

A Man's Best friend



**"BONEY"**

BURIED HERE ABOUT 1863  
BY PETER MEEHAN,  
HIS MASTER AND HIS FRIEND.



THIS MARK WAS PLACED BY  
A. GIANNARELLI & SONS  
MONUMENTAL MASONS OF FITZROY,  
AS A TRIBUTE TO THE PIONEERS AND DROVERS  
OF THE OMEO-DARGO TRACK.



THE DOG'S GRAVE.

An Account of Droving Days  
In Early Gippsland.

Written By

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In Collaboration

With

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For The

Stratford And District Historical Society

1977

ISBN 0 596426 09

## PREFACE.

The story of the dog's grave is set in the period when George Grey held the lease of the Cobungra Station in 1851-'60. All the men concerned in the story were Cobungra Station men. (All related.) This was the beginning of the Gold Era 1851 - 1859.

It relates to the life of the pioneers in this rugged mountain country, the tremendous hardships and effort in making a livelihood from raising cattle.

We dedicate this story to the memory of their dogs and horses for without them the life and living of the cattlemen would not have been possible.

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## THE STORY OF THE DOG'S GRAVE.

Without the assistance of dogs Australia's cattle and sheep industry would have been severely retarded. One would have to say that much of the outer and upper regions may not have been developed at all. This story concerns the upper areas of East Gippsland, the winding droving track that links Cobungra Station Omeo to Dargo and down to Stratford. An old saying that "a man's dog is a man's living" holds true today.

Says Don Richardson - Manager of Omeo's Cobungra Station - "Dogs! We just couldn't live without them. We estimate that when we have a big day's work our dogs would travel 100 miles criss crossing in say a 20 mile drive."

On Cobungra, the stockmen generally have four or five dogs predominately of Kelpie blood but with an infusion of heeler or border collie.

A drover, named Semmens, who some claim was the first to breed the heeler, took mobs of three hundred cattle for hundreds of miles with the help of a couple of dogs.

With a good working dog up the sides, a mob of cattle will move freely and steadily. The cattle know that should they break or stray, the dog will stick with them until they return to the mob.

Judith Wright vividly portrays the power and intelligence of the dog over the beast with her lines -

"His thunder powerless  
The red storm of his body shrunk with fear  
Runs the great bull, the dog upon his heels."

(Collected Poems 1942 - 1970 by Judith Wright)  
Angus & Robertson.

One lesson is generally enough for cow or bull.

The intelligent well trained drover's dog can be depended on (sometimes working out of sight and sound of his master) to work the tail or wings of the mob and can block or wheel. The drover knows his dog will protect his property and remain faithful even until death.

Robert Kaleski writing on the present breeds of cattle dog in "Walkabout" 1949 stated that the first dog used in Australia was the bobtailed Smithfield butchers dog. Then came the 'merle' Scotch Collie, smooth haired and mottled, and crosses with the dingo and dalmation, all of which have resulted in the production of the blue heeler and the kelpie, an amazingly intelligent and hardy breed.

The link between drovers and their dogs is steel strong so that although the animals may appear to be treated with indifference, they are in fact jealously guarded and in the main well looked after. An unwritten law of the bush is that one never endeavours to make friends with a drover's dog.

An extraordinary illustration of the relationship between dog and the man occurred in 1966 when Newport drovers sent thirty five dogs out on strike while they themselves remained at work. The point at issue was a compensation claim centred about a dog that had been killed at work.

Suprisingly it's curious but true that although drovers and their dogs have always been an essential item in the pattern of Australian life and have frequently been the subject of ballad, poem or story, very few dogs have been specifically named. When cattlemen gather around the camp fires or congregate in 'pubs', 'that dog of Bills' or 'my old Rover' inevitably become topics of conversation or the causes of argument. The exploit of 'Nellie' who would never leave a beast that broke from the mob, or of 'Buck' who would stand on his hind legs in the long grass to see if any beast had been left behind, or 'Bluey' who followed his dying master to hospital and remained there awaiting his return until he became old and had to be destroyed, are related, but of specific reference after wide research,



the writer can recall only three. Henry Lawson's 'Rover' who accompanied the old pack horse as it struggled up the bank of the flooded stream to take home 'dumb' tidings of the death of young Harry Dale the drover.'

In his book "Dusty" Frank Dalby Davidson told of the life of a dingo kelpie cross that became a killer, indirectly bringing death to his owner. 'Dusty' however was a sheep dog, so his behaviour does not sully the record of the cattle dog.

Probably the best known dog is that teamster's notorious animal which spoiled the record and became the hero of Jack O'Hagan's rollicking rendering "Road to Gundagai" when it sat on the tucker box, thereby completing the misery of the rain sodden Bullocky Bill with his bogged team. This dog and 'Boney' of our story appear to be the only two Australian dogs to have been immortalised in stone.

By strange coincidence or on second thoughts may be not so strange, both memorials have been executed by men whose homeland is Italy. Frank Ruscome was commissioned to build the Gundagai monument and both monuments also serve as a tribute to the pioneers as well as the drovers and their dogs.

Peter Meehan's dog was most likely an Australian Kelpie, which is still the popular breed for the high country. They have the blood of the Dingo in their veins.

Described by Mr. McNamara of Omeo - "They are forceful workers, bark well, are equally good with sheep or cattle, their feet more able to stand up to the rugged terrain than most.

#### Cobungra Station.

Travellers leaving Omeo for Hotham will notice the picturesquely situated Cobungra homestead to their left when they have traversed about fifteen kilometres of the Alpine Highway.

In 1841, two stockmen Jem Brown and Jack Wells held the original Cobungra lease of 150,000 acres. This vast run included all Hotham and part of the Bogong High Plains and had its southern boundary close to the Jim (Jem) and Jack Creek.

On June 14th ten years later George Grey of Pelican Lagoon near Wangaratta tendered for the fourteen year lease of 32,000 acres with a carrying capacity of 640 head of cattle. The terms of the lease were £10.2.0. and £2.10.0. for every thousand sheep or equivalent in cattle above 4,000 sheep. An aboriginal named Larnev guided Grey to his newly acquired property. Grey apparently extended his lease for on 30th May 1859 the run was subdivided into Cobungra and Bynomungee, and on 2nd November of that year Cobungra was transferred to James Parslow (who it is understood was related to Wells) and John Meighan. On 8th October 1868 Parslow and Joseph Richard Rawson were in control of the station.

The run was again subdivided into Cobungra East and Cobungra West on September 18th 1871, Rawson taking the East and Parslow the West. The following transfers then eventuated - Cobungra East - Sept. 18th, 1871 Fredrick William Dreverman; Jan. 5th., 1878 Hans Maas and Claus Maas; Dec. 16th, 1878 Hans Haas and Richard King of Omeo; Aug, 14th. 1844 William and Walter Coughland of Omeo.

Cobungra West - April 25th 1844 James Parslow and Richard King.

Several changes occurred till the Riggall family took up a major portion of the Cobungra run under the provisions of the Land Act of 1869, Sec. 19 and 20. George Grey had a small portion on which he settled under provisions of the 1901 Land Act.

Dick Riggall, who held both leases of Cobungra in 1912 died in his prime as the result of an accident, his executors then sold the property (5,000 acres freehold, 50,000 acres leasehold and 7,000 head of cattle) to Edmund Naughton and Sons of the Riverina. Naughton eventually expanded the station to nearly its original size by acquiring the neighbouring properties.



The disastrous bushfires of 1939 caused the germination of seed which eventually turned the greatest part of the relatively open grazing country into thick forest thereby considerably reducing its value. As a result Ed Naughton, in 1960, sold out to the present owners, Cobungra Pty. Ltd. This deal entailed the transfer of approximately 17,000 acres of freehold, 68,000 acres of leasehold and 2,400 head of cattle.

Annual pasture improvement, rabbit control etc. have enabled the present owners to turn off between 700 and 1,900 head of stock annually. Cobungra cattle by the way, have always been noted for their quality. Even the freak storm of June 22nd. 1949 which enveloped Omeo in the heaviest snow within living memory (the drifts averaged three feet and sometimes six feet) caused minor loss. Most of the cattle came out of the experience in good condition.

Incidentally Cobungra was once noted for its horses which were sold chiefly as remounts for the Indian Army. Sometimes as many as 300 foals were running on the station.

The terrible fires of 1939 took their dreadful toll of Cobungra. The residents took refuge in the Livingstone Creek; however, a stockman named Richards and his dog were incinerated when the flames overtook them near Bright. Thousands of head of station stock were destroyed and the homestead was reduced to ashes.

#### The Homesteads.

The first Cobungra home which one finds mentioned is that which Parslow built on the bank of the Victoria River on the western half of the station. Claus Maas on the eastern half had a slab and shingle roof home. Riggall established his hotel at the Victoria River site.



The second homestead which replaced that destroyed by the 1939 fires, was partly built of brick made and burnt on the site. The rear portion and some of the outbuildings were of timber, quantities of which came from the Riggall Hotel. An existing hayshed covers the site but a few of the original steps can be seen. The present forty square homestead built in 1961 replaces a home destroyed by a fire which originated in a kerosene refrigerator. Of thick walled adobe construction, it was designed by Alistair Knox, famous for his mud brick and is in fact the fore runner of the present (1977) return to favour of that style. Its wide eaved verandahs are paved with local stone.

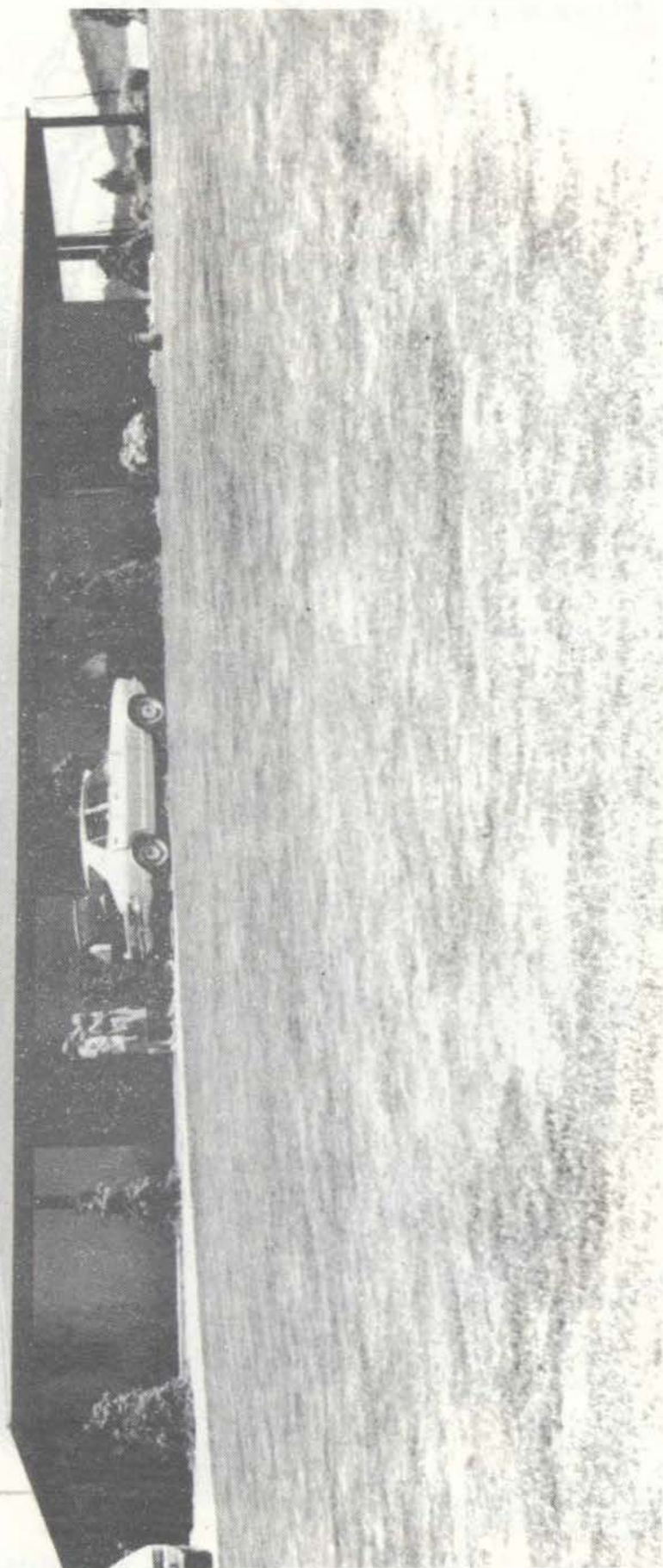
#### Droving.

During the years prior to the advent of motor transport, stock from Cobungra (and from other stations) were driven annually along the 38 miles of winding mountain track through forests of red gum and mess mate to Dargo, on to Stratford to the sale yards of A. McLean and Co., Theo B. Little at Maffra on the Gippsland Plain.

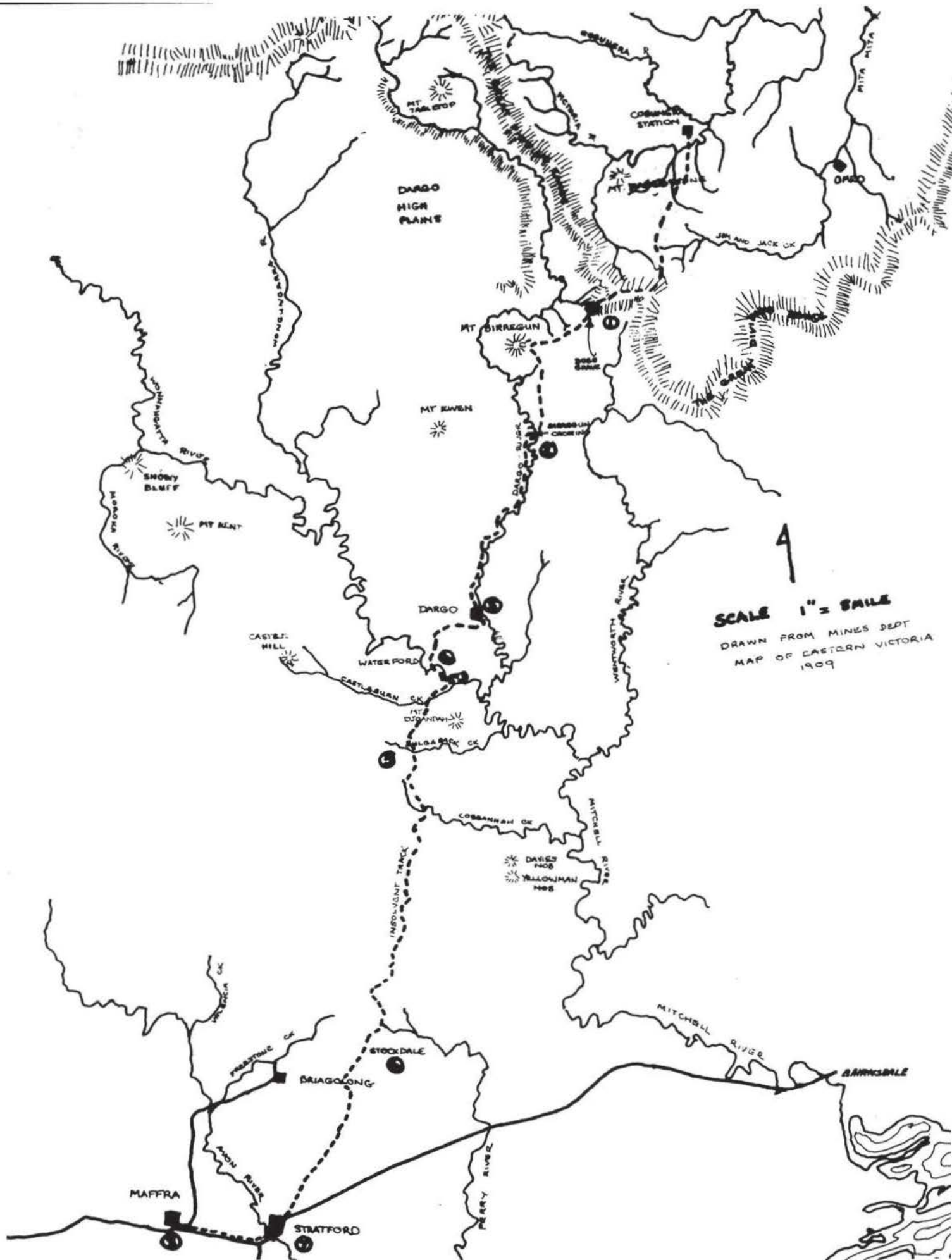
Deep winter snow on Mt. Berrigan made it necessary for the drive to start usually in the autumn. Cattle are not taken if snow is covering the mountain. Stockmen on the Cobungra station would spend perhaps up to a month preparing for the trip, mustering, culling etc. before putting a mob ranging in size from 300 to 500 head of hereford cattle on the road.

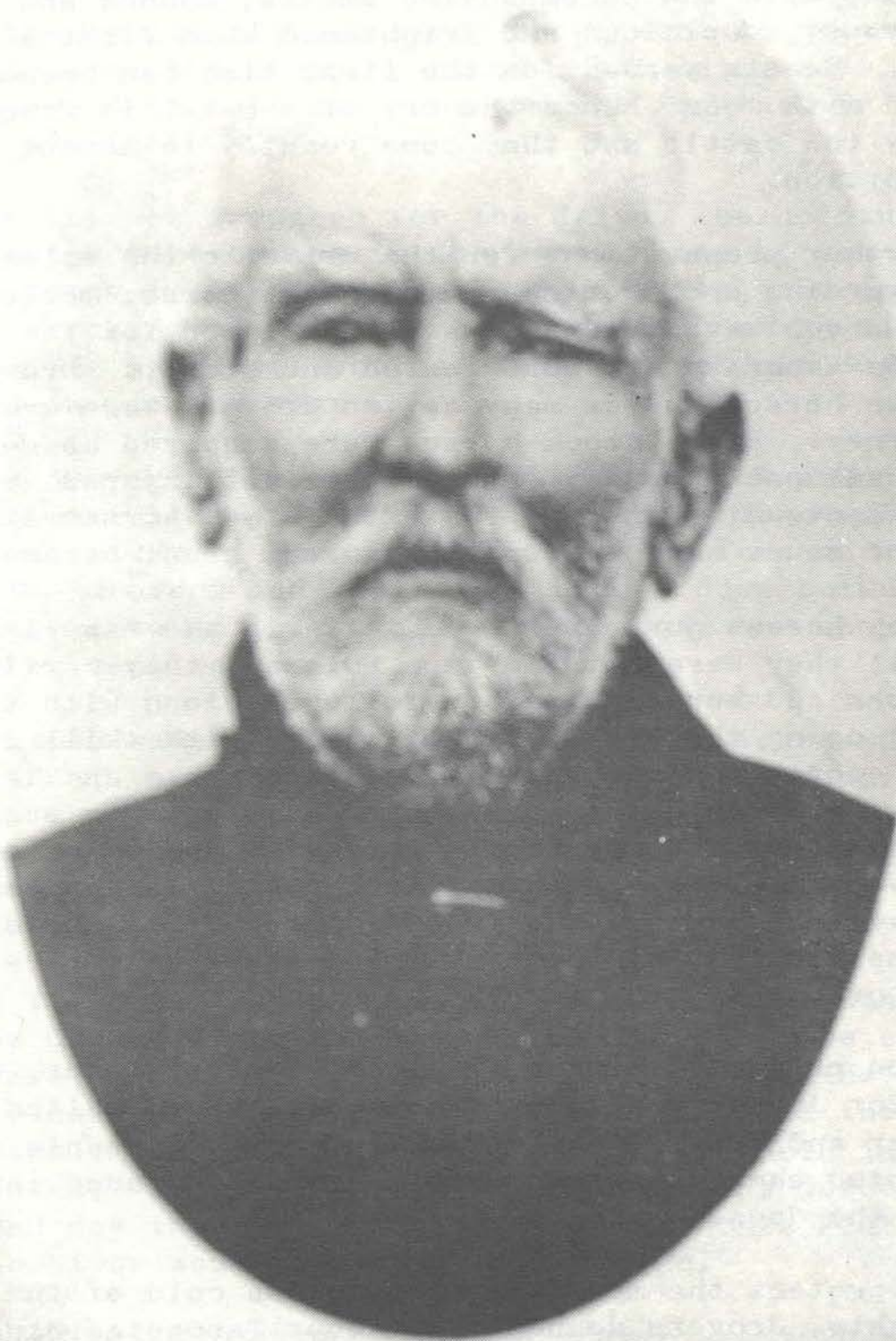
Cattle in the highlands love the taste of salt, although the salt is not really necessary for the health of the animals. The reaction of the animals to the cry of s-a-l-t is exciting to witness. The nearest animals bellow their acceptance and pleasure and come pounding down the hill sides. Bellows from the nearest animals echo back into the hills answered by those further afield until the message reaches into the outer limits of the station. Some of the animals are so far back in the hills, they may take a week or more to reach the salt.

**Cobungra Homestead**









**Mick McNamara, Sen., a pioneer of Cobungra**



Feeding of salt is mostly routine and the benefits are two-fold; mustering is made easier and it quietens the cattle. Mountain bred cattle unused to yards, gates, dogs and humans with the accompanying smells, sounds and sights, are nervous, suspicious and frightened when first acquainted by them. Beasts yarded for the first time can become quite maddened with fear; hence the cry of s-a-l-t is frequently heard by the cattle and they come readily to accept the tasty portion.

Further preparations for the drive to the sales included the yarding and shoeing of the extra horses needed. Horses were always cold shod and those used for the drive had to be experienced, sure footed and sturdy. Drovers rode their own horses and as many as ten drovers were needed for the journey. Extra stock horses were required as well as five or six pack horses. Horses were not injured very often but accidents did happen. The extra stock horses allowed a change of mount when the drover's usual mount became tired.

Pack horses just had to be reliable and experienced, after all they were not led as a rule and they carried the provisions and supplies. They followed along with the cavalcade judging the width of their packs with skill and patience, negotiating the distance between rocks and trees. The packs placed on the horses needed to be very secure and well balanced and required all the skill and experience of the drover as a badly balanced pack could easily push a horse over the edge of the track and result in the death of the horse and loss of the pack. Ropes and halters were usually greenhide and made by the stockmen.

Food prepared for the trip was simple - flour, baking powder for Johnny cakes and damper, fresh and salted meat, tea sugar and treacle were the main fare. A couple of dogs accompanied each drover and killers were included in the mob to feed the dogs.

To protect the men from the intense cold of the mountain nights, drovers donned the famous Tasmanian Bluey made from pure wool and shower proof. Also the equally famous Thomas Evans oiled coat, long wide shouldered, light weight

and rain proof. Thick grey woollen blankets were carried and sometimes waist coats of tanned animal skins were worn. Leggings for protection of the drover's legs in the rough and rocky bush terrain were also worn.

In the period of this story there were no huts and conveniences at the stopping places, but later huts where dry wood could be left and some comfort for the men and dogs was available.

When all was prepared for the drive, the holding paddock gates were opened in the early hours of dawn and to the accompaniment of the bellowing cattle, the shouts and whip cracking of the stockmen and the barking of dogs, the cavalcade moved off on the eight day journey that was both hard on man and beast.

Good drovers always made camp before dark and never be caught making camp in the dark was number one rule of droving; so always a dawn start and camp before dark. Usually the drovers and their dogs bedded down between logs using whatever they could arrange near the camp fire. Tent fly or tent were sometimes used.

If it so happened that a mob had to be taken through short handed, the drovers were often forced to drop some cattle on the way. Such was the hospitality of the bush in those days that adjacent land holders would muster and hold those cattle until they could be picked up the following year.

The first two days journey was south then southwesterly from Cobungra's southern paddocks to the site of the Dog's Grave, a distance of twelve to thirteen miles between the Dinner Plain and Jim and Jack Creek. At the end of this and the next stretch, the stock were held in holding paddocks. Therefore accomodation paddocks were used. The second day the mob travelled to Matheison's Flats on the Dargo River south west of Mt. Berrigan.

The skill and patience of the drover was severely tested on the third day's journey to Phelan's at Dargo.



The first ten miles of the sixteen mile walk was along a bridle track approximately four and a half feet wide. In places the drop was sheer to the river some 1,000 feet below. This track has to be seen to be believed. As one driver said - "The cattle only went over once."

It was single file for the men and the cattle and trouble occurred when an aggressive beast turned to horn into the animal closely pressed behind. Unless the aggressor could be stopped quickly, one or more beasts would be forced over the side hurtling to the river below. In order to prevent trouble, the drovers endeavoured to split the mob evenly between them and with the aid of their intelligent dogs, kept the animals on the move until they reached the next small river flat.

John Sadler writing in the 1850's of his first ride in the area probably on a horse not used to the terrain said - "The view down into those awful depths at one's feet, range rising upon range striped with snow even at this late season (February) took one's breath away."

"Fearsome also for man and beast was the deep descent to the River Dargo below. The track was too steep for rider to remain in the saddle yet it had the appearance of having been much used. It was only by hanging on to the reins that we could get the horses to follow and then the fear that should the horses not be able to check their descent, we and the horses would be over the side."

He continued - "Ascending from the river towards Cobungra, the road was very much the same with this difference. The horses went first and we hung on to their tails. We reached the top in a series of short scrambles, horses and men stopping every few yards to recover their wind. Few men would care to undertake alone the journey described." This was the same route taken by the Cobungra drovers and in the same year.

The fourth day, the mob grazed along to Traill's or Long's at Waterford and at the end of the fifth day camp was made at Bulgoback Hotel. The sixth stage was an extremely long one which included travel along the Insolvent

Track (originally Anderson's Track) from Lee's Junction on the Dargo Road to Stockdale, the site of that night's camp.

Mr. John Sadler's comment on the Insolvent Track - "I took what was called the Insolvent Track, I found it a most abominable one over broken and stony hills at evry step."

The seventh stage brought the mob to Stratford. On the eighth day it reached Maffra. It is believed that the last time this arduous drive was undertaken was in 1932.

The Insolvent Track was opened up in 1881 at a cost of £1,500 and it's formation was the main reason why Dargo joined the Avon Shire. The road was kept free of fallen timber by Richard Lee. Some said the track was so called by out of luck diggers who wished to avoid the storekeepers at Iguana Creek to whom they owed money. Another version has it that the contractor working on the track went insolvent.

New comers today traversing the winding droving track that links Cobungra to Dargo will be suprised when they come upon a lonely grave north of the 4,800 feet Mt. Berrigan. A single grave covered with rocks gathered from roundabout and fenced neatly with lengths of logs. Close by is a monument.

Throughout Victoria are scattered many lonely graves. The last resting place of some unlucky traveller or of some piöneer killed by accident, unable perhaps to receive medical aid in time of illness. They were usually buried where they died.

This grave however, is the grave of neither traveller or pioneer. It is the grave of a cattle dog, proving that a dog can be valued as a true mate.

When John Giannarelli - a first generation Italian member of the Australian firm of Monumental Masons founded by his father - was prospecting in the Omeo Dargo district, his companion Mr. Jack Treasure, grandson of the pioneer family that founded Castleburn, told him the story of the

Dog's Grave as he knew it. In a moment of perception, John Giannarelli determined that the pioneers and their dogs should be memorialised in stone.

Accordingly on his return to Fitzroy, he caused a block of Hârcourt granite to be shaped, engraved and lettered as a tribute to the men and women of the past and their dogs.

Fortunately at that time, he was able to engage the services of an overseas artist whose name he is unable to recall and who has since returned to Yugoslavia. Using a diamond pointed engraving tool, the unknown artist has so beautifully engraved the portrait of a kelpie dog and beneath that has depicted a lonely bushman boiling his billy while sorrowing for his dog.

The picture was appropriately suggested by Fredrick McCubbin's well known painting "Down on his Luck", the original of which is in the Western Australian State Library. The two engravings are set into the granite.

The monument stands some four feet high on its base and was conveyed to the site via Dargo and on May 1975 it was unveiled. Attending the ceremony were Avon and Omeo Shire Council Members, members of Stratford and Omeo Historical Societies, together with groups of cattlemen and their families, 45 people in all.

With the assistance of the Forestry Commission Staff, mostly all were driven in four wheel drive vehicles across the Dargo River (no bridge), past the old Dargo Cemetery where Peter Meehan was buried and past the famous walnut tree which covers a quarter of an acre and along a forestry road only accessible by four wheel drive to the site and to the brief unveiling ceremony.

The unveiling was performed jointly by Avon President, Mr. Gordon Hughes and Mr. Louis Pendergast, President of Omeo Shire. At the time of the unveiling, it was not certain in which shire the monument actually stood; however it was confirmed later to be in the Avon Shire almost on the border of Avon and Omeo.



On the left of the monument, is a small slab of granite carrying a verse as a tribute to "Boney" :-

He served none else but Peter Meehan  
His master and his friend:  
A comradeship wove of the bush  
To last until the end.  
Mute faith in one: a friendship born  
In rugged ranges where  
A loneliness prevailed the scene -  
Just man and dog to share.

They shared each others humble way,  
The ways of bush lore treading  
From dawn to dusk, through wilderness  
Where cattle pads went treading  
Beneath Australia's sunny skies,  
Beneath the tree ferns bending  
Along the ranges, by the stream -  
A way of life transcending.

Until the end, the bitter end,  
Though dumb, in canine way  
He wove a story of the bush  
That we respect today  
He served to mould a history -  
though little was he known  
He rests beside the mountain stream  
beneath these slabs of stone.

S.J. TREASURE.  
DARGO. 1969.

To the right is the original dog's grave. A concave growth of Black Sally makes a fitting backdrop to the group and a short distance away, a creek gurgles continuously.

The story as told at the unveiling was that Peter Meehan camping at the site awakened one morning and found his dog 'Boney' dead at the door of the hut. Peter accorded his dog a careful burial and for over 100 years the site was known in the locality as the Dog's Grave. However, researching this story amongst the Cobungra station folk leads one to believe that it is very doubtful if this is the correct version of the story of the Dog's Grave.

Mr. Charles McNamara, alive and well today, grandson of the owner of Cobungra at the time of the story, asserts his story is the true one. His story is supported by many Omeo folk and generally has been accepted down the years by the Cobungra story tellers. He states - "There never was a hut at the time of the death of the animal. The dog was not 'Boney' but 'Angus', not an Australian Kelpie but a stumple-tailed Smithfield. The drover who owned the dog was Johnny Crisp, well known in Omeo where he kept a hotel and later on was a cordial manufacturer in Omeo. Peter Meehan, John Crisp, Ned Gray, Ned Gunn, Tom Worcester and John Tolland, all Cobungra station men were mustering in the area when Angus picked up a bait that had been carried by a dingo.

The dog died; Crisp buried his dog with much care, placed two layers of stones over the plot and erected a fence with bush timber. On a piece of bark he wrote the following verse-

Once he came across the plain  
Wild cattle to surprise  
Now he's slain  
By Strychnine laid  
And never more to rise.

Whether the facts have been confused with the passage of time or which of the stories is the true one matters little.

What does matter is that the memory of the pioneers and their dogs have been perpetuated in a fitting manner at a fitting site.

The Giannarelli monument is a tribute not only to drovers and their dogs but also honours the early pioneers. The history of East Gippsland comprises of three streams of adventures.

The expeditions of Lhotsky 1834, McKillop 1835, and McMillan 1839-'40 led to an influx of settlers from the Monaro. Strezleckie's report in 1840 encouraged the Port Phillip and Van Dieman Land people to enter via Port Albert and in the 1850's the lure of gold attracted the miners from the Ovens Valley.

The law passed in 1850 made Victoria an independent state. Prior to this Gippsland was under the direction of New South



Wales. Omeo was then the Gateway to Gippsland.

The drovers and pioneers of course depended on their horses. Truly the horse and dog just have to be synonymous with the sheep and cattle industry, the wealth of which has virtually built our cities and given Australia the prosperity envied by other countries of the world, and insufficiently appreciated by the average Australian of today.

Within the archives of the Avon Shire are many stories documented of horses and their feats. From the 'Stratford Shire History' - The horses opened up Gippsland and they were particularly good horses. The best stallions able to be imported by the New South Wales Government laid the foundations that eventually made the world 'Waler' respected the world over.

Not a lot of stories of these wiry grass fed horses have been recorded but one such feat was that of Jimmy the Spaniard, a stockman working on the Boisdale Run. He rode his ordinary stock horse from the Boisdale Homestead to Port Albert with a message, a distance of 140 miles and was back in Boisdale within 24 hours.

In October 1844, P. Coloe of Dargo in order to telegraph for a doctor, rode to Stratford, covering the distance of 52 miles in 4 hours 40 minutes. A 50 mile ride on the same horse in one day was not uncommon.

There was no mail delivery to Stratford or beyond until 1858. Mail was delivered by trading vessel to Port Albert. For people in Dargo wanting to post or collect mail, a ride of some 200 miles was necessary.

No doubt too much was often asked of a horse but poor horsemanship rarely paid off as many a man found to his cost when faced with a long walk home.

One wonders just what were the hopes and dreams of the early pioneer, for many that's all there was. The pioneers expected life to be hard so they suffered many hardships, the reward of which we are reaping today.

'Theirs were the hearts to dare.'

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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

Following the unveiling of the monument at the site of the 'Dog's Grave' Mr. Ron Soulsby, Avon Shire Secretary asked the Stratford and District Historical to research to record as factual, as records permitted the story for the Shire Archives.

Our Shire is rich in early Gippsland History and the Historical Society works to preserve and record as accurately as possible the history of the early pioneers. The interest and assistance given by the people of Gippsland makes this possible.

The Society pays a special tribute to Miss Flora Johns who commenced research, travelled widely and wrote the story. Also gratefully acknowledged is the assistance of Mr. O.S. Green in checking research, rewriting and editing. It is doubtful but for the assistance and first hand knowledge of men such as Vince Phelan of Dargo, Don Richardson of Cobungra Station, Charlie McNamara and Carson McRae Omeo and R. Fulton (chief Forestry Officer Swifts Creek) and other Forestry Officers in the area that this would have been written.

Angus McMillan the discoverer of Gippsland was the really first pioneer of the route and strange but true, road work he and his men carried out to make the route safer for cattle, horses and men, is still effective and can be seen today.

The Society wishes to express sincere thanks to the following for assistance so willingly given:-

Mrs H. Cross, Messrs R. Spreadborough (Dept. of Lands and Survey), Alan Marshall, Jack Hyett, John Giannarelli, Angus and Robertson.

Sources:- The Gippsland Times 1975; The Gap 1963; Hoofs and Horns 1952; Walkabout Dec. 1949; Land; Echoes From The Mountains, A.M. Pearson, M.B.E. Omeo Shire Council 1975.

John Lee.  
President.

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