

OFF TO WONNANGATTA

By Mary Margaret Allen

1922

Edited by Brian Lloyd

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It was somewhat of a dull day on 24th January, 1922 when we at last made up our minds to seize the opportunity of having our long looked for trip to Wonnangatta Station. So at 12.30, with the bluey rolled and everything together, we set sail, with Bill, Ralph and Uncle Ern leading three pack horses.

The first scene from our boundary fence is Garthwaites, followed by Edwards, O'Leary's and last of all, Robinsons. We then left the road and took off into the bush and began to travel on very steep sidelings, with Uncle Ern up ahead leading Vanity with a fairly stiff pack on. On this track Scobie had a laugh at me when I got off to pass through the fork of a tree that had fallen across the track. But I awaited my turn for a laugh - every dog has his day.

After travelling on for some considerable distance, we arrived at a bog on the sideling and we all had a laugh at Uncle Ern when his gallant steed Blossom sank to her flanks; Uncle Ern had to relieve her of his weight to give her a chance to scramble out. Scobie nearly disappeared here on her adorable Golden Globe.

We continued on our way around sidelings and across the river ** numerous times till finally we arrived at Ware's, the first vision of civilization since leaving Robinson's nine miles back. Here we passed along a flat by the river and had an excellent scenery of ferns growing out of the rocky cliffs above. At 5.20 we arrived at our first camping spot:

* *This is a first-hand (slightly edited) account of Marge Allen's first trip to Wonnangatta Station. The people mentioned are Uncle Ern (Ern Allen), Ralph Fry, Bill Hearn and Scobie-Bessy Kearney, a niece of Dan Kearney of Thornton. Marge was 19 years old when she wrote this. Bill Hearn managed Wonnangatta Station for the Allens. He died in Mansfield in 1930.*

** *The Howqua River*

Howqua Hut, three miles above Ware's. After unloading the horses, it commenced to rain.

We had tea at 7.30, then Bill took Scobie and me to visit Mrs. Fry, who lived only a few hundred yards away. We arrived back at the hut again at 10.30 and adjourned to blanket street. Some night it was, cold and wet ! I passed a sleepless night with cold feet and fleas, on a feather mattress on a narrow wooden stretcher, that will linger in my memory for many years to come.

At 5.30, with a big sigh of relief, we flew out of our beds all covered in feathers and fluff from our never to be forgotten bunk, and skipped off to the river for a wash. When we had finished our scran and cleaned up we were ready to begin another day's journey.

A snap was taken before we started. At 9.00 a.m. the last pack was completed and we set sail.

We followed the river for some distance and the first creek we crossed was Blackbird Creek. We then came to some very slippery sidelings, and it then came my turn for a laugh on Scobie - she began giving an exhibition of the gaby glide on Golden Globe, but it didn't come off quite as she expected and she had to glide off for safety.

From there we followed around some very steep sidelings with the river below. We then got a good view of Mt. Buller ahead of us from the sidelings where the cow fell over and broke its leg. We met some of the Ware's cows here.

Once again through the flats, we crossed the river several times and finally reached the eight mile stockyards at just after 12 o'clock. We again crossed the river and took a steep siding with a hundred feet of straight drop into the river below, but even this did not frighten us. Now we had Buller quite close to us on the other side, also Buller Creek and Buller Gorge. We continued around slippery sidelings and through flats, across the river times too numerous to mention until we arrived at Pyke's Flat, where we encountered another bog. It was Ralph's turn for an exhibition this time.

We had lunch at the river at one o'clock, my resting place being out on a rock in the middle of the river, where I felt safe from the annoyance of all the stray bull-dog ants and skippers. We picked up some W.S. (Wonnangatta Station) cows here and travelled on four miles until we reached the little hut, better known as the Stink Pot, or Lovick's, at 4.25. We left the cows behind and rode on three miles before reaching our camping ground a mile from the foot of Howitt Yards, at a place called Ted's Flat. It was 5.30 when we arrived, a big fire was lit, the tents were pitched and we had scran

Scobie and I took a stroll up the river, and saw some trout. We returned at 9.30, to buzz-off to bed on the hard ground, with holes dug for our hip bones and our saddles for pillows. It proved too hard for me, and at 3 a.m. I moved off and my second abode, a log by the fire, proved slightly better until Ralph, who was sleeping on the opposite side, stoked up and roasted me out.

At 5 a.m. we were all awakened by the mournful wails of dingoes, and Bill and Uncle Ern came to light from under a cooley bark tree not far away. We had scran, and at 7.30 we started our climb over Howitt - so called the "Great Iron Knob". We passed along through flats, crossed the river several times, until at last we reached the Howitt Yard. We then began our climb, getting a splendid view of the rugged mountains. To the left we viewed Square Face Jimmy and lots of other rocky peaks where cattle were seen grazing contentedly. Looking back, we could also see the Mansfield Gorge and Mt. Torbreck. While we were climbing up around these steep little sidelings, Golden Globe overbalanced with Scobie, but she was determined not to end the journey there and did a gallant roll off, and when I looked around, there she was perched on a rock unhurt.

Scobie mounted again, and we soon arrived at the top of the first little knob. Here we had a splendid view, below us was a 1,000 foot drop, and from here four rivers commenced, namely the King, the Wonnangatta, the Howqua and the Macalister. We also could see Mount Buffalo and Mount Feathertop.

We were a little windy as we started the climb up to the Iron Knob, and after zig-zagging up around it to the height of 6,000 feet, we reached the top safely at 10 o'clock. Here we sat and took in the good scenery around us again; we again viewed Buffalo, the Dargo High Plains, a

long line of blue plains, the Mt. Bernard Barry Ranges, and Mt. Look-out, and the Cross Cut. After a rest of 15 minutes and some snaps, we set sail for Howitt Hut seven miles east.

We continued along a little plain, guided by snow poles, with a steep gorge on each side, and then passed the Terrible Hollow, with a drop of 1,000 feet on the left. As we rode along the narrow loose rocky pathway, we gazed down into space below. Then after two miles, we reached the big plain seven miles long and seven wide, with not a tree on it, and about 200 head of cattle grazing contentedly. There were all kinds of wild flowers, daisies and violets much larger than the garden ones, and green grass like a carpet under your feet.

Bill gave the salt call, and it was evident that the cattle understood, for we could see them coming from all directions, both near and far. Then the salt was distributed. We could see Mount Wellington on our right - the home of the wild horses. It was 3.15 when we reached the hut, and after a hearty meal of bacon, the men departed to the stock yards. Scobie and I put in the rest of the day carving our initials on the tall gums and on the hut.

When night arrived, Scobie and I dossed together in one bunks, Bill and Uncle Ern in the other, and Ralph in the chair by the fire. It was a dam cold night and I ended up perched on a box by the fireside with Ralph from 10 o'clock until 5 o'clock.

It was then Saturday, and the men went off branding, but we remained by the fire. At 1.30 we saddled up and set out with Bill to help with the mustering. Five head were mustered close handy and put in the paddock, then we made out way to the little plain again, where we saw in the distance Square Face Jimmy, Tommy Standard and Big Billy. We rounded up thirty head there, and then we crossed through snow gums to the big plain. Again we got a splendid view of the mountains, and this time we saw the clear hill that is crossed on the way to Dargo and also Mt. Darling, the Snowy Plains and Mt. Wellington. On the big plain two hundred head were mustered and driven to the yards.

That night Scobie slept in the chair beside the fireside and I on two stools, Ralph took our bunk. It was somewhat of a close night, rather a change from the previous one. The next morning, Sunday, we awoke at 6.30 to a cloudy and windy day, but it brightened up a bit later and the sun appeared. The men went out to the yard but Scobie and I remained inside by the fire.

That afternoon we set out for Wonnangatta homestead. It was all an up hill climb for some distance; the first landmark was Manogue's Look-out and then we came to a plain where the salt call was given again and the cattle rolled up for their salt. We reached the Snowy Hut and then set out for the homestead eleven miles away. Four miles of it was a down steep narrow rocky path where we had to walk. At last we arrived at the homestead at 8 o'clock.

In less than fifteen minutes Bill had a damper cooked and we enjoyed a good meal of bacon and damper. After a discussion on the events of the trip, we adjourned to bed too tired even to dream of Barclay's ghost.

We had a good sleep in on Monday morning, and after lunch Scobie and I went riding around the station paddocks. We caught some worms on our way back, for fishing. Scobie cooked some damper at 7 o'clock, then we went fishing. Ralph caught thirty while Uncle Ern, Scobie and I caught eight. It was some tea on fish that night! We got to bed at 11 o'clock.

On Tuesday morning we were out of bunk at 9 a.m., took some snaps, and then Ralph lopped the pine trees around the homestead. It looked very dull, but we lived in hopes of it keeping fine until we reached the top. At 2.15 we packed up, took a final look around the old homestead and then we said farewell to Bill, who was staying on, and thanked him for the good time he had given us. We then set sail for the top.

There was only one incident worth relating on our journey to the top: I was nearly left hanging by the braces on the limb of a mountain ash. We had several stops on the way to pull out St. Johns Wart. We arrived at the hut cold and shivering, but that was forgotten when Ralph signalled to us to see three big dingoes ahead. They stayed and played while we had a good view of them, and then a shrill whistle from Ralph awoke them to the fact that they were not the only pebbles on the plain.. Then they disappeared. We went to sleep straight after tea, but it was a very cold and windy night.

Wednesday was windy and cold. We took our departure at 9 a.m. and hadn't gone far across the plain when it commenced to snow. The oilers had to be unstrapped and adorned. It continued snowing until we were well over the top and Ralph told us to get a wriggle on when he saw fog approaching. While passing the Terrible Hollow my hat blew off, but we rescued it before it went over the edge. The Terrible Hollow was hidden from our sight by the dense fog while we were coming down off the top, so we arrived safely at the foot without being too frightened. We reached the Little Hut at 1.30, boiled the billy and had lunch before setting sail again.

There was nothing worth relating during the remainder of the trip to Howqua Hut and we arrived at 6.30. After tea we again visited Mrs. Fry and listed to some exciting experiences related by Dad (Mr. Fry) about the early days.

That night Scobie and I were again on the old feather bunk, amidst rats, fleas and mice, but that was nothing in comparison with the first night there. Neither of us were sorry to get up at 6.30. After breakfast the steeds were saddled and we had a last look around the old hut where we experienced our first night of camp life in the bush.

Ralph, who was leaving to journey home on a different track, bade us goodbye, and set out with his father. We too continued our own way. At Ware's some snaps were taken and further along Scobie up-rooted some ferns to take with her. Finally at 2.30 we came in view of the station homestead.

Our delightful trip was at an end and we were once more safely at the spot from where we started. After a good lunch at 3 o'clock, we were content to rest for the remainder of the day and think over our experiences, and wonder if it will ever come our luck again to have such a delightful trip.

Marge Allen lived in her childhood at Pine Grove with her mother after her father's death, but also spend a good deal of time at Ten Mile and Darlingford. She was educated at the Mansfield Ladies College.

She was a keen and able horse woman, and delighted in assisting her uncles Ted and Ern in mustering, and camping out in the bush. She left Pine Grove in 1929, but lived at Howquadale Station for a year in 1923. After her mother died, she had small properties at Bayswater, Blackburn and Ferntree gully where she kept horses until about 1939. Dan Kearney was a very good friend to Marge during that period, and helped her with the horses.

In later life she and Muriel (Ollie) Parkin became inseparable companions, and the two took a house together in Hawthorn. Marge died in December 1971 and Ollie a few months afterwards.

Marge Allen was a battler, but full of wit, as the story of the Wonnangatta trip shows so well.



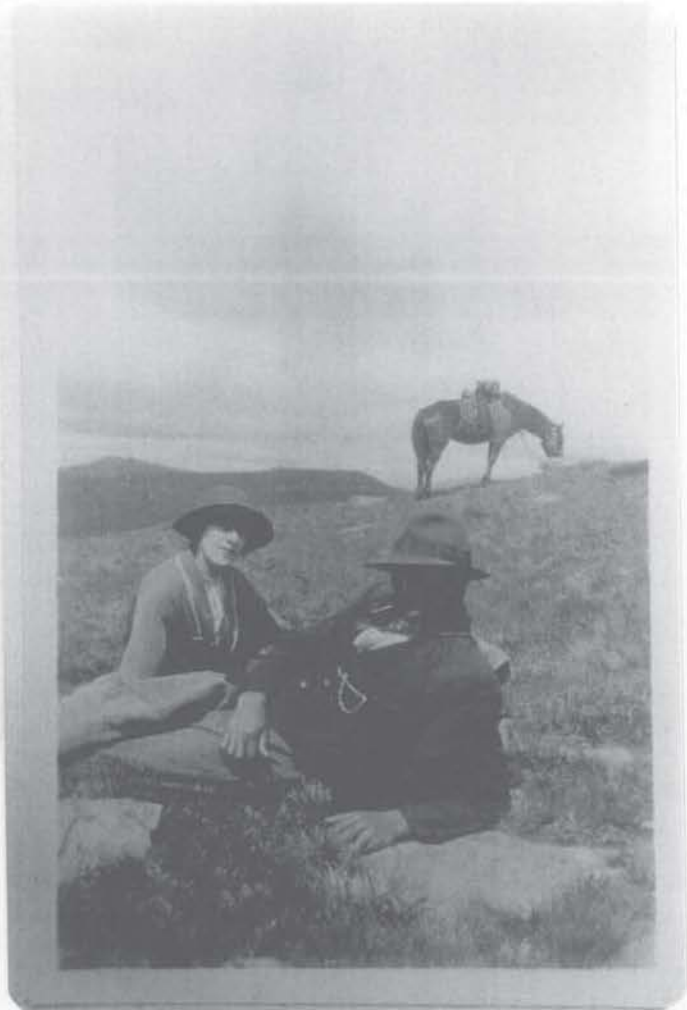
From left: Bill Hearne, Ern Allen, Jim Fry,
Bessie Kearney, Ralph Fry.



On top of Mt Howitt



Bessie Kearney, Bill Hearne
unknown, and Ralph Fry.



Bessie Kearney and
Ralph Fry



Wonnangatta Homestead, about 1922



Ralph Fry at Howqua Hut

By Mary Margaret Allen



Marge Allen on the cage (flying fox)
at Fry's, on the Howqua River.