

In The Steps Of The Monaro Tableland Pioneers: Settlement Of The Snowy River

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By
Dennis Dugan



The picture of the Australian pioneer which comes most readily to the mind is of a gaunt, bearded man, perhaps with an equally gaunt and weary wife, moving across the rolling plains of central New South Wales, fanning out across the dry, dusty savannah from the westward end of the road which Evans built across the Blue Mountains. He, his waggon, his cattle, his dogs and his aboriginal guides moved in a cloud of dust and flies across a land burnt by the summer sun and not always revived by winter rains.

making for and returning from the gold fields.

The Clarke gang, between 1865 and 1867, murdered ten policemen and nine civilians before the two leaders, John and Thomas Clarke, were captured and later executed at Darlinghurst.

The miners formed their own escorts to convoy the gold from Kiandra and in the first year of the town's existence the escorts carried almost 68,000 ounces of gold from the Snowy fields—almost £250,000 worth at the then valuation.

But the boom was not to last. The gold cut out rapidly and in 1881 the little boom town was described as almost deserted: "half the stores are closed, and where it was formerly difficult to elbow one's way through the crowd, it is now a matter of wonder to see half-a-dozen diggers. There are not more than 250 diggers at the outside, on the whole Kiandra diggings."

But other mineral wealth was found a few years later at various points in the district and copper was mined at Kyloe for some years.

The mining, however, was incidental. The wealth of the Monaro was pastoral and it was in that direction that development was to

continue until men saw the possibilities of diverting south-easterly flowing waters through the range to provide power and irrigation for the drier plains to the west.

"Snowy Saga" is in two parts—the first a record of the early days of the district, the second, contributed by the Snowy Mountains Authority, a description of the hydro-electric scheme which has brought so many men of so many nationalities to the area in recent years.

George Petersen, for many years manager of the Kosciusko Hotel,

contributes a chapter on the aboriginals of the district but the rest of the first section is unattributed. The man mostly responsible for it, however, is Cr. Leo Barry, present President of the Snowy River Shire, a descendant of Monaro pioneers whose vision and action did much to persuade the authorities of the value of the Snowy River scheme.

"Snowy Saga," which is profusely illustrated, is obtainable only from the Snowy River Shire Council or the Snowy Mountains Authority. The price is not given.

NEW NOVELS — —By Alan Nicholls

Melbourne Ten Years Hence

This week brings two novels with Melbourne settings, but neither deals with the city we know. Nevil Shute gives us a picture of Melbourne 10 years hence, while Martin Boyd's picture dates back to 44 years ago. But both novels show a feeling for the city, a love of it, that Melbourne folk will find flattering.

"ON THE BEACH," by Nevil Shute. Heinemann, London. Price, 13s.

NEVIL SHUTE IS A tricky author to pin down, because he can be so very unequal. Books like "The Pied Piper" put him in the front rank, from which eminence he proceeded to fall flat on his face in some later novels.

In spite of some faults, "On The Beach" goes a long way toward re-establishing his reputation.

It is another attempt at prophecy, an act in which he proved so adept

None of the people in the book, not even the author himself, appear to have given a passing thought to any such plan.

But in spite of these faults this is a vivid book, a warmly human book, sustained by Nevil Shute's remarkable gift for simple, crisp narrative.

It is also a solemn warning about the possible results of nuclear warfare—a warning which no-one living can afford to forget.

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ric Authority, the date of the first penetration of the Monaro is put in the early 1820's, when surveyors and explorers told stories of pirate shepherds and stolen flocks which roamed the district before the advance of the established stations.

In 1822, Berry, Johnstone and Hume tried to reach the Monaro from the coast but were unimpressed with the country through which they passed. The following year Currie and Ovens got as far as Billilngra Hill, about a dozen miles north of the present site of Cooma, and in 1824 the botanist Cunningham who made several minor excursions into the Monaro, spoke of the little-known activities of settlers who, he said, had been in the area for the past three years.

Some members of the Pendergast family, still a well-known name in the Monaro, claim that Thomas Pendergast was in the Snowy River country with 400 head of cattle as early as 1821.

But it was not until 10 years later that the movement to the Monaro began in force. In the years between 1831 and 1836 almost all the great stations of the tableland were occupied and stocked by pioneers whose descendants, in many cases, still hold land on the tablelands today.

And such was the land hunger that the movement to the south continued, and it was from the Monaro that Gippsland was first explored and named by McMillan, and that settlement of the Omeo district was pioneered.

They were hardy men and women, their first homes stone and slab huts made from material they won from their own holdings; their food and household necessities like candles and soap largely produced by themselves with fats from the animals they bred, for the bullock waggon journey to northern markets was long and arduous.

The stations and settlements were given picturesque aboriginal names—Kiandra, the place of sharp stone for knives; Jindabyne, a valley; Adaminaby, resting place; Farrangobilly, flowing stream; Cootangamba, where the eagle drinks, and many more as colorful. Monaro, or Maneroo, was the aboriginal name for the district itself.

By 1840 there were within the present Snowy River shire about 60 stations and a population of some 600, with a proportion of six men to each woman. The stations carried about 70,000 sheep, 28,000 cattle and 700 horses.

And it was for horses and horse-

men that the district was best known throughout the settled part of the country. At the annual musterings the stockmen from various stations joined forces to gather the wild cattle from the unfenced runs, and they vied with each other in daring feats of horsemanship on the steep, rocky mountainsides.

Round the camp fires at night, as they ate their damper and drank their strong tea, with a dawn to dusk day in the saddle behind them, the stories of the mustering were retold, and perhaps a little embellished, stories which lived and inspired Banjo Paterson to write *The Man From Snowy River*.

Other writers were inspired by the picturesque life of the Monaro too—notably Miles Franklin, born both under her own name and under the name of "Brent of Bin Bin," describes the life of the landholders of the district. In one, "All That Swagger," her Danny Delacy is close in name at least to the Delany of Adaminaby whose feats

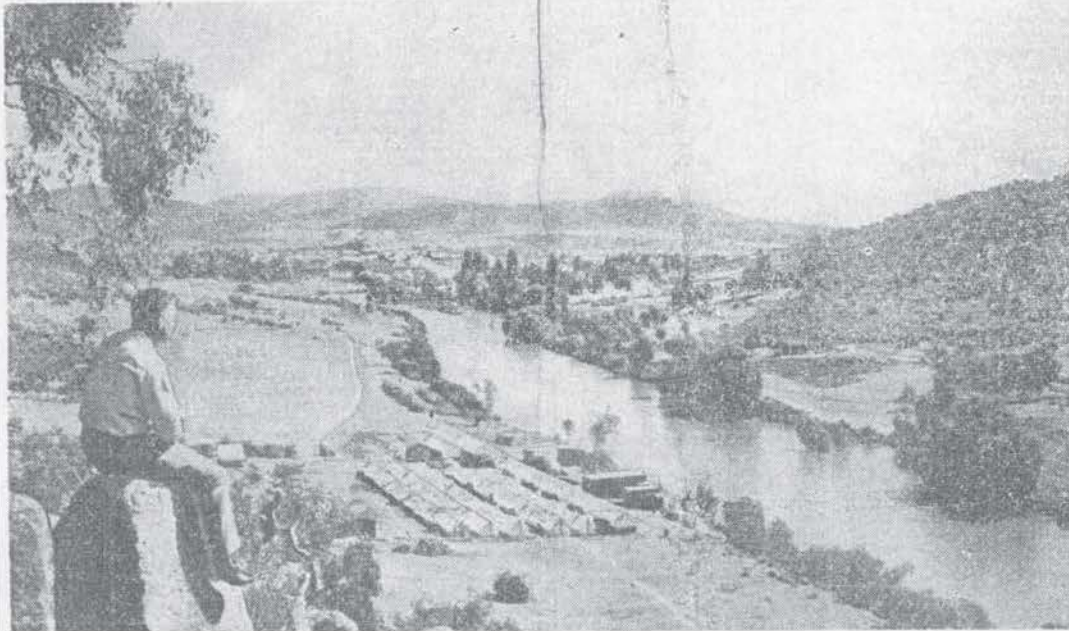
as a horseman are still spoken of with reverence in the district.

Gold was discovered at Kiandra and the Crackenback in the 1850's and 60's and the rush brought many new settlers to the district when the John Robertson Free Selection Act was passed in 1861.

The squatters, firmly entrenched on large areas of leasehold land, hampered the new settlers by every means possible but many selectors prospered and developed agricultural farms to add to the resources of the district.

The hidden valleys of the Monaro attracted many lawless characters and as early as 1833 a number of stations were looted by a gang of armed bushrangers. Throughout the '30's and '40's the station holders had to contend with occasional armed attacks from escaped convicts.

The 1850's saw a lull in bush-ranging incidents but with the finding of gold at Kiandra the "gentlemen of the road" returned to the Monaro to harass the men



Who was the first is not certain for, as happened so frequently in early Australian history, he was moving in defiance of the Government. Land policy was uncertain and the daring and adventurous spirit who sought to establish himself beyond the perimeter of known settlement did not advertise his intentions.

In "Snowy Saga," published by Oswald L. Ziegler for the Council of the Shire of Snowy River and the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Elec-