

High country's grim view

From
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in Melbourne

IF BANJO Patterson's legendary man from Snowy River were to make his immortal ride today he would be arrested.

His horse would probably be confiscated and impounded and he would be lumped with a hefty fine.

This, according to mountain cattlemen Graeme Stoney, is part of the tragedy of a "greenie" push for the establishment of more national parks which is now threatening the Victorian Alps.

The mountain cattlemen were erased from the slopes of NSW's massive Kosciusko National Park, where "The Man" tamed the wild country, when it was gazetted last decade.

A grim-faced Stoney believes the same fate is only a few years away for their Victorian counterparts. Every year the State Government has the option of renewing the cattlemen's high country leases, giving their cattle unlimited access to the mountain pastures.

But pressure from conservationists for a national park adjoining Kosciusko (one which Stoney says would exclude all but the back-packer), is putting the squeeze on the State Government to renew fewer leases.

The conservationists claim the cattle are destroying the wildflowers, polluting water and eroding the land.

The cattlemen, on the other hand, say their stock helps reduce the amount of grass and thus the fire hazard.

Stoney, who is also vice-chairman of the Victorian Mountain Cattlemen's Association, said that of the 90 to 100 families still grazing their cattle in the highlands, about 12 had seen their leases reduced or rescinded by the previous Liberal Government.

Now that Labor had power with a platform favoring the creation of national parks, he said, the cattlemen were gravely worried.

"Our whole way of life is being threatened," said Stoney. "We are an endangered species."

"Up to 20 p.c. of our stock is probably affected now, and there's going to be a lot more affected in the future."



Graeme Stoney ... "Our whole way of life is being threatened. We are an endangered species."

"It's a phase-out decision and it's going to come into effect over the next four or five years."

"My children can ride like the wind and know a lot about the area and what we are doing ... in another generation the kids won't know."

Stoney said the cattlemen "tradition" began in 1835, and many of the families still holding leases had grazed the high country for more than 100 years.

"It's the oldest land use in Australia which is still being done the same way," he said.

"Everything else has changed but the cattle country is no different, and that's why it's living heritage."

Despite the small group's lack of political clout, Stoney said they were not prepared to lie down and play dead. A horseback ride on State Parliament during the autumn session was being considered. Such an unusual stunt was sure to focus national attention on the small band of "merry men" in their bid to retain their "Sherwood Forest."

Even now, Stoney said, the alps people were adapting in an attempt to unveil their kind of heritage to interested eyes, with horse-riding and Nordic skiing tours being conducted by some families.

"We have been fairly traditional but we felt that people would want to go there, and we have

always shared our knowledge," he said.

Stoney, 43, said he owned 810 hectares of lowland home property, with almost 5665 hectares of mountain pasture under lease. If his lease were to be rescinded he would be forced to reduce his cattle herd by up to 40 p.c.

Should the same fate befall all the leases, totalling more than 20,000 cattle, it would play havoc

with the gene pool they provide for breeding stock around Australia.

"The lowland farmers call on the gene pool for their gene stock and fattening stock," said Stoney.

"It is renowned throughout south-east Australia. If the leases are lost that gene pool will be lost to the Australian farming community."

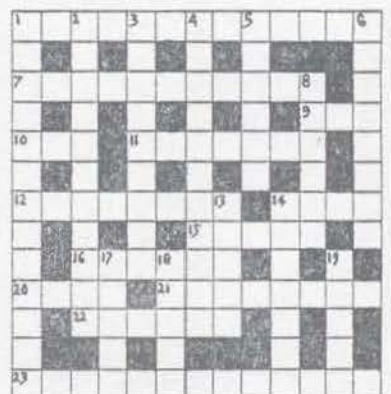
"These people don't understand the full implications of what they are doing."

"They have been pushing for national parks and they don't understand the implications of having an enormous area locked up in a national park."

"Present users of the alps — mountain men and tourists alike — will be very disappointed when they see it in 10 years."

CROSSQUIZ No. 1959

- ACROSS**
- Which famous British author, daughter of Sir Leslie Stephen, drowned herself in 1941?
 - Which former Goldwyn girl was for many years in sole control of one of Hollywood's largest television production companies?
 - Where was Einstein born?
 - Which is the longest of the Scottish freshwater lochs?
 - Who wrote a biography called *Goodness Had Nothing to Do With It*?
 - Which Russian town was from 1938 to 1957 called Chkalov in honor of a long-distance flyer?
 - What is the head of a cathedral chapter in the Anglican church?
 - Which British poet became an American citizen but returned to England to become professor of poetry at Oxford?
 - Which ethnic community in the Dolomites, largely descended from the Etruscans, speaks a language derived directly from Latin?
 - Which SA Governor was born in Lisbon, Portugal, a week after his father had been killed in a siege?
 - By what name was the Emperor Augustus earlier known?
 - In which former provincial capital in France does the university specialise in Breton culture?
 - What is said in nursery rhyme to be "full of grace"?



DOWN

- What is one involved in the scientific study of volcanoes?
- Who failed to win the
- Where in 1632 did King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden gain a famous victory but lose his life?
- What term for sudden

No. 1958 Solution

W H I T E R O T Y E R