almost anything to get an extra dollar for his vendor.

He joined the *Stock and Land* staff reporting on weekly sales at Newmarket and writing a weekly column on the store cattle market around Victoria. This he continued until full retirement in 1986.

In 1993 he wrote *Selling the Mountain Calves* and the book was launched at the 1993 mountain calf sales at Omeo. Such was the demand that it went into immediate reprint.

Ian sold at the 50th mountain calf sale and went back each year until it became too difficult after 1995. One of the things many recall about Ian Balmer's selling style was the banter between him and the buyers and vendors.



John (Jack) Robb Purcell

18 May 1920 - 28 October 2006

Jack was born at the Mansfield Hospital to William and Frances Purcell of Merrijig - the seventh in a family of eight children. He attended Merrijig Primary School and gained his Merit Certificate. By the time Jack left school he was already developing a lifetime signature for which many remember him - his singing voice. The other signature mark was the strong bond with his younger brother Tom, leading to the farming partnership of J & T Purcell which lasted over fifty years. These two attributes - singing and loyalty - were the hall marks by which he is remembered.

As were many of his generation he was “called up” and served in Darwin and New Guinea with the 2nd/146th Transport unit.

Jack was a skilled horseman and renowned for his knowledge of cattle - he and Tom often topped the snow lease sales at the end of the season having spent many an hour on the back of his horse *Jumbuck* bringing cattle down from Mt Stirling. Many hours were also spent at the Commercial Hotel analysing the sales.

After the war Jack courted and married Jean Gardiner in 1949. When first married Jack and Jean lived with Pop Purcell at Mount View then built their home on School Lane. In 1950, Stephen arrived followed by Beau in 1952. After many years of boys, boys and more boys in the extended family, Maree was born in 1957, and was the apple of Jack’s eye.

During the 1960s Jack bought land at Happy Valley which was subsequently subdivided and is now the site of Pinnacle Valley Resort. In 1975 his beloved father, Pop, died and the Purcells purchased the Hunt Club Hotel at Merrijig. In the late 1960s the government of the day was pushing for a National Park in the High Country and this issue motivated Jack and Tom to ride with fellow cattlemen – Lyle McCready, the Westons, McCormacks, Jack Lovick, Eadley Stoney and Fred Ross to Wonnangatta, meeting up with Jack Treasure, Wally Ryder and Don Kneebone and thus was born one of the first Mountain Cattlemen’s Get Togethers. The National Park was created, and in later years Jack continued to show his commitment to the mountains by participating in the Department’s Soil Conservation Group inspecting where the cattle were grazing and other preservation areas. Of course, this meant camping out and Graeme Stoney recalls Jack and Tom entertaining the group with a song and stories around the campfire. In latter years, as a guest speaker at the Mansfield Historical Society, Jack was asked, “Did you ever light fires as you were coming out of the bush?” Jack responding saying, “No, but Tom was known to be careless with matches.”

The family grew and married and grandchildren filled the lives of Jack and Jean. They learned to ride their ponies and move the cattle, and mix with the many friends that came to visit and join the muster at Razorback. And they all learnt to sing a song for their Pop sitting around the fire before they hit their swag and then woke to the smell of bacon, eggs and leftover ‘redgum’.

In 1993 the decision was made to dissolve the partnership of J & T Purcell to lay the future path for the two families.

Throughout Jack’s life he had a best friend and mate in his brother Tom, but it is the 57 years of marriage to Jean that burns brightly for family and friends to remember. He will be remembered as a family man, a man of integrity and a true gentleman, with more than just a twinkle of mischief. He loved his land, was at one with a horse and could work cattle as they should be worked. Despite his imposing presence, the words “cheeky imp” come to mind, for while Jack Purcell got older by age he did not age in attitude. He is gone, but in the high country he will not be forgotten.

Taken from the eulogy presented by nephew Noel Willaton and as reported in the High Country Times by Michael Ray.

Cattlemen's Call

The debate over grazing may have seen all cattle banned
but the legend of the cattleman must live on across this land.
Examine the issues for yourself, for it is then that you can tell
it's due to the cattleman, that over the years the mountains faired so well.
It is they who will be remembered when the truth is revealed at last
not those who are now the 'carers' of these parks so broad, so vast.
As they tended their cattle, their plot of licensed land
it was cattlemen that checked the spread of weeds by hand.
It is they who kept the undergrowth in check with the cattle they grazed
now their huts lost, the mountains scarred and beloved land blazed.
When at last it is realised what a mistake has been made
who then will have the knowledge if it is allowed to fade.
Ride on cattlemen, reclaim what's yours to uphold
it's a tradition that belongs to our nation that must not be sold.
If you don't continue the fight there is no way you can win
so grit your teeth, take the bit and rein the battle in.
If we all join forces, and help each other out
the country can only benefit, of this I have no doubt.
There are many groups of people this government aims to harm
one way or another, a vendetta against the farm.
All the rules and regulations and troubles by the score
is it any wonder we're not all headed for the door.
This government may have all our backs up against the wall
but if we stick together, it will be they who fall.
No more politicians out of touch with those in the bush
long will they rue the day they gave cattle the push.
Come one, come all. Let's show 'em what this fight's about
we'll all join forces, form a mob, and united we'll have the clout.
Let our cries echo across the valley and down over the plain
tis then we will see the cattlemen ride the range again.

Joy McAuley



Rose River 2006

Pleasant conditions, as per usual, and a large crowd gathered at Rose River in January 2006. A great time was had by all. Our grateful thanks go to the owners of Rose River for hosting the Get Together again.

Congratulations to all the winners of the events and good luck for this year!

Our thanks go to Frances Westbury and Colleen Hurley for the use of their photographs of last years activities.

Cattle Cut Out – Ian Forge, Cheshunt

Stockhorse Time Trial – Graham Forge, Oxley

Winner of Mountain Cattlemen's Cup

(over three events: Cattle Cut Out, Stockhorse Time Trial and Cattlemen's Cup Race)

1. Lincoln Adams on *Jack* from Maffra
2. Graham Rozynski on *Gee Jay Rustie* from Granite Rock
3. Graham Forge on *Rocky* from Oxley
3. Steven Boulton on *Harvey* from Sale
4. Adam McCormack on *Kip* from Mansfield
5. Ron Connelly on *Embers* from Omeo
6. Tim Brown on *Pet* from Myrtleford

Junior Cattlemen's Cup

1. Matt Maliki on *Warrator*
2. Cassie Malday on *Que Bar Dot*
3. Nicole Leishman on *Forget me not Tigers Breeza*

Junior Whipcracking

1. Davey Tom Jones
2. Emma Higgins
3. Ricky Shellie

Juvenile Whipcracking

1. Jenelle Kiely
2. Jessica Bardebes
3. Elless McLean

Cross-cut Saw

1. Chris and Robin Box
2. Graham and Anne-Marie Forge
3. Bas and Lyall

Ironbark Hereford Bull Roping

1. Zeb Bowden
2. equal Aleshia Sievers and David Olsson
3. Emily Schultz

Bushman's Challenge – Men

1. Mat and Trent
2. Paul Zabilowicz and Matt Kiely
3. Chris Baker and Grant Sims

Bushman's Challenge – Women

1. Sara and Rhonda
2. Aleshia Sievers and Robyn Cook
3. Anne-Marie Forge and Tracey

Haystacking – Men

1. Chris Box and Rex Bennett
2. Luke and ?
3. Luke and Mick

Haystacking – Women

1. Kelly and Annette
2. Jenelle Kiely and Zelda Yates
3. Cassie and Nicole

Dog High Jump – Working Dog

1. Dean Burton with *Jo*
2. Rick Quilford with *Ruby*

Dog High Jump – Small

1. Sara Street with *Luke*
2. Christine Frandsen with *Roxy*

Tug-a-War – Men Tug-a-War - Women

Swift Syndicate Swift Chicks

Wally Ryder Walking Race

1. Jim Treasure on *Rosie*
2. Ron Connley on *Pontiac*
3. Charles Connelly on *Chev*

Men's Packhorse Race

1. Graham Forge
2. Ron Connley
3. David Olsson

Women's Packhorse Race

1. Anne-Marie Forge
2. Ros Knight
3. Aleshia Sievers

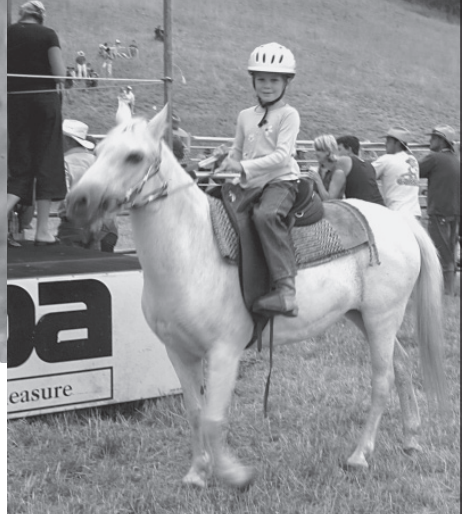
Women's Whipcracking

1. Diana Hurley
2. Aleshia Sievers
3. Susannah Kiely

Open Whipcracking

1. Diana Hurley
2. Wayne Campbell
3. Zeb Bowden





Rose River 2006



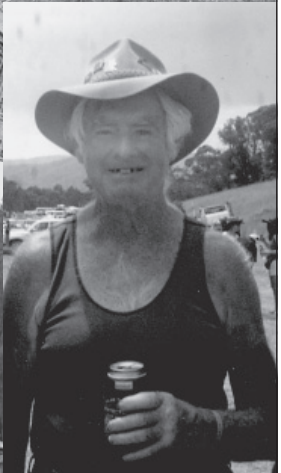
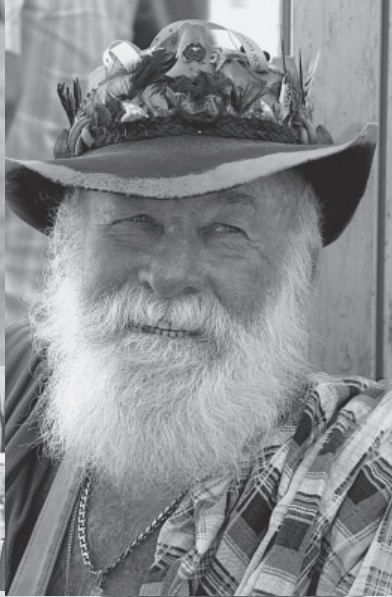


Rose River 2006

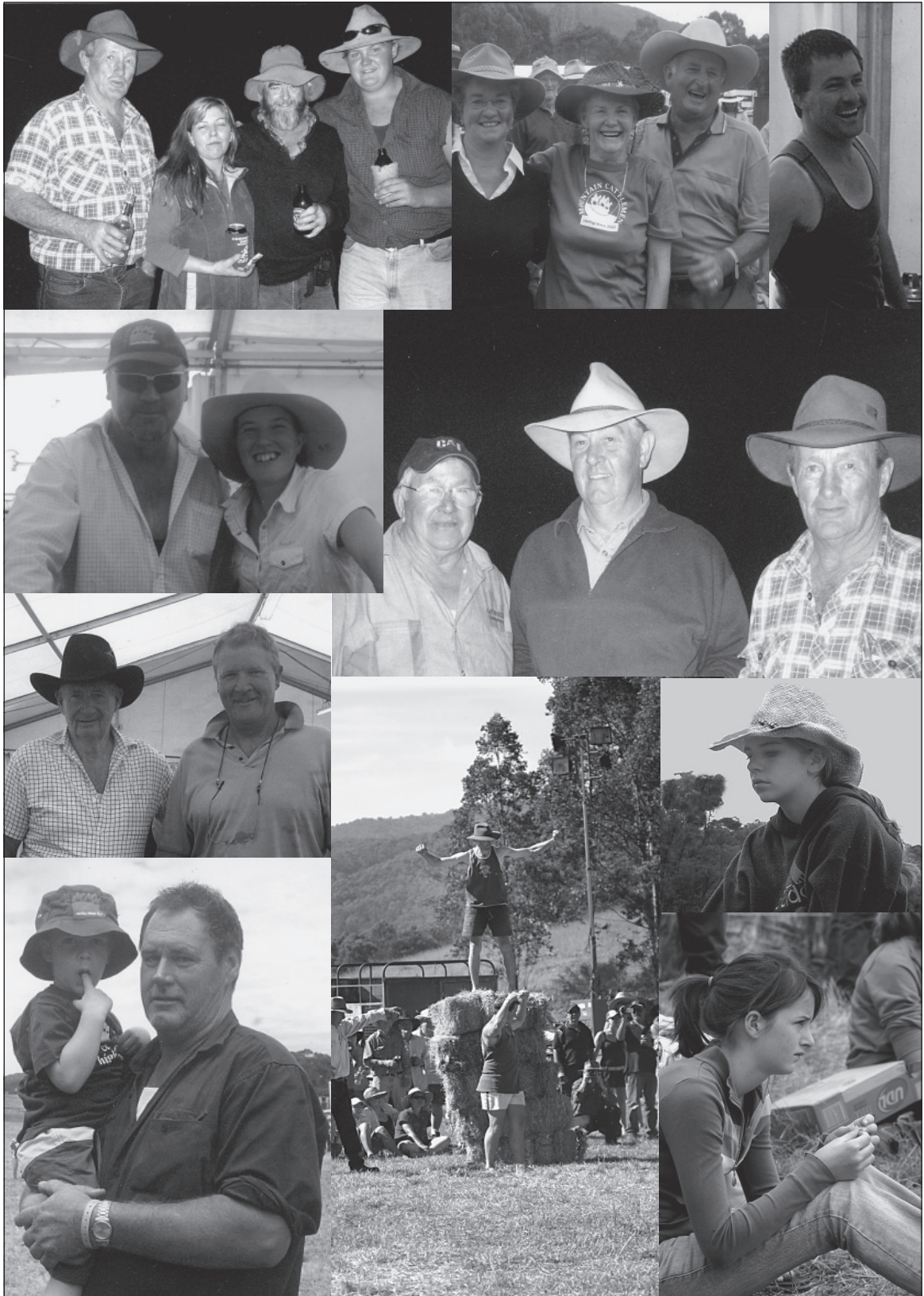


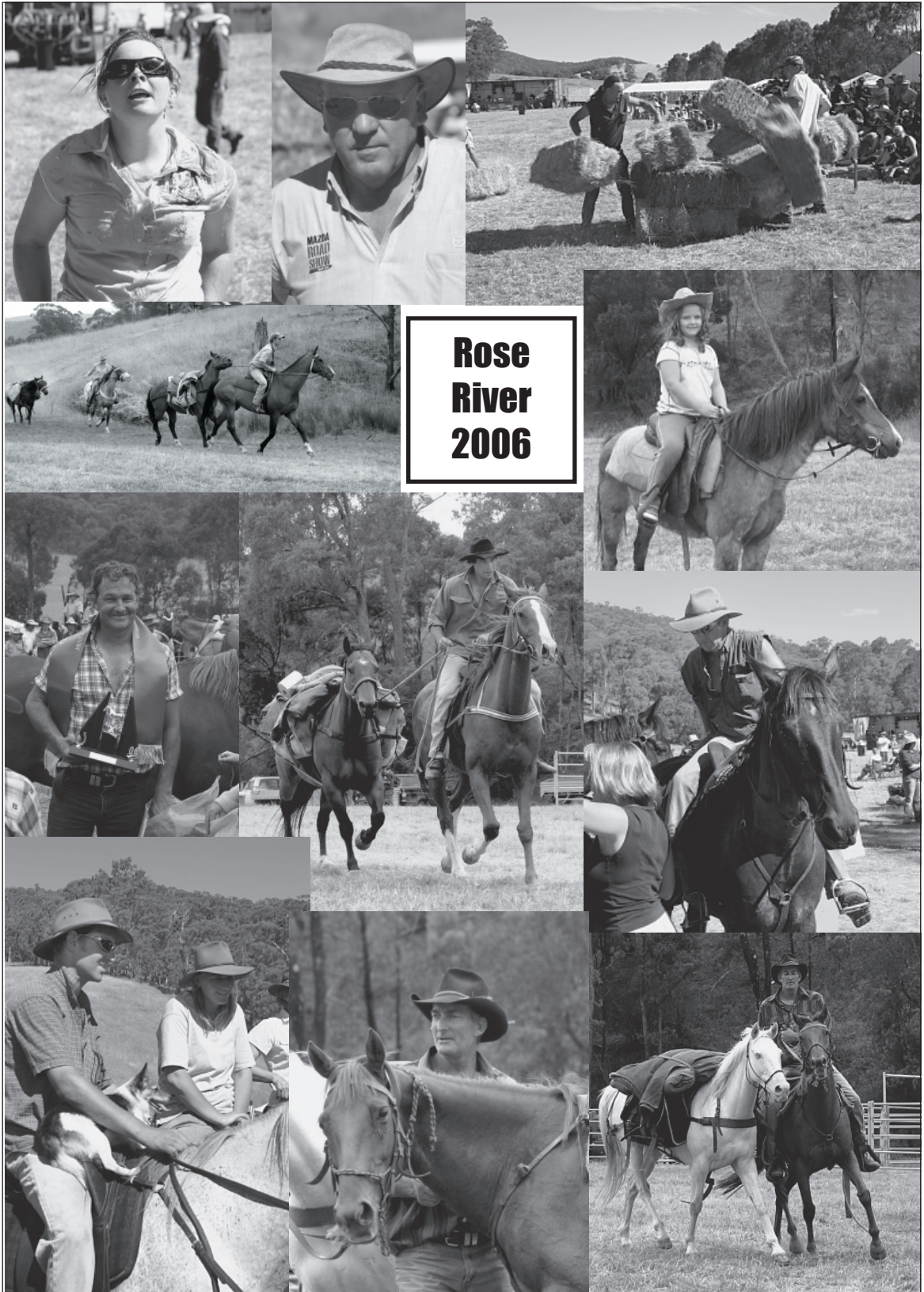
Rose River 2006





**Rose
River
2006**





A Word from Hon. E.G. Stoney

As recorded in Legislative Council Hansard for 29 March 2006 under the heading

Tourism: mountain cattlemen

Hon. E. G. Stoney (Central Highlands) — I would like to quote from the *Herald Sun* of 22 March 2006 regarding the Eye segment headed ‘Go tell it on the mountain’, which states:

More delights to behold at the media centre’s Tourism Victoria booth, this time the giant pictures of the state’s most beautiful vistas covering the walls.

Unfortunately, one particular image caught our attention — the one of the high country, complete with the very same mountain cattlemen the government kicked off the land last year.

This charming trip down memory lane encourages visitors with the slogan ‘Victoria’s high country is renowned for its legendary mountains, cattlemen, wines and fresh Alpine air’.

To paraphrase Meatloaf, three out of four ain’t bad.

The hypocrisy of this government knows no bounds. The government has destroyed the cattlemen by taking the high country from them. That land is synonymous with the cattlemen and their legends, not to mention their traditions and connection with the land. Now the government is pretending the cattlemen are still there to encourage tourism. It is no wonder the cattlemen are angry and intend to keep protesting at their poor treatment which is continuing to be handed out by the government.

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The Association is indebted to the following businesses and organisations for their ongoing and loyal support of the mountain cattlemen. This year we are particularly indebted to the Gilder family for the use of their property for the Get-Together. Thank you all.

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Marshall's Agri Services

Barastoc

Hurley's Contracting Pty Ltd

**Gippsland Times and
Gippsland Farmer**

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Maffra**

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**Landmark Kyle Obst
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Lindenow**

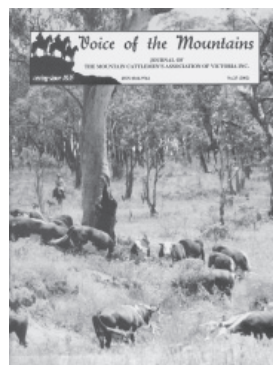
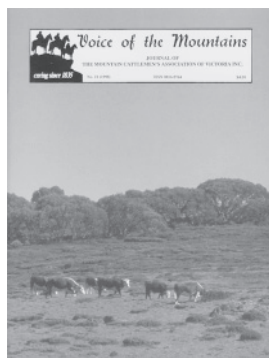
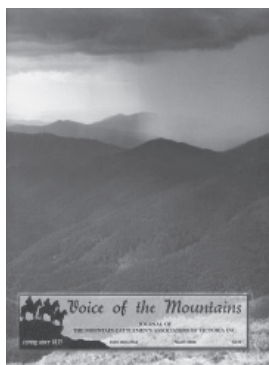
Bucks Rural Fencing

**Landmark
Sale**

**Goodman's Seeds
Bairnsdale**



Back Issues and Acknowledgments



A consolidation of back issues of Voice of the Mountains has taken place and we are able to offer SPECIAL PRICES for you to complete your sets. Be warned - some of these are in limited numbers and it will be those who are first in who complete their sets!

We have the following available at just \$2 a copy !

No. 10 - 11 - 17 - 18 - 19 - 21 - 22 JUST \$2 EACH

No. 13 and 20 @ \$4.50

Volume 26 @ \$6.00

Volume 27 and 28 @ \$8.00

All other volumes are sold out and unavailable.

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

A note regarding the publication of this year's Voice. Traditionally, Voice of the Mountains is published for the annual get-together held in January. Due to the fires in our backyard at the end of last year that continued into the new year, the decision was made to "postpone" the get-together and with it, the publication of Voice, hence this edition has been prepared in April 2007.

I would like to thank all who have helped and given assistance in the production of Voice of the Mountains this year and apologise for the late night phone calls and pushy emails when I have been looking for written material and photographs. This year the recipients were: Doug Treasure, David Treasure, Bob Richardson, Laurie Webb, David Oldfield, Shellie Jones, Graeme Stoney and Phil Davies, Colleen Hurley, Cath and Susan Noble, Brian Higgins, Ralph Barraclough, Neil Barraclough, Frances Westbury, Dianna Edwards, Sue Silvers and Linda Barraclough.

Each year Stephen Baggs, (my employer) gives me carte blanche time, computer facilities, internet, phone and e-mail access to complete Voice. Thank you.
Although there has been a change of ownership at E-Gee Printers they have continued to show the same loyalty to the MCAV with even less time this year.
Had it not been for all of 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.

