

▶▶ CATTLEMEN BACKLASH

Protest turns to election

By PAUL SELLARS

VICTORIA's mountain cattlemen have ended their protest ride through the Alpine National Park by urging supporters to vote against the State Government at this year's election.

Groups of riders drove cattle through the park last week in defiance of the Government's decision last year not to renew their grazing licences.

The ride was timed to end just before last weekend's Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria annual get-together at Cheshunt in the upper King Valley.

Association president Doug Treasure told a crowd of 4000 that the cattlemen's only hope of regaining park access was for them and their supporters to vote against the Government.

"The political reality is that we have a Labor government kicking us out and the opposition saying they will put us back if they win government," Mr Treasure said.

"The cattlemen have become a political football so we have to

play a political game whether we like it or not."

Mr Treasure, who along with state Liberal MP Graeme Stoney took part in the protest ride, also vowed to make it an annual event.

"The cattlemen are going to drive stock through the Alpine National Park each year until we get our licences back," Mr Treasure said.

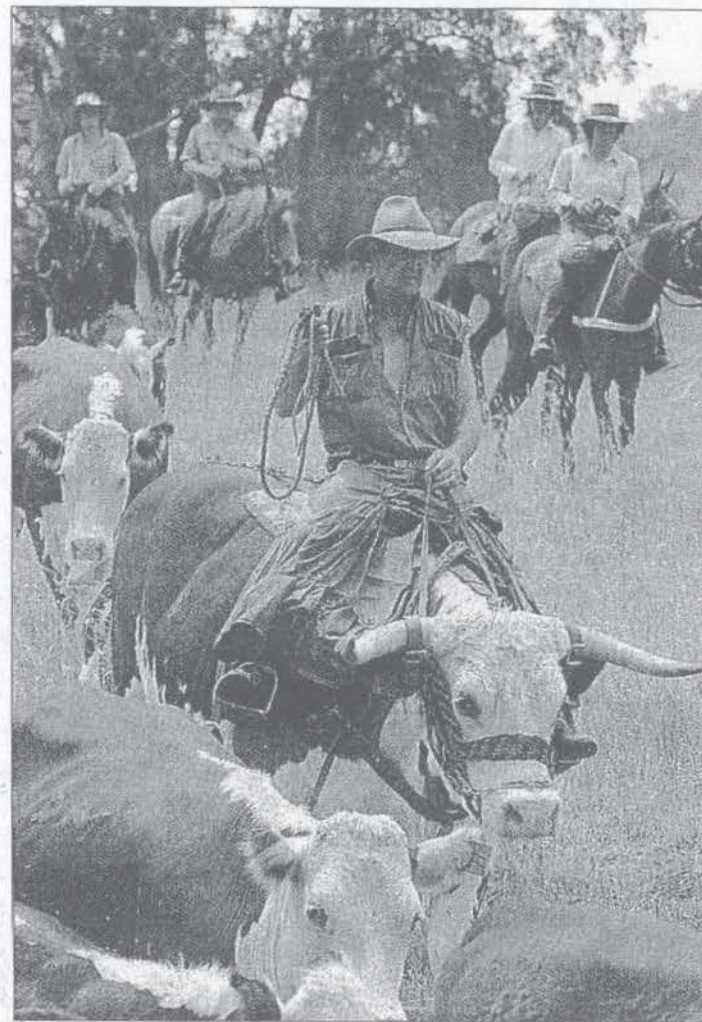
"The only thing that will stop this protest action is for the minister (John Thwaites) to give us meaningful concessions."

However, Parks Victoria regional manager Chris Rose said the cattlemen faced heavy fines if their future protests involved taking stock into the park.

"The cattlemen are welcome to protest but they are not welcome to break the law," Mr Rose said.

He said Parks Victoria had not yet decided whether it would fine riders who took cattle into the park last week.

"We need to review the evidence we have collected to determine what course of action to take," he said.



By the horns: protester John Lovick rides his Hereford into the Cheshunt get-together. Picture: FIONA HAMILTON

"There are various regulations which may or may not have been broken and each one carries a different fine."

Meanwhile, the overall winner of the famous Cattleman's Cup, held each year as part of the get-together, was Maffra's Lincoln

Adams, riding Jack. Granite Rock's Graham Rozynski came second aboard Geejay Rusty.

Last year's winner, Sale's Steven Boulton, riding Harvey, and Oxley's Graham Forge, who partnered Rocky, tied for third place.