

Herding tourists takes over in high country

By STUART HONEYSETT

HIGH in the Victorian Alps, crack bushman Chris Stoney drives a herd of cattle past a dangerous precipice just as his father and his grandfather did before him, and grins wryly at the mention of "living legend", a description of him created by tourism promoters.

"I mean that's just bloody nothing but embarrassing, it really is," he says laughing and cracking his whip to budge some stubborn cattle.

"It's all right for the good of the tourism for the area but I've got to live in town.

"I get a hard time about it off my friends but I'm thick-enough skinned to wear that, I suppose."

Big business came to the bush this week when Tourism Victoria said country regions would be targeted in the third phase of its highly successful marketing campaign.

Victoria has overtaken Queensland as the second most popular tourist destination in Australia, capturing 23 per cent of the market compared with the Sunshine State's 21 per cent.

Mr Stoney, 31, said that since his farm began offering horse rides in 1986, tourism dollars had accounted for about half of his income.

"It started as a bit of a diversification thing because farming's not that flash and it's turned into a bit of a monster," he said. "For a return on investment, my horses are killing the farm big time."

Mr Stoney is a born-and-bred Mansfield boy who has four times won the Great Mountain Race of Victoria, the "Melbourne Cup of the bush".



Cattlemen move a herd . . . Tourism Victoria is targeting high country farms as tourist attractions — Picture: JOHN FEDER