



THE CONTINUING BATTLE

MOUNTAIN CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA THE POSITION 1984

Mountain Cattlemen have entered a new phase in their battle to retain High Country grazing in Victoria.

Over the past year they have taken a higher profile with the daily media and have adopted other similar tactics, in an effort to counter "conservation" arguments.

It is not a step they welcomed, as traditionally cattlemen have kept a low key approach and simply gone about their business in a quiet industrious manner.

Now with their future under threat they have come out fighting.

Two Land Conservation Council surveys of the Alpine area in the past four years, under different governments, have seen a phasing out period established for some of the best Alpine Grazing country. Coupled with this is the Government's apparent determination to savagely increase grazing charges, which could have the same effect in removing cattlemen from the High Country.

When all expenses are considered, the cost of alpine grazing is already equal or more expensive than commercial agistment rates, and it appears that there are to be further savage increases in government charges. Cynics among the cattlemen say that this is simply another way of removing cattle from the Alps.

L.C.C. — Final Alpine Report 1983

The affection and awareness of the public towards the cause of the Mountain Cattlemen was apparent by the number and quality of letters sent to the L.C.C. on their behalf, totalling an impressive 15.4% of all letters and submissions received by the council. Considering the complex nature of the Alpine area subject, this was a credible show of support.

Less than one third of all submissions and letters received by the Council supported the proposal to extend the Alpine Park.

THE OVERWHELMING SUPPORT WAS FOR NO CHANGE.

Despite this fact, the L.C.C. has recommended that massive areas of the Alps be included in the Park system and that the Howitt Plain be added to the areas that are to be phased out from grazing.

Cattlemen believe that the majority opinion has been ignored. It appears that the L.C.C. has not followed the due democratic process; but has carried out what it originally intended, or was instructed to do.

The report recommends that grazing be allowed to continue in the proposed Alpine Park system which will cover most of the Alps. However, as it is stated Government policy to phase out grazing in National Parks, Mountain Cattlemen are very wary of the final outcome.

NATIONAL PARKS

Mountain Cattlemen recognise that some National Parks are necessary and desirable in Victoria's Alpine Regions. However, they have been opposed to the creation of a massive Alpine Park. They believe that this is undesirable and a move that future generations of Victorians will regret.

THEY BELIEVE THAT THE PUBLIC DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE IMPLICATIONS TO VICTORIA OF THIS MASSIVE PARK.

It is their belief that the Park will become more and more regimented over the years; and they fear that the public's freedom and initiatives while using the Park will be sapped and replaced by almost total bureaucratic control of their visit. This is the history of most parks in Australia.

Mountain Cattlemen subscribe to the Multi Use concept of Alpine areas, with some special places in the Alps designated National Parks, as was decided in the initial L.C.C. report in 1979. They believe the greatest benefit for the greatest number of people would be achieved by this approach.

MOUNTAIN CATTLEMEN AND ALPINE GRAZING

OUR HERITAGE

This unique group of families have grazed their cattle on the High Alpine pastures in the Victorian Alps for more than 140 years.

For most of the 120 families involved, this tradition has an unbroken thread of continuity, back through the generations to Victoria's pioneering heritage.

This heritage is under serious threat as for one "reason" or another, many Alpine grazing leases are being slowly phased out.

Recently, on radio, in response to a question, one major conservation group stated that, "It's **ONLY** an emotional thing, tied up with nostalgia and a Country looking for its traditions, and trying to seek an identity in a rapidly changing world."

We agree it is emotional stuff, and of **course** the community is looking for its traditions and identity in this rapidly changing world.

We cannot understand how any responsible "conservation" body could belittle such an important bonus to a Nation which has so little tradition and heritage.

As Australia developed in the early days, the personal endeavors of explorers, sheepmen, miners and cattlemen, set the basis for what it is today. The Mountain Cattlemen are a living example of this heritage and endeavor and are almost the only ones left still applying their trade in much the same way.

Grazing cattle in the Mountains is still hard work, challenging, romantic and sometimes dangerous — it was 140 years ago. The current popularity and awareness of the Mountain Cattlemen testifies to the community's acceptance of this fact.

It is a rapidly changing world, and in such a world the community needs benchmarks to relate back to, as it goes forward. Almost everything else in our society is gone, or been taken by the changing world. Why not protect one of the last benchmarks our society still has — the Heritage of Mountain Cattlemen.

It is not just the Cattlemen's Heritage, it is the whole community's.

PRACTICAL CONSERVATION

There is also much that is obviously right in a conservationist approach to the high country environment. The cattlemen are themselves conservationists in attitude — not only for romantic reasons, but for practical ones as well. There is an inherently long term view and they are more aware than anyone of the need to carefully maintain a balanced environment. Short term exploitation would be selfish and ultimately self-defeating. It has no place in the cattlemen's thinking. Indeed there are many areas of agreement between the mountain cattlemen and conservationists.

Despite this, the cattlemen are very much on the defensive. The more extreme bushwalkers and conservationists have adopted the attitude that the high country should be locked up for their own exclusive use. Their arguments against the presence of cattle are based more on emotional grounds than practical ones. Though they talk of cattle causing erosion, trampling bogs, cutting back the wildflowers and so on, the cattlemen can produce ample evidence to the contrary.

THE CATTLEMEN'S APPROACH IS THAT OF SHARING THE HIGH COUNTRY — OF RETAINING IT FOR MULTIPLE USE.

FACTS AND FIGURES

1. The cost to cattlemen of grazing cattle on the High Country is equivalent, or slightly more than, lowland agistment rates when all costs are taken into account. These costs include an average loss due to mismustering of 2% (these cattle generally perish) — (McGowan's survey).
2. Alpine Grazing assists in fuel reduction and fire prevention. It is good land management to keep alpine pasture short and green. It also encourages dramatic wild flower displays, since growth isn't suppressed by old and rotting material.
3. Cattlemen provide a presence in the area which cannot be emulated by any ranger. Their expertise and advice is readily available at any time to the people who visit the area, and is willingly offered.
4. Alpine access tracks are kept open by the cattlemen. Their huts, dozens of which dot the mountains, are never locked. They provide comfort and refuge for any traveller. This surely is unique in Australia.
5. The mountain cattlemen's contribution to Search and Rescue work over the years is well documented. There are many people who owe their lives to cattlemen's knowledge of the mountains.
6. The 20,000 high country cattle are among the best breeding herds in Australia. They are conservatively valued at \$6 million, with estimated annual sales running at \$3½ million. These cattle provide a breeding resource and gene pool that underwrites the supply of fattening and breeding stock to the rest of the state — and never more so than in years of drought. — No government subsidies for these cattle.
7. There are about 120 Mountain Cattlemen families.
8. About 10% of Cattlemen's families will lose all or part of their runs by 1991 because of Government decisions.
9. The area grazed **per adult beast** in the High Country is between 70-227 hectares, depending on the quality of the country, and for only 4 months a year. Claims of overgrazing in the High Country have no foundation.
10. **DAMAGE:** In the distant past the Alps suffered some damage. Now, with the banning of sheep, some control of the rabbit and control on cattle numbers the High Country has never looked better and is improving all the time. Damage is now a poor excuse for removing cattle from the Alpine meadows.
11. Rugged gullies, rolling grasslands, towering cliffs and majestic stands of timber, all combine into an irregular mosaic in the High Country and surrounding public land. It is a magnificent natural and renewable resource. The cattle grazing, timber and Alpine recreational industries should be allowed to continue in harmony with people wishing to escape the pressures of everyday living and visit these remote areas. Because of the large expanse of the Victorian Alps, there exists very large areas where no trace of man can be found. Many pockets of absolute natural wilderness can even be found only a short walking distance from any road that penetrates the Great Divide.

MOUNTAIN CATTLEMEN BELIEVE THAT THERE IS ROOM FOR ALL IN THE HIGH COUNTRY.

If you believe that Mountain Cattlemen have a continuing role to play in the High Country of Victoria, please tell your local State Member of Parliament or the Ministers involved, Mr E. Walker or Mr R. Mackenzie, Parliament House Melbourne.

For further information contact:

Jim Commins, Ensay, President M.C.A.V. (051) 57 3232

Graeme Stoney, Mansfield, Liaison Officer M.C.A.V. (057) 75 2212.

Mountain cattlemen care for the high country