



DON KNEEBONE

WHERE THE
GIANT
EUCALYPTUS
GROW
and
Other Verse

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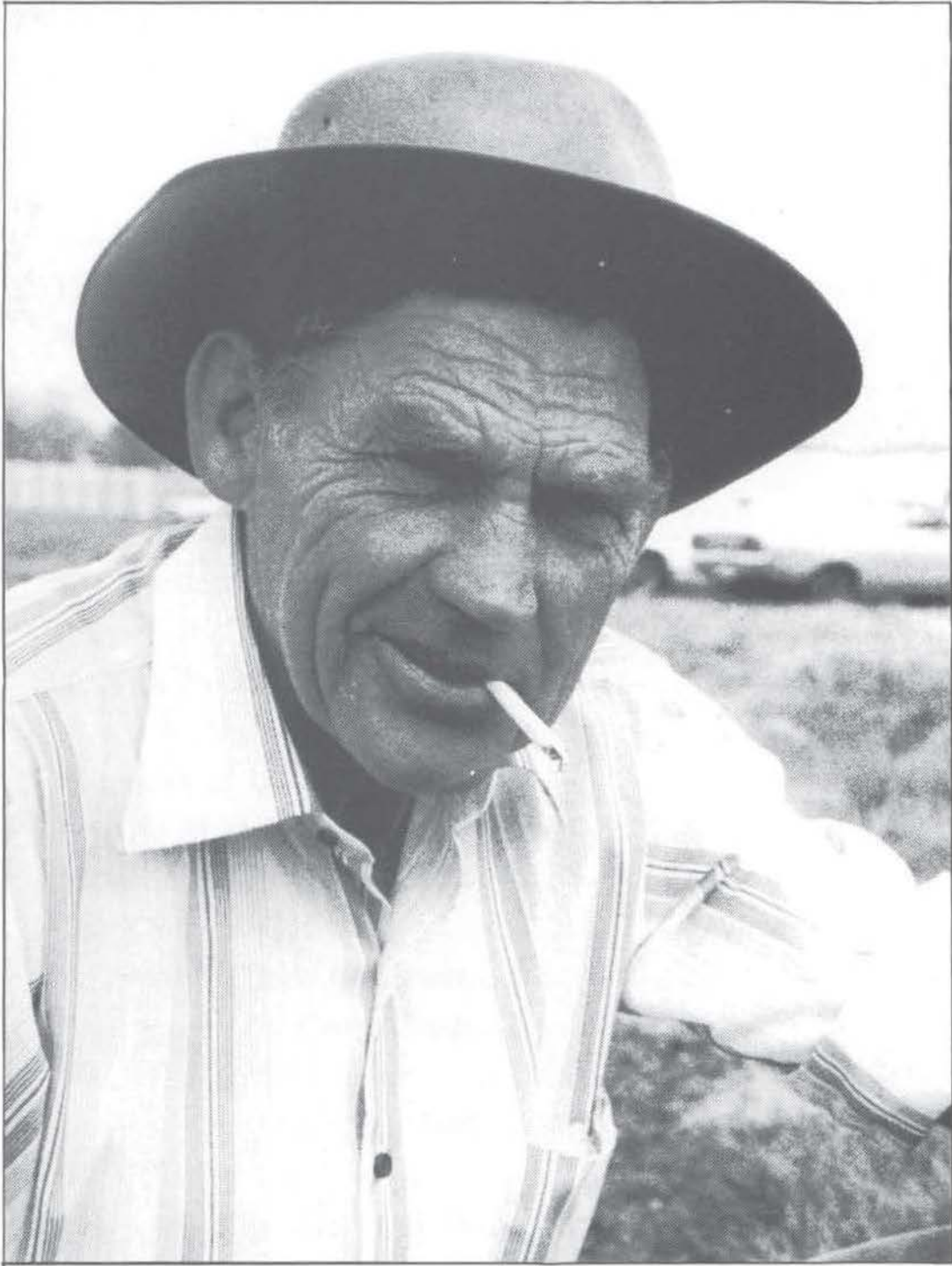
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This book is dedicated to all with a free spirit who, like Don, loved his country.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is a great pleasure to be able to make available to the people who enjoyed Don's poetry, this book of some of his best work.

Those of you who knew Don will understand that some poems which were in his memory only are gone forever.

My sincere thanks go to Debbie and Linda for their help.

To Lyle for his introduction, and to all who gave encouragement to me to go on with Don's book, my thanks.

Dana C. Kneebone

INTRODUCTION

D.A. Kneebone, known throughout the Mountain Country as Don, was born at Beechworth in September 1922.

One of a family of ten, he went to school at Whorouly. His grandfather, Albert Kneebone, was the first white child born in Victoria's Ovens Valley, at Whorouly.

Early cattle handling experience was gained on his father's property, but he preferred to work Clydesdale teams. Developing from this, he began to breed and train stock-horses. In the mountain country he had a reputation as a top horseman.

From his early teens, at every opportunity, he handled mountain cattle, becoming familiar with Alpine grazing areas from Mount Bogong to Mansfield. Throughout this area he was a noted bushman, whose opinions and assistance were valued by all cattlemen.

During long rides through his beloved bush and mountain country his poetry came to him, and during happy times around the campfire at night with his mates. Because of his powers of observation and remarkable memory, he was an interesting story teller of incidents and experiences.

Over the years he gave considerable time to visiting schools to share with children his love and appreciation of the bush.

Lyle McCready
Life Member MCAV

TRIBUTES TO DON

Mr Kneebone is to me a spirit left by all the people he talked about. He was a feeling about him which is actually terrific. He can actually get through to you with history. In his way, he talks in poem and story.

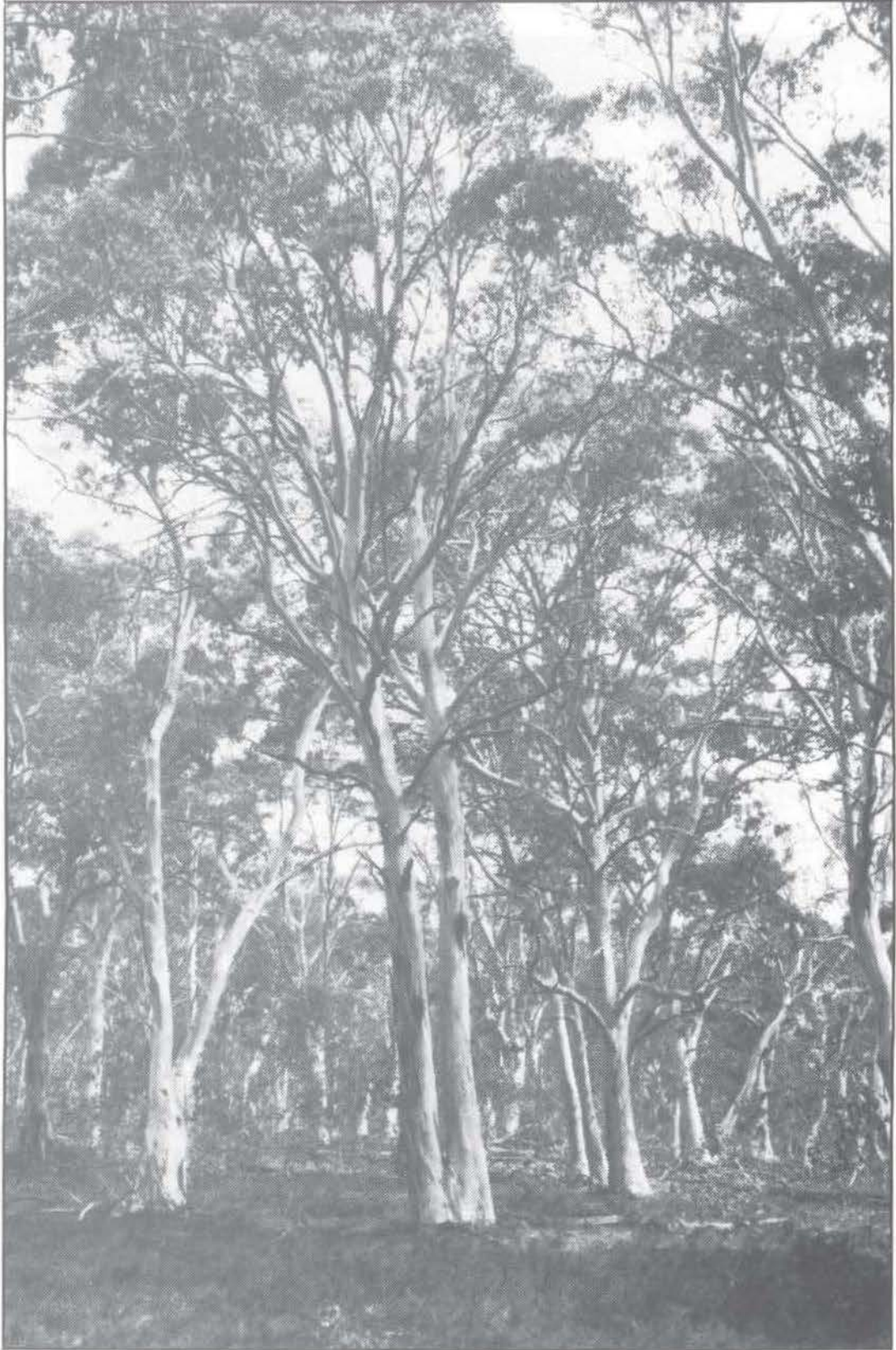
Mr Kneebone has a way to find happiness, freedom. I think he's a man with a good life to remember. He has a dream, which he could enjoy and fulfil. It is easy to think he could be a guardian of life in the bush. Mr Kneebone isn't a person but a wisp of happiness which he expresses simply.

*From
Dianne Simpson*



*I like Mr Kneebone because he tells poems
just like no one was there. He is just like
a person who died and came back to life.
It is fun to see a real good man.*

*From
Gary Hayes*





WHERE THE GIANT EUCALYPTUS GROW

I love to ride down the mountain side,
As the crimson sun sinks low,
Watch the shadows creep and little streams weep,
Where the giant eucalyptus grow.

Feel the soft tips of the wattle
Brush gently over your face,
And the old pony knows we've turned homeward,
Even he starts to quicken his pace.

The dew drops sparkle on the bracken,
And settle down on the grass,
Fluffy-tailed rabbits pop into their holes,
And out again after you pass.

I like to hear the hobble chains
Jingling on the pack.
For those sounds to me are music
When I ride on the cattle track.

Yes, the bush becomes a theatre,
And the mountains become a stage
All the birds and animals are the players
They know every line on the page.

And let's educate the children
To see Nature at its best
There'll be no need for national park rangers,
Our heritage will do the rest.

I love to ride down the mountain side,
As the crimson sun sinks low.
Watch the shadows creep and little streams weep,
Where the giant eucalyptus grow.

For I love Australia's bushland,
The animals, birds and flowers,
I love the snow-capped mountains,
That rise like giant towers.

I love all the little rivers,
That sparkle and gleam,
And dance and play and wind their way,
Down to join the bigger stream.

Then there comes a ray of sun,
There's blossom everywhere,
For the cold wintery months are done,
And spring is in the air.

The jackasses laugh, the magpies sing,
And the bush becomes alive,
Little bees go out in the wind,
To bring pollen to their hive.

I often rest neath the shady tree,
When the summery sun grows hot,
For the good Lord made the bush for me,
And there seems to be nothing He forgot.

I love to sit and watch the rainbow,
That follows the autumn showers.
The magnificent blending of colours,
Lingers in one's mind for hours.

I've often been told there's a pot of gold
At the rainbow's end,
But I've never found where it reaches the ground,
It seems to be always just around the bend.

So I might die without a cent,
But money never worries me.
For I found beauty wherever I went
And my wealth is the giant eucalyptus tree.





THE TRACK TO WONNANGATTA

It was on the silent banks of the Buffalo River
Beyond the Gentle Annie
Three men waited for the crack of dawn.
There was Frank and Vic and Dannie.

You could hear the bush birds call, the dingoes howl,
And hear the wallabies scatter
But nothing would hold them from their path
They were bound for Wonnangatta.

The jackass sounded the starting time,
To the black cockies' mournful cry,
They were perched in that old white gum
Once blazed by Billy Wye.

The horses were restless as they munched their chaff,
They sensed what lay ahead.
A stiff hard climb up the spur
Onto the Great Divide,
Where the scrub bent down and blocked their path,
Or raked them on their side.

With a hearts as big as an anvil,
And as hard as the rock they tread,
You could hear the packhorse scramble
As a branch breaks overhead.

Down the slopes into Rylie's Creek
Never a horse would falter,
Hobbled round the camp at night,
Or tethered on the halter.



Wonnangatta Station

Then up once more they climbed the spur,
Heading for the gap,
That took them through the rugged range,
On the final lap.

Though saddle-sore and weary,
Nothing seemed to matter,
For far down there in the valley below
Flowed the Wonnangatta.

They crossed her at the head of the stream,
Where the waters were fast and deep,
Scrambled up the other side,
The banks so slippery and steep.

Then down the track to the old slab shack
And what a great sensation,
As the men threw their saddles down
On Wonnangatta Station.





THE DROVERS' BLUES

We were droving up north, for what it was worth,
Just down off the new England range.
The wagon wheels squeaking, the black billy leaking,
Even the old blue dog had the mange.

The cattle were poor, we were both saddle sore,
And things weren't going real well.
So I said to me mate, 'We'll make a drover's gate,
And give the whole damn mob a spell'.

So we poke 'em along to the billabong,
Where the cockie's fences are slack.
With the old cart tyre we raised up the wire,
Then turned the leaders back.

'You've done that before, I feel quite sure,'
My mate said, 'Haven't you Jack?'
'Many a time,' I said, 'at a dry river bed,
Or when feed was scarce on the track'.

We tied up the dogs by a heap of logs,
And threw 'em a leg of bandicoot,
Scraped off our beard, rough as if we were sheared,
And got some money out of an old riding boot.

There was a big horse trough on the edge of town,
Where the dogs all swam, and the birds often drowned,
But we plunged right in, had a real good scrub,
Put on our best and went around to the pub.

There was a barmaid, all frilly and frisky,
My mate doing well, and sipping some whiskey,
Then without any warning things suddenly eroded,
A big town lout, hung one fair on his snout,
Then the whole damn pub exploded!

'Hit 'em hard,' I yelled, 'or else you'll go down,
If you start tapping here they'll fight for a year.
And you'll finish up fighting the whole damn town!'

Like Little Jack Horner I danced back in the corner.
I'd five on the mat and going sweet.
Then I let go a right at a jaw clenched tight,
And flop! It was me mate went down at me feet.

That really sat me back, I said, 'Good grief Jack,
Now you'll have to beat a retreat'.
So I dragged him out of there by one ear and the hair,
And landed him safe in the street.

He was sprawled on the ground, but I soon
brought him round,
With a mug of cold water in his face.
I said, 'Get away from this pub, head straight for the scrub,
You'll find it a far safer place!

'For that mob in there's gone fighting mad,
Why, there's cousins and brothers,
Their wives and their mothers,
And half of them taking a swing at their Dad'.

We made our way back down a rough old track,
And had almost reached the camp,
Neither one spoke, though we both knew the joke,
Until at last he said, 'Hey, champ.'

'I'm glad it happened like that,
You sure can still fight,
And pack an awful right,
But what did you do with me hat?'

He sat on a log, like a wounded dog,
With both hands holding his head,
Then after a while he looked up with a smile,
And this is what he said:

'I started that strife, tell me she was his wife,
And I couldn't fight for a quid,
If I'd stayed in that row, they'd 've killed me by now,
And you could hardly blame 'em if they did.'





THE BALLAD OF BILL HOWARD

He was part of the mountain ranges,
He respected his fellow man,
He loved his dogs and the white-faced cattle,
And the country where they ran.

And now he's gone before us,
In search of greener fields,
Where no national parks or conservation,
Can interfere with the yields.

And, as we stand in silence,
For a man so honest and kind,
Remember we're sure to follow,
So keep this in the back of your mind.

Good cattlemen never die,
They just cross the divide,
In search of better pastures
Where mountain cattlemen
Are forever free to ride.



THE BALLAD OF DAN CROTTY

Let me call for three minutes' silence
Before we start this show,
For one that only God could keep
From being here at our big Rodeo.

He was a grand performer
He and his old grey,
And when you look across the ground
They're missing here today.

With his roping and his riding,
Many thousands of people he thrilled,
And only God will ever know
Just why Dan Crotty was killed.

And as we stand in silence,
Let our minds go back today,
To the one who misses him most of all
- Dan's old silver grey.

See him wait at night fall,
For the rug he always knew.
See him stop and listen,
For a voice so good and true.

And when young Buddy comes along,
Things don't seem the same,
The old horse stands and wonders,
Just why Dan has never came.

His roping days are over
His life is almost spent,
Now he's waiting for the call
Straight up to the Master's tent.

And at the Rodeo up yonder,
That's not so far away,
The first man through the Golden Gates,
Will be Dan Crotty on that silver grey.



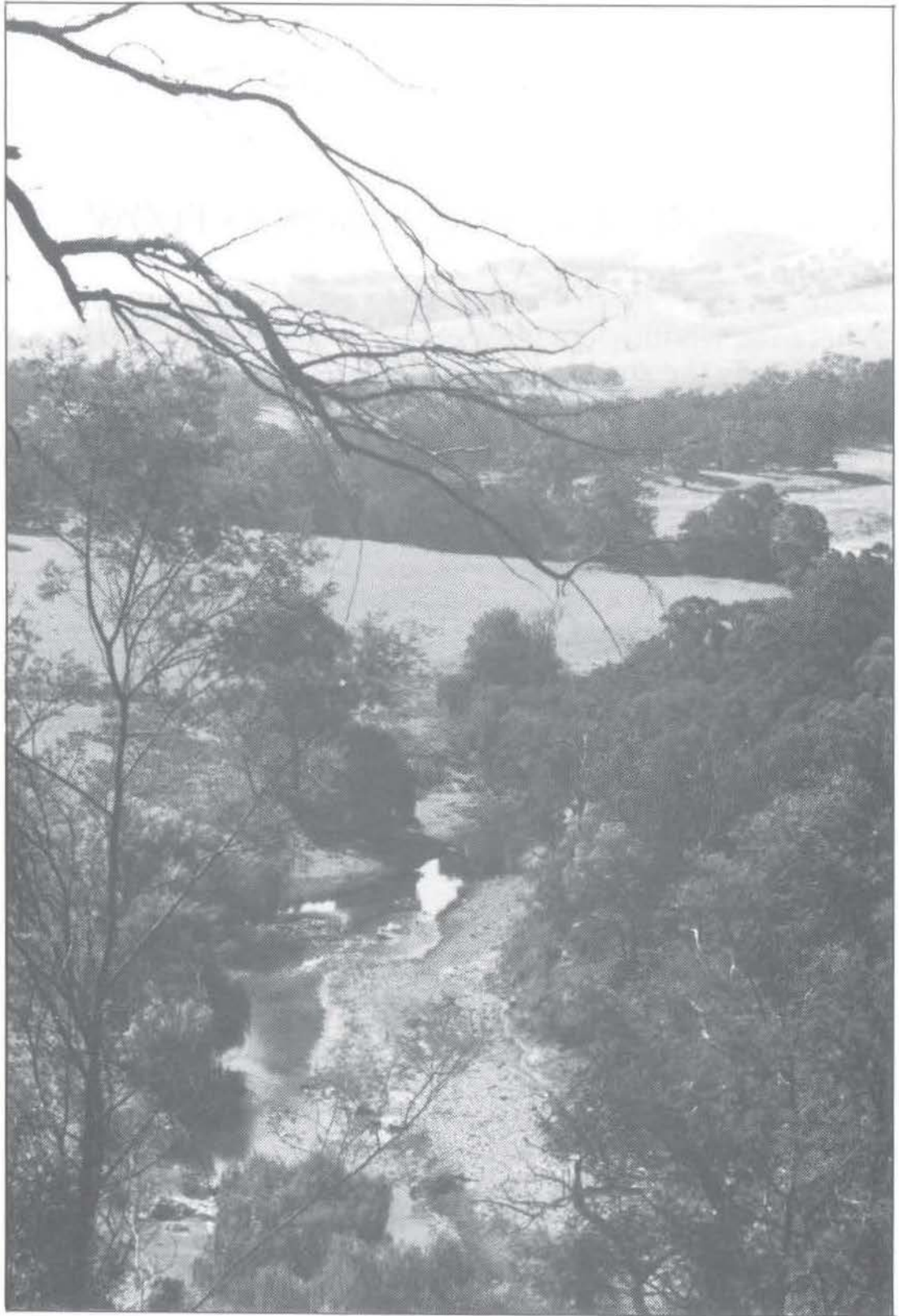


WHERE THE MOUNTAIN WATERS FLOW

There's a place I once knew
Where the wildflowers grew,
Where only the stockmen would go.
And the jackass laughed free
In the giant gum tree,
Where the mountain waters flow.

But the spurs have now rusted
The whips have frayed,
The bridles all busted,
The ponies have strayed,
The cattle bogged down
In the waterhole,
And the stockmen poke round
In town on the dole.

The dogs on the chain
All bark and fight,
And the dingoes howl
In the dark of night.
The wise old owl
Now hoots alone
In this land that once
Was the lyre birds' throne.



Tambo River, near Ensay

So what have we left
For the next generation
Now the hooligan's moved in
Under cover of conservation.
You can follow their trails wherever they go,
There's beer cans and bottles
Where once bloomed the wattles
Where the mountain waters flow.

People love to stroll,
Along the banks of the roads,
With the wind in their hair,
And the frost at their toes,
Listen to the chatter,
Of the little blue wren,
Or the whip-bird's call
As the cattle move in.

But with four-wheel drive
And the modern trail bike,
They've bogged all the tracks
Where folk used to hike;
You wonder why we're bitter!
But there's now cans and litter,
Wherever you go.
And heaps of bottles,
Where once bloomed the wattles,
Where the mountain waters flow.

They wrecked the doors,
Till they drag and squeak.
They smashed all the windows,
In the hut up the creek.
And the blackberries 've grown over
The little flats of clover,
And there's no place left
For the wildflowers to grow,
And the birds won't sing
Where the mountain waters flow.

So I ask all you stockmen
To make a last stand,
Strap on your spurs,
And save this land;
If we can't educate
We must exterminate
This two-legged vermin,
That's so damned determined,
To ruin the places wherever they go.
We'll let the wildflowers bloom
Where the mountain waters flow.
Yes, we'll let the wildflowers bloom
Where the mountain waters flow.





THE OLD TAWONGA HUT

It was only a hut in the mountains,
Almost at the highest peak,
Sheltered by a clump of snowgum
Put there for when the weather turns bleak.

Only a hut in the ranges,
Alone and peaceful it stands,
It saved the lives of many strangers,
When blizzards swept over the land.

Built by a couple of cattlemen
From woolly-butt down the ridge,
A little bit rough in appearance
But as strong as the Harbour Bridge.

So if ever you're caught in a snow storm,
In sleet or blinding hail,
Come right in and join us,
There's room at the hitching rail.

Go right ahead and use it,
Make yourself at home while you stay,
But never neglect or abuse it,
There might be someone cold the next day.

Cattlemen use it each time they muster,
And remember at the close of day,
The nights they spent without it
And how they'd almost perished away.

So I hope it'll long be respected,
By sightseers just passing through,
May they give a little thought to the men who erected it,
When the blizzards have chilled them too.





THE DROVER STEPPED ASIDE

His stockwhip still hangs on the nail by the door,
Above the boots and spurs that our drover once wore,
His old raincoat, all faded and dusty,
And the saddle and bridle with the bit gone rusty.

No more down the road at the old jog-trot,
Or whistle to his dogs, 'Come in behind here, Spot!'

We still miss him passing in the dark, or the fog,
And the flicker of the camp fire down the lane by the log.

No more the wagon horses shoulder the load,
And the grass has gone wild by the side of the road.
The horses turned out, all foundered and lame,
And the dog's half mad from barking on the chain.

Now the cattle on transports all bump and bruise,
Or roll over on the bends when the drivers snooze.
The tourists and skiers have now taken over the track
And the speeds that they travel there's only one way back.

With police lights flashing and sound of cars crashing,
Then the ambulance whistling by.
Modern progress, they call it
Or that's what they say to you and I.



NEVER BE ASHAMED

Never be ashamed to wear a patch
On the sleeve of your shirt or across your knee.
It was put there by your mother's hands,
Just as neat as neat could be.

There's been many pants never had the chance
To feel the needle and thread,
And many a boy never knew the joy
'Cos his dear mother was dead.

Never be ashamed to wear a patch,
Even if others laugh loud;
You think of the stitches she's put in your britches,
And hold your head up proud.

I've seen her sit, and darn and knit
'Til her poor tired eyes would close.
Her head would drop, her dear hands stop
And the glasses hung low on her nose.

Then after a while, she'd look up with a smile
And these words so often said:
'I've darned your socks, patched your pants
Now I must go off to bed'.

'I'm so far behind with the mending',
You would often hear her say,
'But I'll do my best to patch the rest,
You may just have to wear them another day'.

So never be ashamed to wear a patch,
But hold your head up with pride.
There's been many a one, never realised how much she'd
done,
'Til after their dear mother died.





THE ONE SO OFTEN FORGOT

Let me remind you all that once a year,
There's a most important day,
When all you chaps should stay off the beer,
Get down on your knees and pray.

And don't be ashamed to take the blame
If suddenly you discover,
The one you've neglected most of all,
Happens to be your own dear mother.

We take her so much for granted,
We know she's always there,
She's become like part of the furniture,
The old kitchen table or the comfortable chair.

With an apron tied neatly over her skirt,
She'll sweep and cook and sew,
And even wash your dirty shirt,
As off to the footy you go.

She does the ironing late at night,
And you'll never hear her complain,
Stand right up for you and fight,
Even though you've brought her pain.

*There's no need for costly presents
Or sparkling wines,
Just turn back on the garden track
And say sincerely, 'I love you, Mum'.*



THE GREATEST PIONEER OF ALL

You've all heard of the pioneers,
And the way they had to battle,
The way they'd toil and till the soil
To feed their sheep and cattle.
But to me there seems someone so often forgot
To whom we all owe praise,
It's the gracious lady who stirred the pot
In those pioneering days.

She worked beside her rugged man
To whom his children she bore,
Camped in the bush in a leaky tent
Or an old bark hut with an earthen floor.
At night she'd sit and sew and knit,
And read the Bible too,
Pray to the Lord to keep her fit
So she might guide those children through.

She was doctor, teacher, dentist and preacher,
And ran to every call,
With a newborn babe held gently in her arms,
She'd pray that she may rear them all.
She never looked for honours,
And never looked for praise,
Just did what she thought was right
In the pioneering days.

So let's shout her praise with glee,
Hang the photo high on the wall,
And mark her name on the family tree
As the greatest pioneer of all.



DEEP IN HIS MEMORIES ARE THE MUSTERING DAYS

Did you see the old grey
As you came down the track?
All sunken in the eyes
And quite hollow in the back.

Yes, he's earned a rest,
For he was one of the best,
So we've turned him out to graze
And left him to his memories of the droving days.

He'd hold his own with any red roan,
And was never defeated by a black or a bay,
For he was one of the greatest,
That old flea-bitten grey.

He comes up each night,
For a few oats and a drink,
I still put on his rug
And stand and watch him think.

And his mind goes back to the ranges,
He hears the stockwhips crack,
Sees again the slippery river track
And for a moment all the world becomes strangers.

I can still hear his hooves
As they'd clatter down the rocks,
Feel him twist in the bracken
Or bound a log like a fox.

Swim the flooded river when others'd baulk and shiver
To turn the leaders back.
Yes, he's earned a spell and I know it well,
For he once was my very own hack.

He still sees the calves break away from the mob,
Hears the snort of a maddened scrub bull go past,
Then his muscles all quiver as he thinks back to the river,
And how the floods run fast.

Yes, he's earned a spell and I know it so well,
So we'll just leave him there turned out to graze,
With the breeze blowing gently on his flea-bitten hair,
And deep in his memories are the mustering days.





ANOTHER STOCKMAN CROSSED THE DIVIDE

We were saddling for the muster,
Everyone joking and gay
Except an old man who stood by the slip-rail,
Watching and waiting for us to ride away.

He lit his pipe and he tapped a stick,
In a rather impatient sort of way,
Then quietly turning to his old dog Mick,
I heard the old gentleman say:

'How I miss the mountain ranges,
I used to ride the snowy plains
And help 'em with the muster,
I can still feel the red-hide reins.'

I see me old hack and the clumper with the pack,
Followed by a kelpie dog or two.
I hear the cattle call by the waterfall,
But my mustering days are through.

'There's me old quart pot and me pony at a trot,
He's now quite lame in the leg,
My saddle and whip that made many a trip,
And the bridle hangin' neatly from the peg.

Yes, it's hung there for years, now it brings back tears,
As my mind goes back to the past,
But time has moved on, the stockmen have gone,
Only memories forever will last.

But once more I'll try before I die,
And I'll saddle up and ride,
Up the mountain track to where there's no way back,
There'll be another stockman across the divide.

Yes, I'll ride along to an Angel's song,
And my pony will step with pride
Up that great long track to where there's no way back,
I'll be another stockman across the divide.'





MUSTERING THE OLD DAN RIVER

Take a seat on that log,
Don't mind ant or frog,
Where the bracken fern wave and quiver,
There's no telephone or mail,
And I'll tell you a tale,
Of life on the old Dan river.

I was awakened one morn,
At the crack of dawn,
Straight after the autumn break.
Two voices I heard,
The sound of a bird,
And the smell of bacon and steak.

There was a small campfire,
And in the distance a lyre.
Two stockmen with a billy of tea.
'Care to join us, mate
On a trip through Hell's Gate?'
Was the greeting they gave to me.

They were after their cattle
So I watched them saddle,
The pride of a stockman's heart.
Each released a dog
And at the old jig-jog
I saw those stockmen start.

Through the first water crossing,
With their horses' heads tossing,
Where the river runs fast and deep.
There the mountains reach high
Up to the sky
And the tracks are narrow and steep.

They know every lurk,
The dogs know their work,
And the cattle are hard to find.
I saw them run a wild steer,
Down a slope without fear.
- One slip could mean certain death -
And print their name on his hide
With the whip every stride,
It would almost take your breath.

They rested at night
With the stars for their light,
And the cattle quite close at hand,
On a small clover flat,
That was hard to get at,
In that wild and native land.

As the day passed by,
There was cloud in the sky,
And they treat every sign with respect.
For one day too late,
If the weather should break,
They'd know just what to expect.

There was thunder on the mountains!
Then the lightning's flash and quiver!
So it's 'Come in, Bob, and turn the mob
And head 'em down the river!'

'Keep out, Dinah!, Come in, Lad!
Keep the leaders straight!
They must press those cattle with all they know
To get them below Hell's Gate.

With six more crossings below them,
Through sleet and blinding rain,
You wonder if they'll ever find the track again.
Mountain winds, howling, the waters leap and foam
As down the old Dan river, they turn those cattle home.

The tracks so narrow and slippery,
They trust that stockman's prize.
It's only horses such as these,
Can get 'em through if the river should rise.
Hear their voices sounding -
Then a whistle loud and shrill,
And the stockwhip's echo rebounding
Far off a distant hill.

The older cows are bossing,
The horses' heads still tossing,
The dogs all working well.
But the light was now descending,
And on this they were depending,
To take them through the spill.

The waters by now were pounding,
Lightning lit the sky.
The boss's voice still sounding:
'Keep the cattle high.
Go right in and lead them,
Swing 'em to the right!
Keep them well above those rocks,
Then head them for the light!'

And through the roll of thunder,
The lightning and the rain,
The stockmen had succeeded
They were below Hell's Gate again.

So if ever you camp on a mountain flat
Where lyrebirds mimic and call,
Where the jackass laughs at the break of day
In the purest air of all.
If thunder clouds gather in the sky
And the bracken ferns wave and quiver,
Give a little thought to the stockmen up high,
Mustering the old Dan river.





MEMORIES OF UNCLE BEN

He loved the mountain ranges,
He rode the snowy plain
Turned the white faced cattle
In sleet and blinding rain.

He was an inspiration
To all his fellow men,
One that'll be remembered,
Was dear old Uncle Ben.

He started out in cattle
When he was just a lad,
Followed 'em up the Fainter,
What wonderful spirit he had!

There was never a day too long,
And never a track too rough,
His voice seemed to echo with courage,
When the going got really tough.

They'll miss him at the muster,
Through woolly-butts straight and tall,
The cattle just seemed to know,
When Uncle Ben would call.

He told a tale by the stockyard rail,
Round the camps or on the cattle track.
When the moon was high, he'd talk of Billy Wye
And sometimes even Bogong Jack.

He left such wonderful memories
To those he's left behind
He was a real example of a man honest and kind.

And if ever a stockman reaches Heaven,
I know just who it'll be.
He'll hang his saddle bag on the Pearly Gate,
and his whip on the nearest tree.

The dogs still wait by the garden gate,
The old pony looks up every now and then,
And cattlemen pause as they pass by the yards
'Is that the voice of Uncle Ben?'





MY OLD MATE MUT

When I was a lad, I found a little pup,
He was all pot-bellied and his ears stood up.
He had nowhere to go, no place of his own
So I took him along and gave him a home.

And how I put up with him, I'll never know,
He seemed to get into trouble wherever he'd go.
Feather the chooks and chase the cat,
Chew up me socks and run away with me hat.

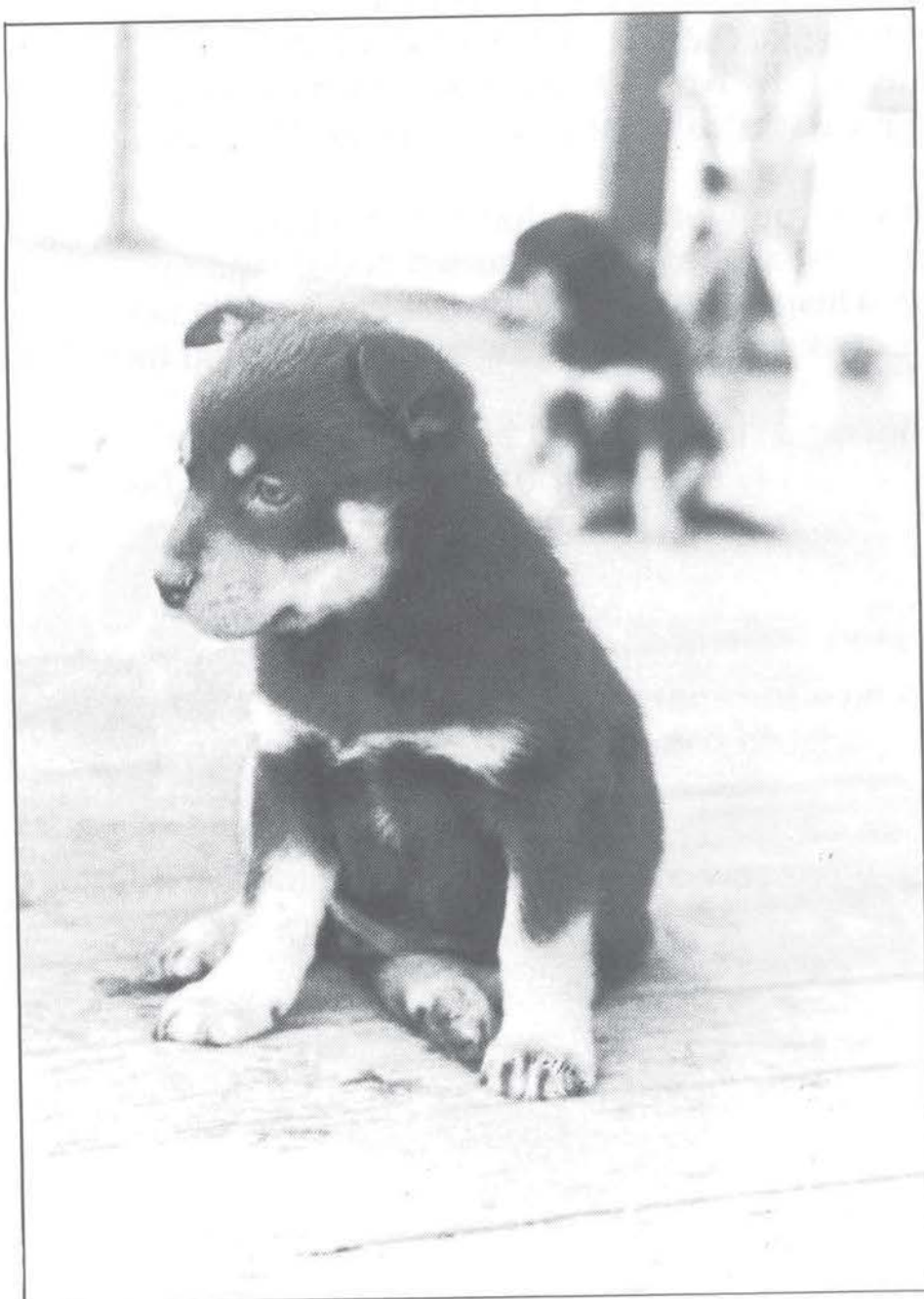
He had nothing to do but roll and play,
And when life became boring he'd sool me old grey.
An ugly, useless, good-for-nothin' mut,
But I fed him along and let him stay 'round the hut.

I thought he'd never grow up,
He nearly drove me to tears.
Then one day seated on a log,
Sifting back through the years
Something licked at my hand and before me stood
A full grown dog.

Still the same prick ears, trying to make me understand,
I rose to my feet, stroked his head, patted him
And these words I said,
'You'll do me for a mate, let's go back to the hut
See that kennel inside the gate?
That's yours, and I'll call you Mut.'

Yes, we knocked around for many a day
Me, and Mut, and the flea-bitten grey.
Mut stuck with me through thick and thin
Had many a fight and most times he'd win.

Then in the evening, we'd go back to the hut,
Me and the old grey and my mate Mut.
The years rolled along and we all grew old,
He wasn't so playful, reckless and bold.



Then one evening at the close of day,
Mut went to heaven to pave the way.
And things round the hut didn't seem the same,
It wasn't very long and the old grey went lame.

I woke up one morning and the old grey was gone,
Time had caught up with him and he'd passed on.
And there I was, left all alone
With no-one to share my home.

Then came a letter just the other day,
I gently broke the seal to see what it had to say.
I made out the words and this is how they read:
'I suppose you're quite lonely now the old grey is dead.

But don't you worry and don't shed a tear,
For it's just as the Lord promised in this land up here.
Come when you're ready, 'cause I've found a new hut',
And it was signed with a paw mark, 'Your old mate Mut'.





MUSTERING IN THE SNOW

They were preparing for the muster, stockmen gathered
round,
With their hardy horses, to bring the cattle down.
Suddenly the grey sky burst open, the wind began to blow.
Rain came down in torrents, then a fall of snow.

There was snow like they'd never seen before,
Three thousand head could perish, or perhaps even more.
So they selected the best stock horses, the ones that knew
the run.

The goin'd be mighty tough and there'd be no time for fun.
They headed up the mountains to where the blizzards blow,
The horses scrambled belly deep in freshly fallen snow.

There was Fletcher fighting for the ridge, Wally Ryder too,
Eric Weston on the top, Ben Cooper nearly through.
When suddenly a voice rang out across the mountain air:
'Two horses down to perish, they're owned by Rossy Blair.'
At last they reached the top of the plain,
And what a sight to see!
Cobungra river completely covered, there was snow on
every tree.

The cattle quickly came to the call, calves right by their side.
Dogs worked as they'd never worked before, to force them
off the Divide.

And down the slopes the stock horses slip and slide,
Hear the pack horse scramble, as he fights to save his hide.

The going was better on the way back,
The cattle in front had hardened the track,
And at last there came a ray of light,
The stockmen turned the mob and headed down to Bright.

But round the camps in years to come
They'll tell tales of where the cattle go,
And the one that'll never be forgotten,
Is that muster in the snow.





THE CATTLEMAN'S CUP

It was down along the Tawonga side
Straight after the autumn muster,
Into the Bogong pub with pride
The cattlemen started to cluster.

To drink all night and half the day,
And tell tales of the cattle track,
Who had the best dogs away,
Or which was the smartest hack.

There was a tall stranger there
Queer sort of a bird,
He was waving a ten dollar note,
And soon made himself well heard.

'I've listened to you blokes skiting,' he said,
'I think it's a pack of lies!
We'll race from here to Mongan's Bridge,
And make this note the prize.'

Five miles it was to Mongan's Bridge,
Tom Roper measured the course,
So he'd want more than luck that day
He'd want a damn good sort of a horse.

Then they decided to reverse the course,
And finish them up the hill.
This way they'd find out which was the better horse
And give the crowd a thrill.

There was Ryder there with a fiery beast
- I'm sure he called him King -
A full sixteen hands at least
He'd make the stranger sing.

Ian Roper was there with a little roan,
And Hicksy there with Kate,
Then Millsy led in a thoroughbred
And along came Cooper's Mate.

Away down towards Mongan's Bridge
Blairs joined 'em with a blue
That danced and pranced all over the ridge,
To show what it could do.

And in the yard was Dargo Newman,
With a half-broken little filly.
It was underfed, with a brumby head,
And to start it seemed almost silly.



But Dargo was always a game little man
Who never turned it up,
And just to see how the filly ran
He started in the Cattleman's Cup.

'Bring 'em in!' we heard the starter call.
It was Jack Roper on a grey,
'And where's the bloke who started it all
With that stylish little bay?'

'Bring your horses into line,
And face 'em right about,
For anyone who gets the jump away
Will be disqualified and out!'

'And with one clean almighty blow,
I'll bring this stockwhip down
That's when you'll swing and let 'em go,
And head 'em straight for town.'



Away they went! It was a good start
- Except for Newman's little filly,
For her and jockey almost came apart,
She carried on something silly.

Off up the road those horsemen went,
Riding with whip and spur,
There never was a stockman yet
To saddle up a cur.

And high from a vantage point
Where the road gets a little bit hilly,
You could still see Newman back at the post
Wrestling away with the filly.

Down the straight past Madisons' gate,
They gave 'em all they knew,
Those horses going at a terrific rate,
Frank Blair in front on the blue.

Into the bend by Coopers' gate
Along past Tresidders' shed
Roper's roan and Hick's Kate
Were going head for head.

But as they bunched up in the gully
Old King had seen the way
He was as game as he could be,
And looked as though he'd stay.

Now Millsy's horse was dropping back,
- They said it went quite lame -
And Cooper's Mate was getting slack
Although it still showed game.

They never stripped their saddles down
There were raincoats, saddle bags and all.
And for days thereafter quart pots were found
Where they raced 'em past the hall.

But still down there by Mongan's Bridge
Just across the bog,
Was an old unwanted blue heeler,
Camped in a hollow log.

He was known around Tawonga town,
As the old Tawonga ghost,
But Newman had fed him from time to time,
So he whistled him to the post.

He came in so hard and fast,
That filly lashed out with pain,
Then dashed off down the road at last,
With Newman grabbing for the rein.

She bucked and reared and plunged,
Then gathered up her stride.
With the old blue dog still nipping away,
Newman settled down to ride.

The other horses were half-way there,
She'd have to do it alone!
But the speed that was in that mare,
As she swept past Roper's roan!

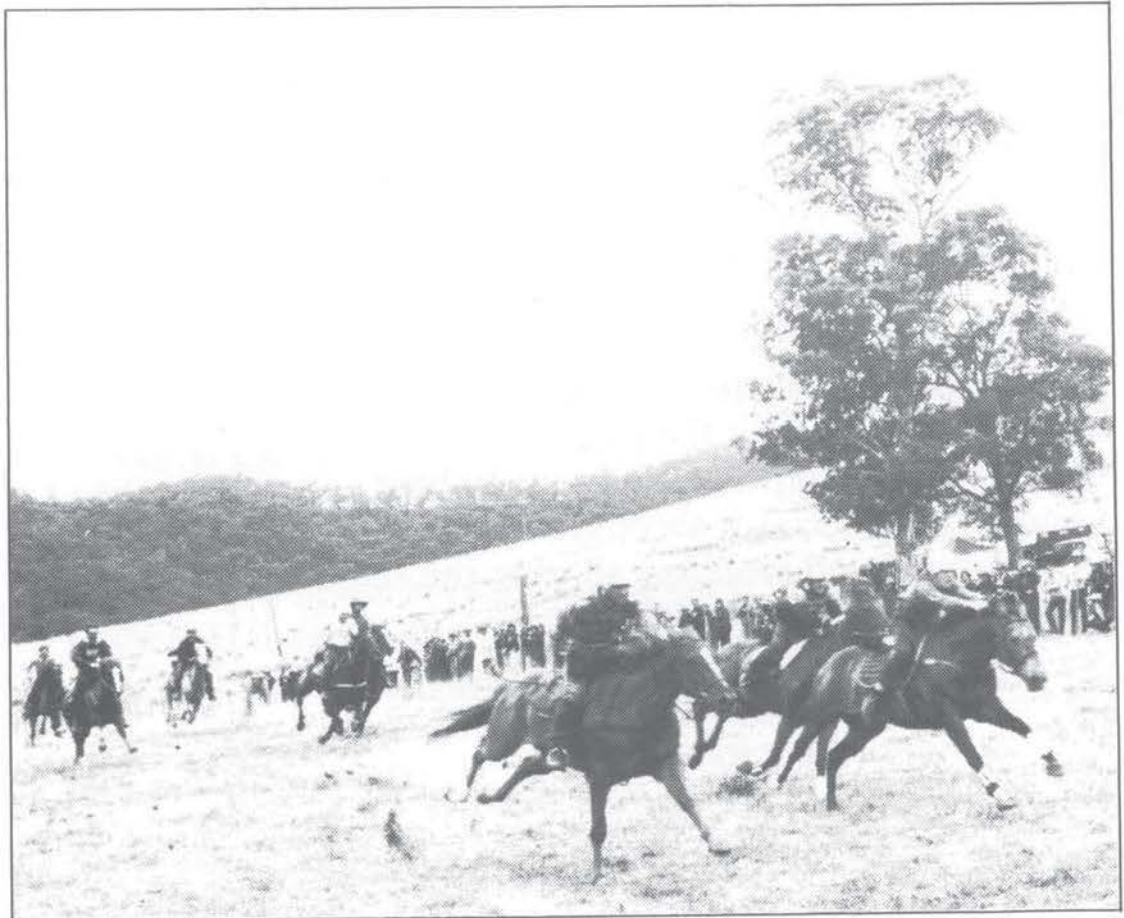
On past the church, the filly fairly flew,
After Cooper's Mate and Hick's Kate,
And straight on past the blue.
But Ryders' King was the horse to beat,
And would she see it through?
She swayed and wobbled all over the street
- She'd never worn a shoe.

On down into the town,
The maddened horsemen tore,
Neck and neck they fought it out
As they raced 'em past the store.

The old blue dog, he wasn't a fool,
He stopped and limped away.
He knew they were near the school,
And the kids had stoned him every day.

On up the hill those horses raced,
But the filly turned it up.
And Ryders' King just bowled along,
Looked set to win the Cattleman's Cup.

But just as the crowd all rose to cheer,
That horseman past the post,
The old dog did again appear,
He came in like a ghost.



Stockman's Dash at Castleburn

The filly gave a bound and squeal,
And then she really flew -
The old dog fastened hard on her heel,
He drove the little mare through!

So if ever you're up Tawonga way
And you don't believe in a ghost,
You ask the boys who were there that day
How Ryder got beat at the post.

Or down about Mongan's Bridge,
And your horse ever turns it up,
Just whistle out from over the rise
'Cos Newman has saved a pup.

And as for the bloke that started it all,
With that stylish little bay,
Well, this may stand correction,
But Jack Roper got the field away,
And he swears he went in the wrong direction.



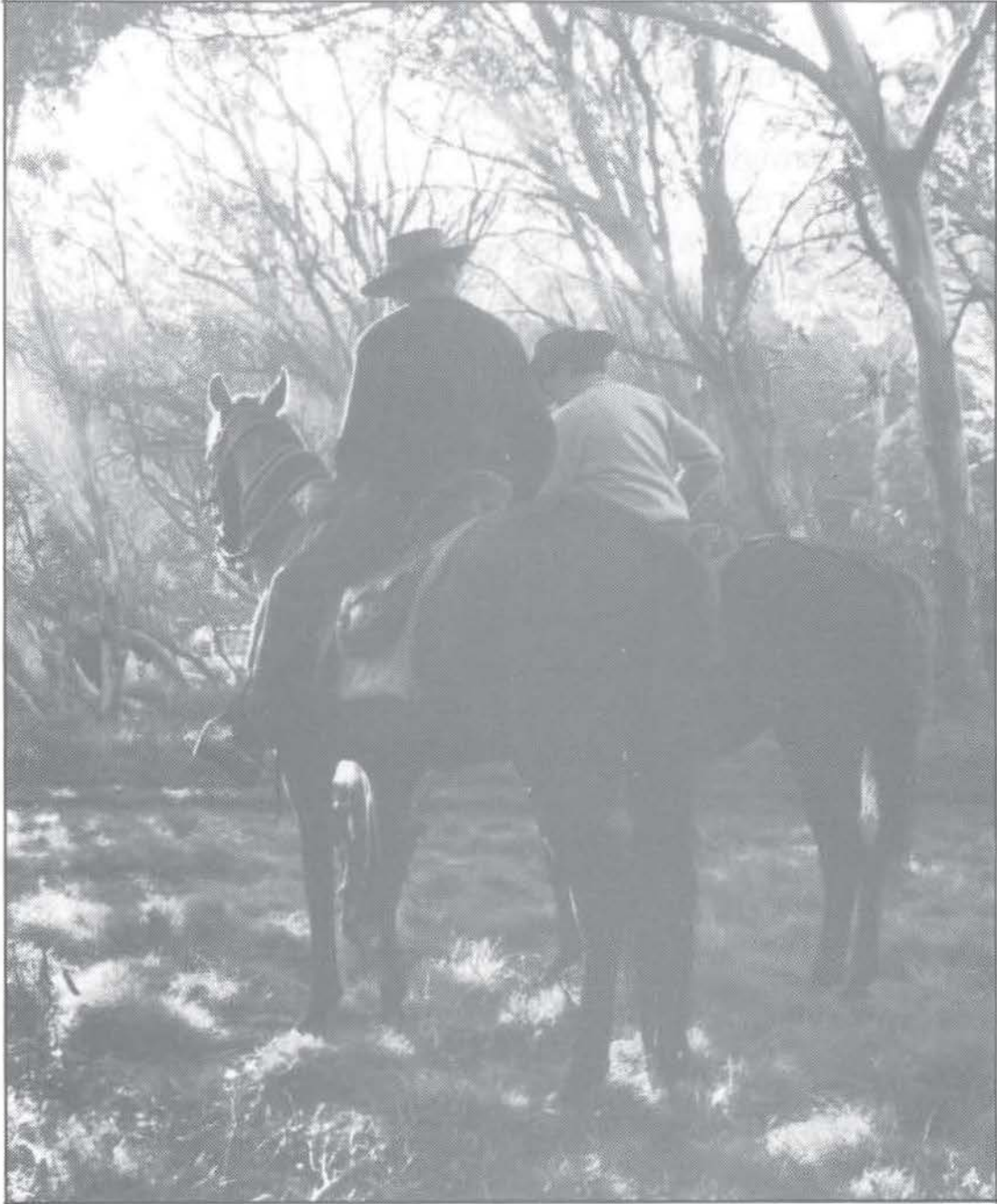


A TRIBUTE TO EARLY STOCKMEN

You've heard of Banjo Paterson,
And the Man from Snowy River,
The famous Henry Lawson
Whose poems live on forever.
From the slopes of Kosciusko
To the banks of the Castlereagh,
They've spurred the hearts of stockmen
Through many a lonely day.

From Gundagai to Narrabri,
To the Bogong Plains and back,
Those poems are forever quoted,
If you follow the drovers track.
They've been passed down through the ages,
The covers ruffled and worn,
Some books have lost their pages,
Others just faded and torn.

But the stockmen remember the missing words,
Even to the torn out part,
For it was about him the lines were written,
And he cherishes them deep in his heart.
He opened Australia's bushland,
Where tourist coaches now roar and fly
Past the old dog on the tucker box
Just out of Gundagai.



Frank and Leonard Ryan

So never knock a stockman,
But bid him a cheery good day
For he's long been before you
To pave your tourist way.
Those who are left still follow the herds
Across the rolling plains,
See them pause awhile, to listen to the birds,
As the tired old fingers grasp the reins.

Camped at night at the drover's track,
With the wireless they listen to the news,
But the mind always flashes back,
To the emu and the kangaroos.
They'll never adapt to this modern life
So silently they move away,
To the murmuring call of a waterfall
On the banks of the Castlereagh.





I WAS BORN IN A CATTLE CAMP

I was born in a cattle camp
And raised on black billy tea.
At night I still hear the cattle tramp
As the stars twinkle down at me.

I hear the stockwhips crack to turn the mob
The dogs breaking away for the lead
I see the stockhorse clear the half hidden log,
While racing at full speed.

I hear the cattle bellow at the river crossing,
Men riding through with horses' heads tossing,
To show the depth of the stream.
The moon rises high above in the sky
And lights up the world with its beam.

While back there at the homestead
Mother would wait at night,
Peering out into the dark and fog.
'The cattle are coming,
The leaders are in sight,
And I hear the bark of a dog.'

Tramp, tramp those cattle tramp,
It means such a lot to me.
Mother's hot scones and blackberry jam
And sipping at black billy tea.



WHERE I MAKE MY HOME

I make my home where the wallabies roam,
Where the wombats grope through the forest floor,
Where the maidenheads cling to the bank of the spring
And the sun peeps through the old hut door.

The deer pass with a bound and a leap,
As the snow starts to thaw and the mountains weep.
I love to stand and listen and waters glisten
At the first break of spring.

The animals move out, there's the flick of a trout
And the birds burst forth and sing.
No four wheel drive or modern trail bike
Ever breaks the silence where I love to hike.

Just the sound of a cow as she calls her calf,
And high in the gums the old jackasses laugh
- They knows well where the little ones poke
But they'd never tell for it would spoil the joke.

And I feel like the wise old owl -
I'll never show strangers just where to prowl.
It's not the damage they'd do, but they may pass it on,
And if the hooligan gets to know
It's forever lost and gone.

With beer can and bottle and hand on the throttle
They scour these mountains we know,
And what worries me most as I picture that ghost,
It's only just some place to go.

As I stand and dream by the banks of the stream,
And my mind goes back to the past,
With the invasion of tyres in the land of the lyres,
I wonder how long beauty will last.





THE DROVER'S LAST CAMP

The smoke curled up from the red-gum shade
On the bank of the creek the last camp was made.
The horses turned out, no hobbles did they wear,
And the dogs, unchained, lay about in despair.

No more the wagon wheels turn and squeak,
It's settled down forever on the flats by the creek.
The drover, his face all wrinkled and old,
Hands hard and calloused, their own story they told.

Seated by the fire on a four gallon drum,
Just quietly resting 'neath the old red gum,
And as he sits and sifts through the years,
His sad eyes glisten and fill with tears.

No more will he battle with big mobs of cattle
No more up north will he go.
He tightens his lip, he's made his last trip,
To the creek where the red gum grow.

He remembers running wild steers in yesteryears,
The drought and fire and flood.
Then right at the peak, how they bogged down for a week,
When the rain turned the dust into mud.

Yes, thrills and spills, mustering cattle in the scrub,
Or how they dropped in for a song
- And stayed too long -
In some outback country pub.

He tidies up the camp where the cattle tramped
As he's done many times before.
With tired feet dragging his eyes fasten on the wagon,
And the harness that hangs by the door.

He's made his own cross, just a wagon and horse,
And he prays that the end might quickly come.
He holds no regret, and he leaves no debt,
Just a wagon 'neath the old red gum.





WHEN THE CATTLEMEN RODE BACK

There's been many a song, from Tamworth to Geelong,
By the best bush bands we know;
The story's been told of how they fought for gold,
From Ballarat to Bendigo.

They fought day and night for their miners right,
Battled with pick and spade.
If you want to take a look, it's in the history book,
Known as the Eureka Stockade.

But that's all in the past and fields are now grassed,
And the towns have taken on a glow,
At Easter this year, the crowd began to cheer,
When the cattlemen rode into Bendigo.

With stockwhip and dog, at the old jig-jog,
And hobble chains jingling on the pack,
You can take it from me, it was something to see,
The day the cattlemen rode back.

For a century and a half, they've followed the cow and calf
And no way they'll give up their lease.
For they fought for this country in times of war,
Now they fight the battle in peace.

And the legend'll live on forever,
Wherever the cattlemen ride,
For the man from Snowy River
Still echoes across the mountainside.

(Easter 1984)



Don Kneebone



FIRE FROM MUDGEONGA

'Twas on February the first in sixty-eight,
The wind, ten knots and growing stronger.
The mercury soared to one hundred and eight
- Then a fire at Mudgegonga!

Fanned up by a westerly,
Smoke blanketed out the sun,
Flames spread like a sheet
Up there on Hicks's run.

It burnt into the forest land,
Where firemen made a rally,
To hold it there 'till nightfall,
Or it could wipe out Happy Valley.

It raced across the farm land,
Like a torrent down its bed.
Burned out life long savings,
And the hay in every shed.

And the farmers fought their battle
'Till they could stand no longer.
It burned their fences, sheep and cattle
The fire from Mudgegonga.

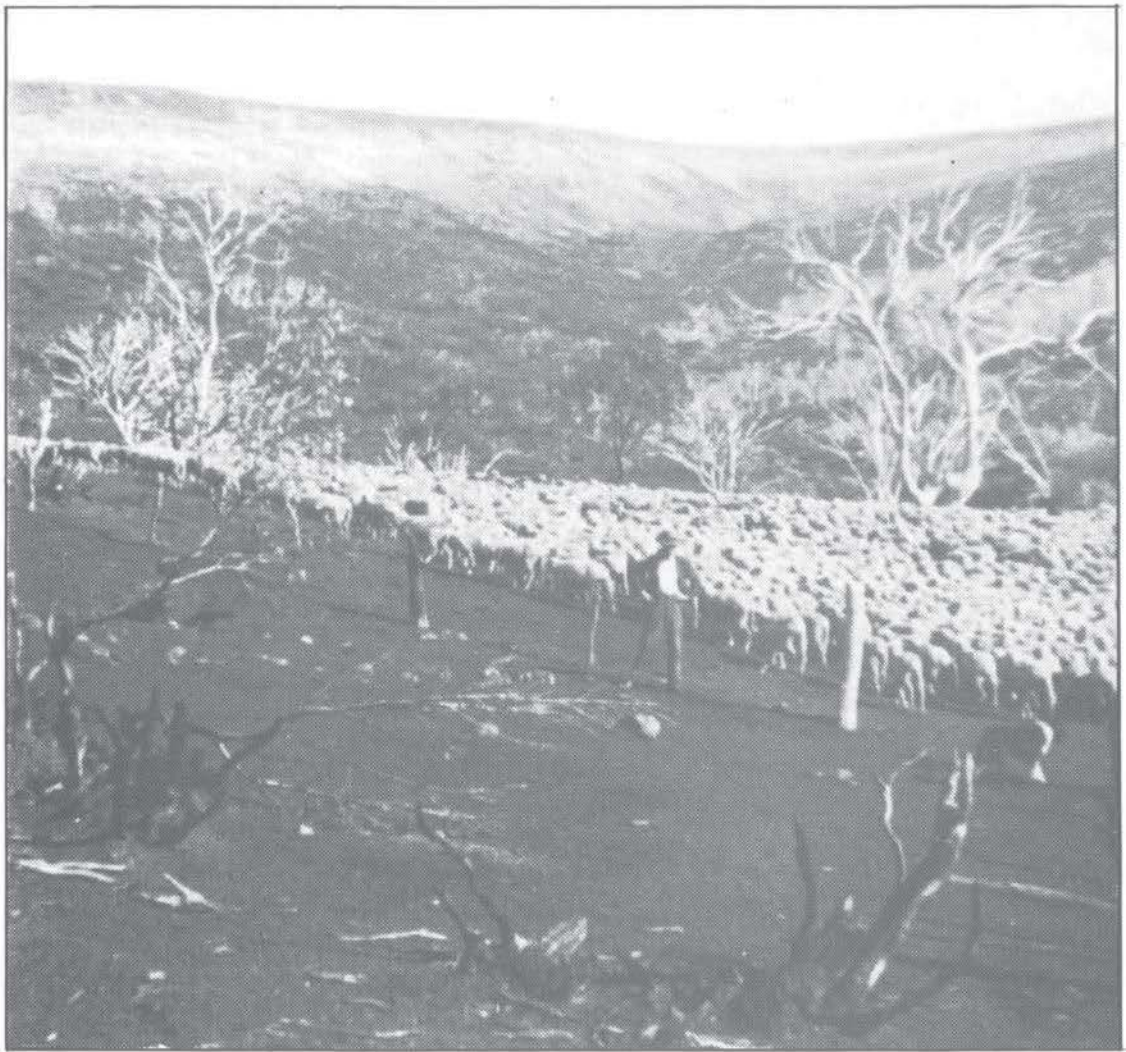
The courageous women faced it,
Amid that crimson glow.
They watched their homes scorch round them,
Their shrubs and gardens go.

It jumped the Kiewa River,
Went raging on its way,
A sight to make you shiver
And frighten the C.F.A.

They burnt it back across Mount Jack,
Dozed a trail below Eskdale.
From the Mitta to Mount Tawonga
Firemen fought with tooth and nail,
To arrest the fire from Mudgegonga.

So when you're joking with your mate,
Down by the farm yard gate,
Or smoking in the shade the Lord has made,
Just see a match don't linger longer.
Think of the day the fire got away
From Hicks' at Mudgegonga.







ASH WEDNESDAY

We watched the fire season slowly pass,
The summery months move on.
Autumn is here, there's life in the grass,
But many human lives are gone.

Ash Wednesday they call it in the Bible,
But how few of us remember the day
Till the fate of fire swept over the land,
Then we all knelt to pray.

I ask you to remember,
It may help you to understand,
We all have to answer to the Lord,
For He is in full command.

Who would have thought the day before,
That all those lives could be lost?
It's a day too late when the fire's at the gate,
And oh Lord!, what did it cost?

We can give them money, rebuild their homes,
But we'll never heal the scar,
There's always a heart, that's been torn apart,
And the missing faces in the local bar.

Look down the street, where young folks used to meet,
Watch the scavengers grope and roam
See little children wait where once was a gate,
For a father who will never come home.

A silent prayer by a mother's bed,
For the last words were never spoken.
Many firemen paid the price, the full sacrifice,
So anything we do is only a token.

But we must carry on, now our mates are gone,
And each one do a little more.
For it's a day too late when fire's at the gate,
And the flames race round the door.

When it comes round to Ash Wednesday next year,
And we stand and mourn the day,
Don't be ashamed if you shed a tear,
And please remember to pray.





THE MONUMENT THAT STANDS BY THE WAY

There was very little snow, the rivers ran low,
Already many dreams had run dry.
The cattle and sheep, too restless to sleep,
And the locusts had begun to fly.

Yes, well I remember the twenty-second of December,
In nineteen forty-three.
The mercury soared, and the north wind roared,
The branches broke out of the trees.

Then came a message,
A fire had broken away.
It was down about Londrigan
Oh! what a terrible day!

It raced out of the grasslands,
And through the standing crop.
With flames leaping metres high,
Something no man could ever stop.

And it was then, a handful of men,
Ran clean out of luck.
They tried to turn, for fear they'd burn,
And stalled the old fire truck.

I heard them call,
I heard their screams
For I was there and saw them all.
It still haunts me in my dreams.

I speak of the fire at Tarrawingee,
And the monument that stands by the way,
That marks the spot where many gallant men,
Gave up their lives that day.

United they stood and did what they could,
With knap-sacks, beaters and rake,
But the flames leapt higher from a windswept fire,
Till they fell and died for their mates' sake.

It left a scar that will never heal,
In the minds of many folk.
No matter how hard they try to conceal,
It still shows at the first sign of smoke.

And that's why we've got fire brigades,
And chaps that are ready to go;
The first sign of smoke is never treated as a joke,
Or whenever the siren should blow.





A HORSE AND DOG FOR BOB

It was deep in Australia's bushland,
Where the mountains rise and fold,
Around the stockman's camp, where cattle tramp,
The story's so often been told.

On a lonely track, where the creek winds back,
An injured stockman lay;
No more he'd ride off the great divide,
For he and his horse had fallen that day.

He gripped the old whip handle
His face all twisted with pain,
As he lay there in the bramble
His fingers still clutching the reins.

His old dog sat beside him
His horse waited patiently by
With no-one left to ride him;
They both knew their master would die.

He knew his life was over
That it was the closing day,
No more he'd be a drover
Where the white-faced cattle stray.

The old horse stood quietly by,
With an inward feeling of guilt,
For he knew that he'd faltered that day
As he watched his master wilt.

But forgiveness came as Bob uttered his name
And partly raised a hand.
They both knew what they had to do,
It was the last command.

The old horse shuffled closer,
And slowly he lowered his head.
The dog looked down onto the ground,
They both knew their master was dead.

They waited awhile in silence,
Wondering just what they could do,
A moment before there was three of them,
And now there's only two.

But there was no way they could help him,
Not even to place a wreath.
So gently the old dog picked up the reins,
Gripped them firmly in his teeth.

And sadness settled down upon the hill,
As they started down the track,
With their master's voice echoing still
'Go, lead my old pony back'.

No laughter they heard, not a sound of a bird,
As they approached the river,
Just the cold rippling of the stream,
And the empty creaking of leather.

And now Bob rides with the angels,
With his stockwhip in his hand,
And he drives the biggest mob of cattle
Ever seen in the promised land.

So when you go to Heaven,
If you want a stockman's job,
Just give the password to St Peter,
'I brought the horse and dog for Bob.'



Down the back of the course they race,
The big chestnut's hit the lead,
And not far away is Bart Cumming's bay
Did you ever see such speed?

And there does the black with Higgins on his back,
Closely followed by the grey,
The big chestnut's had enough, he's run clean out of puff,
I knew he wasn't bred to stay.

Around the end, and into the bend,
As the jockeys straighten 'em up;
And then they go for the whip,
As they ride 'em home in the Melbourne Cup.

And the crowds rise and cheer
And the grandstands start to sway,
And who has won the Cup this year?
Why, it's Gurner's Lane I'd say.

Now the day is over and they go into recess,
While the cops round up the soaks,
And the ladies tear off for another new dress,
And I'll see you at the Oaks.





A TRIBUTE TO WALLY RYDER

He loved to get up in the morning,
And give the horses a call;
*He was a true mountain cattleman,
And a friend to us all.*

*And now he's gone before us
In search of greener fields,
Where no national parks or conservation
Can interfere with the yields.*

At home among the snowgums
Or down the woolly-butt side,
With his old black dog and raincoat
Walter was born to ride.

They speak of snowy river country,
And where the brumbies run,
Why - he's seen all of that
And chased them just for fun.

At night around the campfire,
You could hear him joke and laugh;
But he certainly knew his cattle,
Right down to the very last calf.

And now when we hang up the bridles
At the closing of the day,
Hobble down the horses, and put the saddles away,
In the distance it seems we hear a voice say,
'Dick - put the billy on.'
Then we realize fond memories are never gone.

For he was part of mountain ranges,
He respected his fellow man,
Loved his dogs and the white-faced cattle
And the country where they ran.

Now as we stand in silence,
For a man so good and kind,
Remember that we are sure to follow
So keep this at the back of your mind.

Good cattlemen never die,
They just cross over the divide,
In search of better pastures,
Where cattlemen are forever free to ride.



Wally Ryder



THE LONE STOCKMAN

He was tall and lean and wiry,
Game at heart, reckless and bold;
A man that'd get a little bit fiery,
If his horse and dog didn't do as they were told.

He could run a mob of cattle single handed,
Down the slopes of the mountain for fun,
Home to the yards to be branded,
Or count them through the scrub on the run.

He was one of Australia's top bushmen,
A stockman through and through,
At home in the scrub or some old bush pub
Telling stories of the places he knew.

Telling tales to his mate
Or moving cattle through Hell's Gate,
When never a track could be found,
Camping in the frost on the nights they were lost,
With bush leeches there on the ground.

He'd give credit to his dogs,
And his old horse too,
Who had many a short ration
They'd always see him through.

'Better times ahead', he'd often say,
There'd be a wag of a tail, or a soft little neigh,
'When we get home you'll all be fed,
So cheer up, old mates, better times ahead.'

He was tall and lean and wiry,
A man who was never a skite,
He had more in his head than a diary,
Though neither could he read or write.

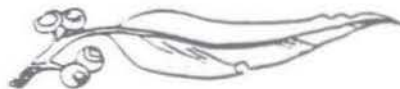
You'd see him at times when he was on for fun,
Ride out on top where the wild horses run,
Meet that old stallion face to face,
And apply the whip furiously just to make a good race.

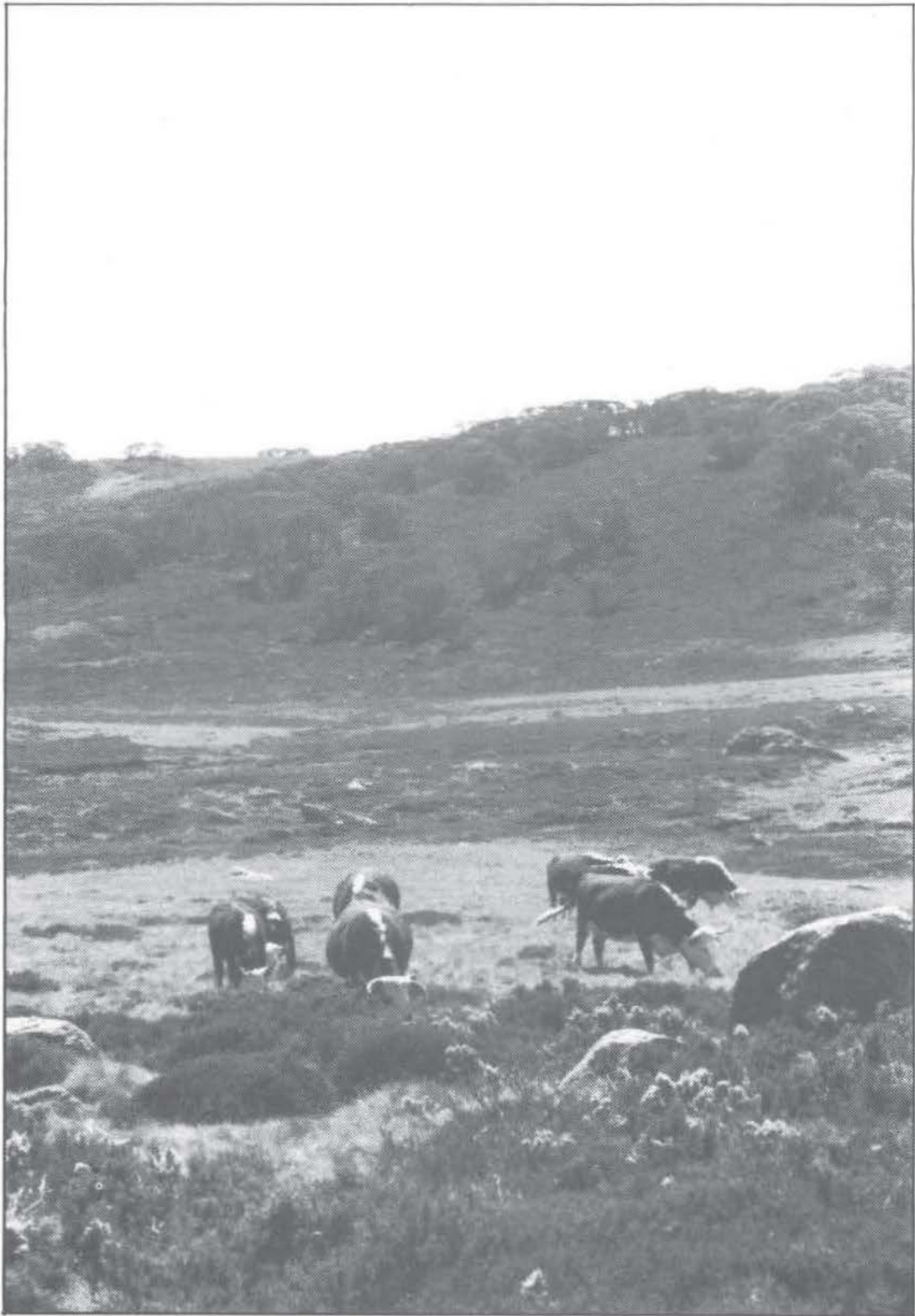
Yes, tall and reckless and wiry,
A man that would never say die,
At times he'd get a little bit fiery,
But never told a comrade a lie.

Now he rests out there on the ranges,
We stockmen will never know where,
But the dingoes howl in the dead of night
As if they know and care.

The curlews call their mournful note,
And black cockies screech and cry,
In memory of a stockman who rode away
And never said good-bye.

But when he arrives at the pearly gates,
St Peter 'll be there to meet him,
To the stockman he'll say, 'Come right in mate'
And the angels will be there to greet him.





THE DON KNEEBONE HERITAGE AWARD

The Don Kneebone Heritage Award began in 1992 at the Get Together at Dargo. After Don's death in 1991 those who knew him felt strongly that this was a fitting memorial to him.

Don received much pleasure from sharing his experiences of the mountains, and life in general, with other people through his poetry. Many people took pleasure in listening to him.

With the commencement of this award others are encouraged to do the same as Don. That is to put their feelings of the mountains and heritage of the cattlemen into words.

Entrants perform at the annual Mountain Cattlemens' Get Together in much the same way as Australian bushmen, such as Don, would have told a yarn around a campfire.





DON KNEEBONE

1922 - 1991

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