

Graziers take path of defiance

Natasha Robinson

IN Victoria's Alpine National Park, a handful of grazier families are mounting a last stand.

A day after Victoria's Environment Minister John Thwaites visited the area to trumpet a new plan to protect the pristine snowgum country, the graziers rounded up their cows and marched them across the imaginary line that divides national park from state park in a show of political defiance.

"They try to portray us as environment vandals," said Charlie Lovick. "But this country's in safer hands with us than it is with the National Parks".

During his visit this week, Mr Thwaites announced the culling of hundreds of wild goats in the National Park by volunteers from the Sporting Shooters Association. But the Government shied away from expanding the cull to include herds of brumbies also damaging large areas of the park. Goats and brumbies are responsible for much of the \$660 million in damage caused by feral animals across the nation.

At the protest group's base camp above Sheepyard Flat on the Howqua River, Mr Lovick, a fifth-generation grazier, saw the protesters off yesterday.

The group of four men and

two women will drive several small mobs of cattle along stock routes across the 660,000ha national park, which stretches from near Mansfield in the east to the NSW border in the west.

Although the Government allows 10,000 head of cattle to graze in the state forest nearby, it has banned cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park since June.

The Australian Heritage Council, in a report released last August, found alpine grazing in the park posed "a major threat to natural heritage values".

But Mr Lovick believes the environmental effects of cattle grazing on the bush have been grossly overestimated.

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