

• LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

“Retain and promote the mountain showpiece”

I have had a lifetime of experience of the Victorian Alps — for instance, it was my party which discovered the Cleve Cole dug-out in 1936. (A reminder that the great cattleman, Wally Ryder, who was leading the party, was the one called upon for any search and rescue in his area).

It was the facility of the cattlemen's tracks and huts which made early ski touring possible.

I have no vested interest whatsoever in cattle grazing in the Alps. In my semi-retirement I became a small “selector” with a few cattle and I now have experience of cattle habits.

Basically I am one of the “greenies” and I have become even more “conservation conscious” with time, and a participant both in re-forestation and the re-cycling of waste.

In 1978 I carefully studied the Land Conservation Council (L.C.C.) proposed recommendations for the Alpine area. (May I comment that I found the recommendations and the maps complex to follow, even though I had been to most of the areas outlined — how could someone not familiar really comprehend them?)

In my submissions I opted for multiple purpose use and I did not object to the Government implementations at the time. It is beyond my comprehension that the Government's decisions were but false promises and that another

exhaustive inquiry with public comment etc. is to be held so soon.

I do not believe that the Howqua River, Bluff, and King Billy area should be a National Park.

*It is the highest Alpine area nearest Melbourne. Professionally guided tours, such as Mountain Trail Safaris and High Country Nordic Ski Tours, are the only safe means whereby the ordinary people of Melbourne (including the conservationists) can have “all season” access to enjoy the Alpine region and the Wonnangatta-Moroka National Park.

*Alpine areas were subject to multiple purpose use for over 40,000 years. Aboriginal tribes used the areas for the ‘Bogong Moth’, game, the making of stone tools, etc. — and with the Aborigines their ubiquitous preventative fires.

*Can the L.C.C. guarantee to me that the banning of cattle grazing will not damage the area? As I look out my window I can see that the opposite hill has been transversely terraced by cattle tracks, thus preventing erosion. I can arrange for the L.C.C. to visit a timber area, once crossed by horsemen

— however, without grazing, now so overgrown with scrub, even a dog couldn't penetrate it.

I recall Black Friday as well as Ash Wednesday and have vivid memories of ferocious electrical storms and lightning strikes in Alpine areas.

I believe the Howqua River, Bluff and King Billy areas should specially and specifically be retained to include cattle grazing.

Since the 1978 recommendations two developments here must be mentioned.

(i) The growing nation-wide interest in Australian history and heritage has ‘spilled over’ into Mansfield - the old police stables are to be re-situated and reconstructed; the Mansfield Historical Society has been reformed and Pioneer Day recently celebrated - at the Mansfield Primary School.

(ii) “The Man From Snowy River” was filmed in the area, assisted by local cattlemen. The film, the horsemanship and the scenery created national and international interest.

Surely it would be apt and unique to have the surrounding high country here kept, developed and preserved as a living heritage of the seven score years of the mountain cattlemen's pioneering tradition - original cattle trails kept in good order, cattlemen's huts restored to original condition, cattle kept grazing on the high plains - a picturesque living historical model of our past.

In other words I am suggesting retaining and promoting as a “show piece” the mountain cattle industry around the Howqua, Bluff and King Billy area above Mansfield in the same way that the Bendigo and Ballarat areas reconstructed the old gold mining industry to preserve these segments of our heritage.

I, for one, could see high country, as I first saw it with grazing cattle, 50 years ago.

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