

Bellbirds, bush and Billy Cartner

BILLY Cartner (pictured back page) now 89, lives alone on his property of about 280 hectares in his hand built residence on the banks of the Mitchell River, a short distance downstream from the junction of the Dargo and Wonnangatta Rivers.

Billy lives today on land selected by his father late last century, having emigrated from England in the goldrush days.

The property is sited in a delightful setting on a large sweeping bend of the river with steep hillsides over the river to the west, south and north of Billy's huts, sheds and stock yards.

His father cleared the land, planted an orchard and ran sheep and cattle,

By LEO COFFEY

to help support a large family, in addition to his main love of prospecting for gold.

Billy helped his father in digging tunnels for removal of the gravel to sluice for gold and continued on with this for most of his life.

Today Billy lives in a hut which he built himself mostly from slab palings he split himself, and he tends his flock of 154 sheep as well as a mob of 40 Hereford cattle.

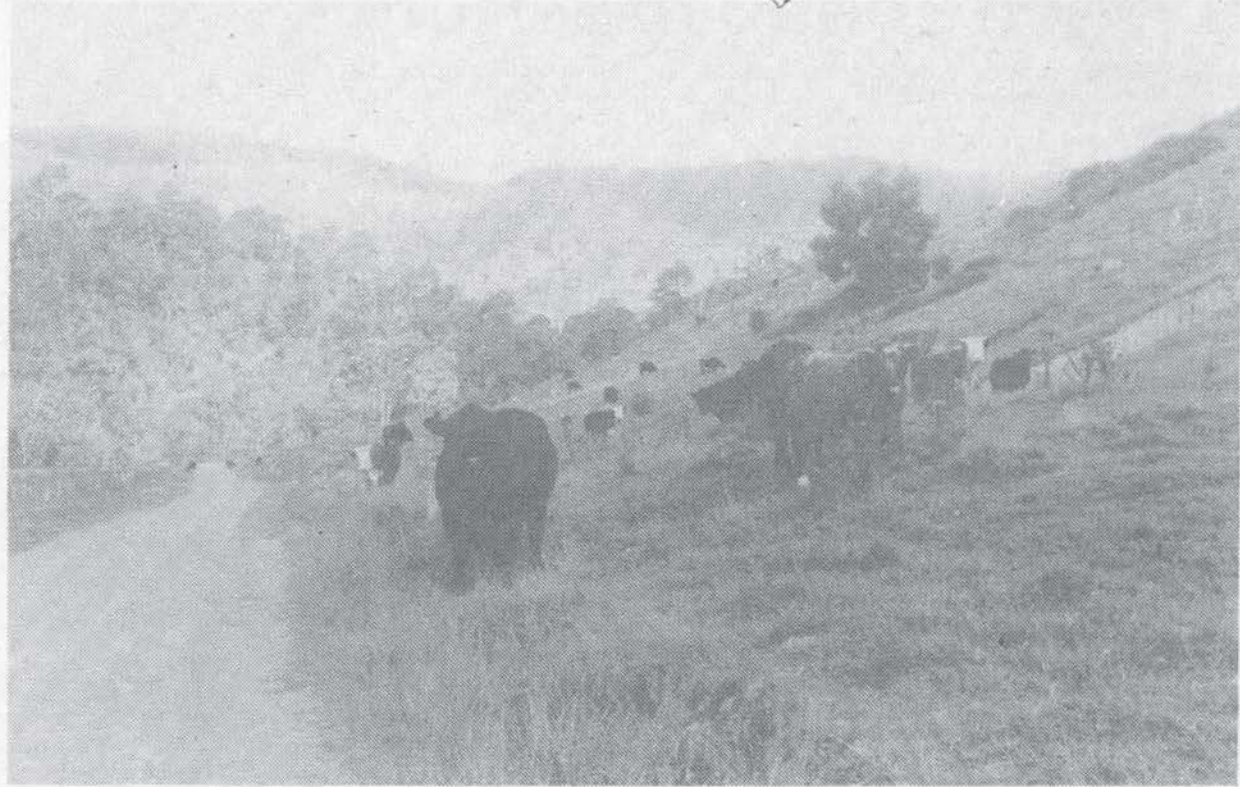
Also on the property at the time of our visit were a dozen horses and ponies owned by a friend and neighbor of Billy's and all of which were extremely quiet coming right up to the hut where

Billy talked to them and patted them, each obviously enjoying one another's company.

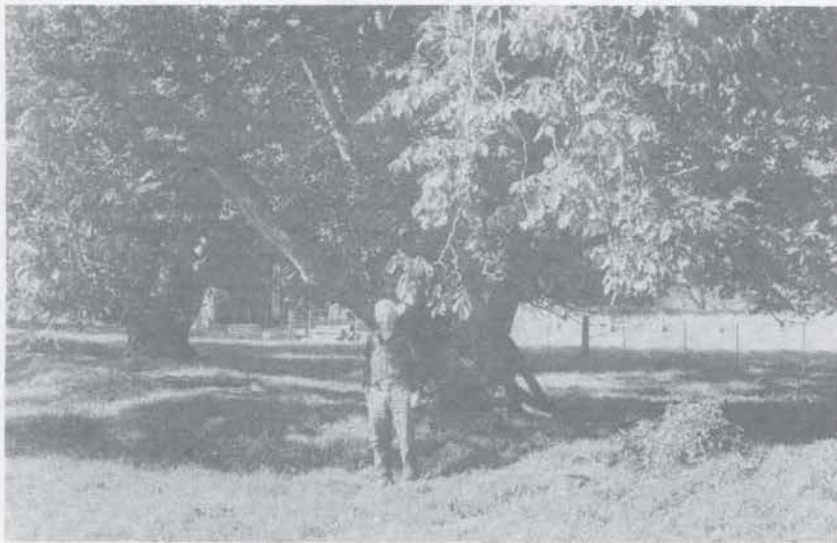
Billy also tends several bee hives which he had "robbed" and extracted the honey from only a couple of days before our visit.

As we bade farewell, he was busy splitting some wood for his open fire as the nights even in autumn can be cold.

Although Billy lives in an isolated area, he apparently has many visitors, mostly neighbors and friends who call in to see him and enjoy a yarn and the peaceful setting, only disturbed by the singing of the bellbirds which abound in the trees along the river bank.



CATTLE graze peacefully on the Dargo high plains.



VINCE Phelan stands beneath walnut trees that are over 100 years old.



CHRISTA Mitchell on the road with cattle mustered from the Dargo High Plains.

Dargo's hospitality

By Leo Coffey

ANYONE who visits Dargo in the north Gippsland hills cannot help but be affected by its beauty, history, isolation and the hospitality of its people.

When two representatives of the Gippsland Farmer visited the area in late April it was the first visit for one and a return visit for the other.

Following a good season and recent rains, pastures were green and lush, and cattle and sheep in top condition, and the walnut trees were providing a bountiful crop.

The winds of change blow gently in a place like Dargo but nevertheless they are there.

Perhaps the biggest change since my last visit to Dargo is in the road which is now sealed for most of its length, with many bad bends cut out and extensive roadworks underway on the last remaining bad section.

Renowned in its early days for its gold, with rich fields in nearby places such as Grant and the Crooked River, it has certainly been known for its top quality cattle right back to the first white settlement of Gippsland.

It would appear the first settlers in the area were workmen on an Angus McMillan cattle station, but the first big impetus to the district rapidly followed the discovery of gold.

Vince Phelan, now 72 years old and whose grandfather came to Dargo in 1862 has a wealth of knowledge about the history of the district, and I am indebted to him for much of following recollections.

The Dargo area was well settled before the

gold petered out at Grant and many of the miners moved to Dargo where it was much easier to feed a family with the soil and climate much kinder as practically nothing would grow at Grant.

The streams were full of blackfish and children were encouraged to catch one only so as to conserve the resource, but later when trout were introduced they killed out the blackfish.

Cattle and horses came in with McMillan and after him it was McIntosh who bred horses in a big way for the Indian horse trade — at one stage he was said to have 60 stallions on his properties at Dargo, Bushy Park and Bon Accord.

In the early days all cattle and horses were walked out for sale at Maffra with late last century one sale being of three days duration.

Pigs and sheep were walked out to the railhead at Briagolong with the pigs following a maize trail while sheep were walked out for sales mainly at Stratford and occasionally at sale.

In the years up to 1900 most of the farming was growing of feed crops along rich river and creek flats to feed the settlers and of cattle production with some dairying, planting of orchards including walnut trees with many trees still growing for over 100 years.

Small numbers of sheep had come in, however, one of the first large mobs was of 1000 ewes brought into Dargo from NSW by the Phelan family in 1904.

Sheep and cattle numbers have tended to fluctuate over the years according to the economics

of the industries with sheep numbers going up in the 1940's and 1950's and history is now repeating itself with many people currently increasing sheep numbers.

Castleburn for instance have recently built a new wool shed.

Dargo is renowned for its walnuts, being one of the premier growing areas in Australia, probably mainly due to rich soil on the creek and river flats.

However the market for walnuts is somewhat limited and they tend to be sold mainly to Gippsland supermarkets, stores and shops.

In the past Dargo was also an important certified bean seed growing area, this trade also having petered out.

Most people would know of Dargo for the publicity over recent years to the high plains, mountain cattle and Hereford cattle and they are all of vital importance to Dargo now, as they have been over the past 150 years.

The Herefords were making their way down from the plains on the day we visited Dargo and we encountered one mob driven by Christa and David Mitchell on the road east from Castleburn. The cattle were in great condition and in transit to winter agistment on the Red Gum Plains.

One other change to Dargo has been the closure of the sawmill which was not good news for the township, although there are still many logs and much timber stacked at the mill site and logs are still being drawn from the hills.

Dargo is a beautiful part of the country and its attractions certainly warrant a visit there.

Store a focal point Caravan park in spacious setting

CRAIG and Sandy Milner have renovated and enlarged the Dargo store since they bought it from Rob Christie four years ago.

It is now a large spacious store stocking a wide range of goods from groceries to ammunition, fishing gear, horse shoes and nails, dog foods, maps and historical books and naturally Dargo walnuts.

Only petrol and ice-cream are delivered to this isolated area which means trips by Craig to

Bairnsdale, Sale or Traralgon for supplies.

Bread and the mail comes in three times a week — on Monday's, Wednesday's and Friday's.

According to well known Dargo identity Vince Phelan the Dargo Store of today is on, or adjacent to the site of the Dargo courthouse.

About 1923 Albert Stout bought the courthouse and converted it into a store with Myrtle Guy the manageress for some years.

Albert Stout apparently had the first truck to cart goods in and out of Dargo with an Englishman named Salmon the driver. Later the carrying business was run by Rupert Guy for the best part of 50 years.

The store was run for some years by Di Guy who married Sandy Traill who bought the business and ran it with the post office and mail service to Stratford.

Sandy sold to George Ballantyne a first class tennis player and official at Kooyong for many years.

Later owners recalled by Vince Phelan were Felix Hude who died recently, Austie and Jessie Hurley, and more recently Robert Christie.

Sited conveniently opposite the hotel, the Dargo Store today continues to be what it has been over the past 65 years — one of the main focal points both for the locals as well as visitors to the area.



WONNANGATTA Caravan Park is run by David and Dianne Guy and is situated on the banks of the

Wonnangatta River at Waterford on the road to Dargo. The park has sixteen powered sites of a total of eighteen sites and is set on a five hectare block with the latest of modern facilities including showers, toilets, laundry and gas BBQ available.

The park provides a great focal point for fishing, bush walking, gold prospecting, visits to the snow or sightseeing.

It is indeed, a glorious spot to get away from it all.



GIPPSLAND FARMER MAY 1989
STRATFORD BRANCH
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BILLY Cartner, one of Dargo's oldest residents lives a lifestyle that many would envy, in a peaceful setting by the river, with bellbirds, the bush and his animals for company. Read his story and others about the history of Dargo in this issue's Town of the Month feature on pages 18 and 19.



Treasure's bull offering

THE Treasure family have been breeding Hereford cattle and running them on the Dargo high plains for over 100 years. They are driven up

to the plains in the spring, then mustered and driven down again in the autumn.

As the Treasure family has grown so have the

cattles' winter pastures.

They graze as far as Tawonga to the north and Stratford to the south and much further north, south, east or west if the autumn break has not occurred in the winter country.

One of Emmanuel and Emily Treasure's grandsons Jim founded a Hereford stud in the 1940's.

Originally Jim was breeding bulls for family and friends and in 1973 he commenced an annual bull sale in June, yarding up to 60 bulls, although in later years he limited numbers to around 40 bulls.

In 1975 Jim sold a line of 50 cows to his daughter Christa and son-in-law David and from 1976 onwards Christa and David have sold bulls in conjunction with Jim at the annual sale.

Jim's hobby is work, and breeding quality

Hereford cattle is his hobby too!

He has purchased sires from most major studs including South Boorook, Ardno, Morelands, Lowanna, Mawarra and Injemira.

The ideals of Castleburn Stud are to breed good, fleshy, up-standing herd bulls which can breed a line of top Hereford calves and also breed a quick maturing vealer for the local trade beef market.

This year's sale will be conducted on Wednesday, June 14 at Bairnsdale saleyards, commencing 1 p.m., when 40 bulls will be offered.

Inspection on sale day is from 10 a.m. or beforehand by appointment, phone Jim Treasure (051) 57 1226, Christa or David Mitchell (051) 57 1471 or agent Phil Rourke of Dalgety Farmers, Bairnsdale (051) 52 3001.