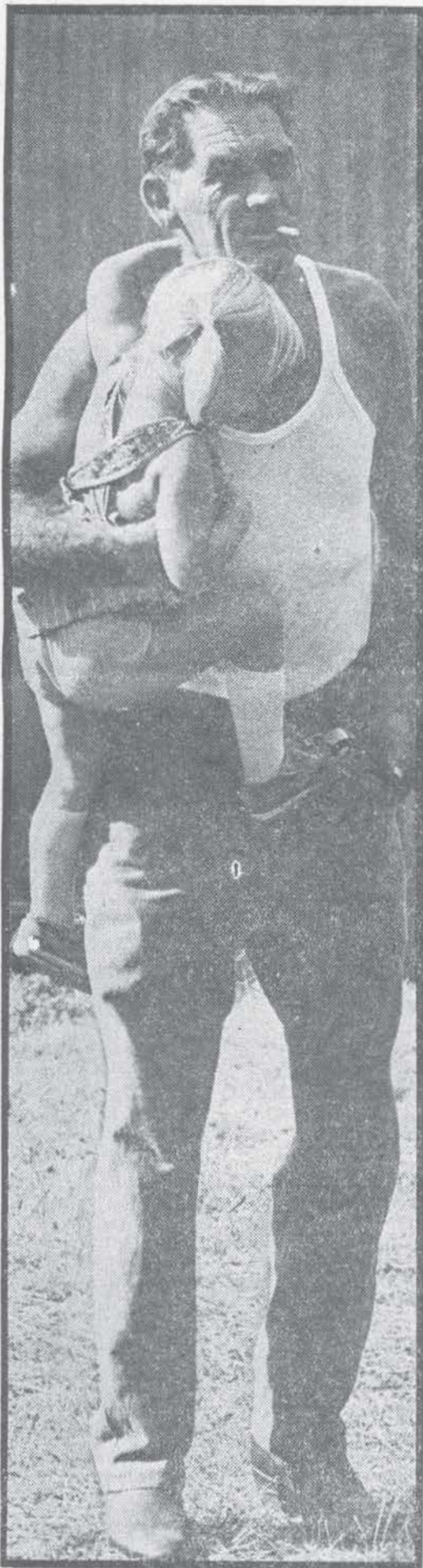


From RICHARD WILLIS  
Pictures: GRAHAM WELSH



Don Kneebone has seen a lifetime in the cattle business but his young companion, Patricia Willis, may have to leave the land.

**T**HEY came down from the high country and from the scorched plains . . .

And they pitched camp in the foothills of north-east Victoria to strengthen the bond that for the moment draws the loners inexorably together: the fight for survival.

The cattlemen are fighting to keep the cattle runs they have used for the past 120 years.

They claim that their breed is slowly dying because their sons cannot take over the uneconomic form of cattle breeding they have kept going after their forefathers started the cattle runs last century.

They claim that conservationists who want the highlands to become a national park are encroaching on their livelihoods.

Last weekend in a secluded valley on the Rose River the cattlemen held their annual barbecue and shindig, a prelude to their annual meeting held in Melbourne in July.

Guest of honor was the Minister for Agriculture, Mr Smith.

More than 300 people gathered in the thick bush country 40 km. south-east of Myrtleford on the cattle run known as Bennies, in the shadow of Mt. Typo.

**W**ITH 14 large kegs of beer, assorted other drinks, five sides of beef, 800 sausages and 600 chops the shindig got under way with a play, ballads, poems and horse-shoeing demonstration.

The Mountain District Cattlemen's Association has 130 members and was formed three years ago to "stick up for our rights to keep the grazing land for our cattle — land we have run for 120 years."

According to Ian MacKay, a former cattleman now retired in Wangaratta, not many of the 300 at the shindig were "real" cattlemen.

Mr MacKay said: "There aren't too many of us left, a few on Bogong and Dargo High Plains, and others scattered around the mountains are all that's left."

"There is no future in cattle and our sons are not in a position to take on a job that pays only \$20 a week."

Brendon Fitzgerald, of "Shannon Dale" east of Omeo, said the association would hold its executive council meeting in Melbourne in July at about the same time the Land Conservation Council makes its recommendations on what it believes should happen to the highlands.

Mr Fitzgerald said if the government turned the highlands into a national park the mountain cattlemen would be forced to sell off most of their cattle at ridiculously low prices because they would have no land on which to graze them.

He said: "The cattlemen form a roster system to guard the cattle and keep them away from the villages, like Falls Creek village, and before the cattle are allowed into the mountains the Soil Conservation Department, Land Department, SEC, and three members of our association inspect the country to determine a day when the cattle are allowed on the runs."

"The cattle go up in December and graze in the country until the winter."

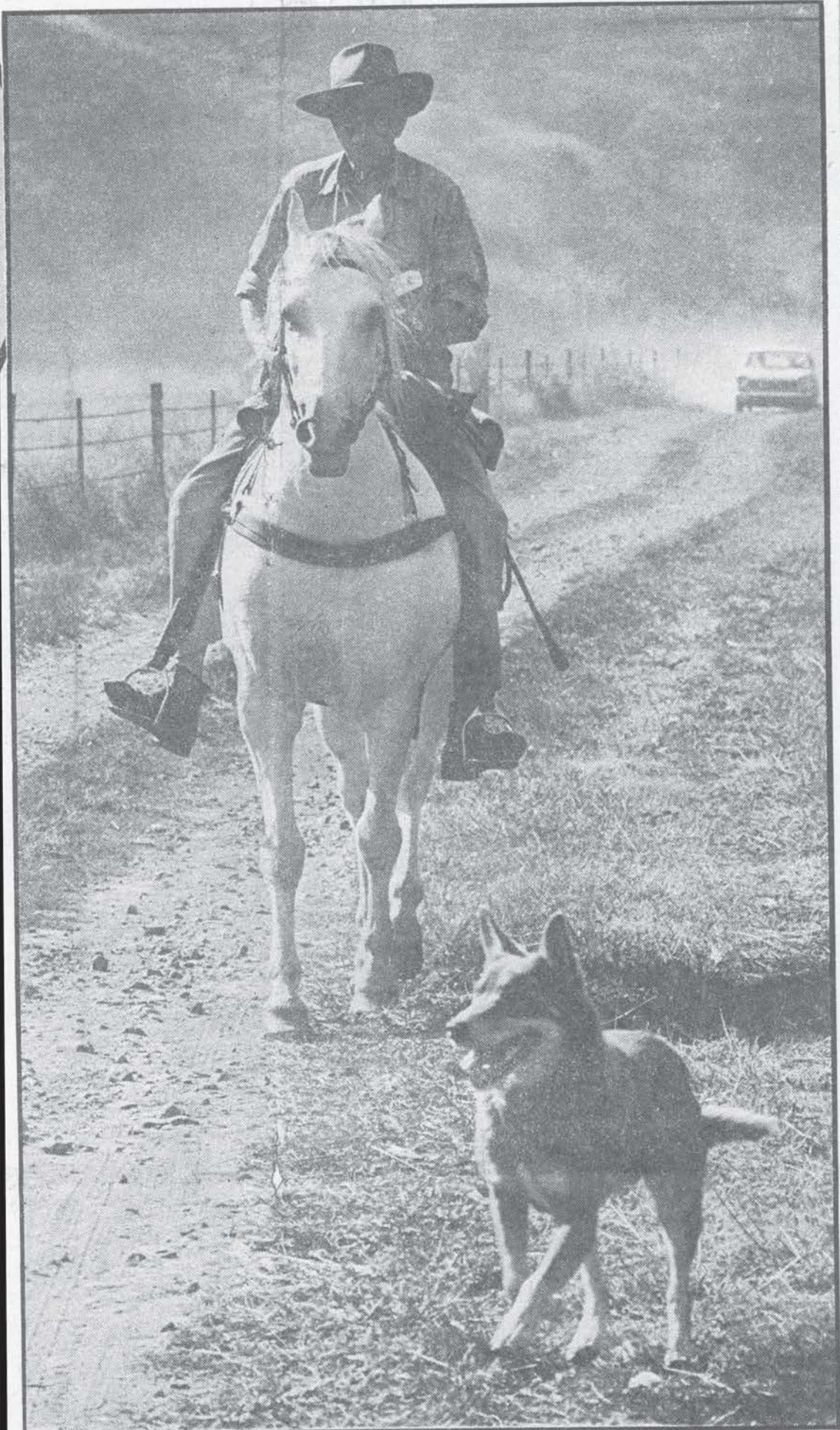
Mr Fitzgerald said he felt the breed of mountain cattlemen was slowly dying because of the economy and the fact that sons cannot afford to take over from their fathers.

**D**URING the weekend this strange breed of Australians forgot their problems as they joined with the Minister and entertained themselves long into the night.

Mr Smith said he had driven from his home at Camperdown to attend the "cattlemen's shindig" and was staying at a local property.

Mr Smith was slightly caught off guard by the cattlemen when he was manoeuvred into taking part in one of their skits.

• Our sons are not in a position to take  
on a job that pays only \$20 a week. •



One of the "Old Timers", Lyle McCready, vice-president of the Mountain Cattlemen's Association arrives from Dandongdale.