

# Correspondence

## Control of alps needs care

Sir, — I write in regard to reports and submissions on the subject of utilisation and conservation of the alpine regions.

There appears to have been no mention of the present state of the areas in regard to possible large-scale bush fires, or available fuel for such fires.

Anyone who experienced the holocaust of January 13, 1939, "Black Friday", and who knew the state of the high country at that time, must now wonder what will happen if these areas, or any part of them is closed to the entry of interests whose requirements is to have

access to slopes which were formerly lightly timbered in the high areas. Within the lower valleys, strands of thin bark timber, Alpine Ash or "Woolly-butt" was nearing mill size.

Then the conditions occurred which produced "Black Friday". With searing heat and gale force winds, fires already burning, united, and a great "front" of fire was created. A fire of such magnitude not experienced in our history of the alps.

After this had killed most of the Thin-Barks, Woolly-butt, Snowgum and Brown Sallee gum, normal rains returned and a prolific growth occurred. Seedlings, suckers and other "fire cracked" seed, flourished and a thick mass of scrub resulted.

Now these areas are all but inaccessible, even on foot. The "fire-killed" trees have mostly fallen, and now lie tangled, and slowly rotting - enormously inflammable, all through this "jungle" of re-growth.

Any action that interferes with provision of access, or fire control, including all forms of management, be it commercial, mining, Forests Commission or tourist entry, will surely impede and strangle any efforts to control the terrible danger that exists in our mountains.

It is my belief that management and development as it is now, should not be interrupted or interfered with, and that reduction of fire fuel, access and encouragement of commercial interests including tourist entry, should continue.

However, as there must be control, I believe some tightening of these controls should continue to be applied by present authorities, where serious damage to the area can occur.

I am a pensioner receiving a full service-pension under the repatriation system. My wife and I own our own small home at Bairnsdale. We do not own any land; nor have we ever owned land.

On Saturday, August 2, 1980, A.P.R.A. (Association for Protection of Rural Australia), held a meeting at Bairnsdale to foster interest in the movement. My interest and deep love of this country, the bush and the mountains, prompted my attendance.

Although the secretary for Land Conservation Council answered my early submission regarding the council's then pending recommendations to Government, I received no copy of these recommendations, as promised.

At the A. P. R. A. meeting, the organisation had available some very interesting pamphlets for distribution, among them a copy of L.C.C. recommendations for an alpine area of Victoria.

As one who has been very active in the past in encouraging the sport of ski-ing, down-hill and touring, entry into the mountains, and usage of them for sport and recreation, as well as prospecting and hunting, I was deeply disturbed by what was revealed at the A.P.R.A. meeting, and feel some action is called for by all Australians who care.

Unfortunately, the problem of the growing difference of opinion between the conservationist and the rural people, seems to be one of communication rather than friction between city people and those in the country.

After all, when the chips are down as they were when the Second World War began, we soon joined together to do what we could for the nation and our beliefs. The bush people and the city people soon made up a very significant volunteer army to fight that menace in 1939.

The L.C.C. recommendation is in fact the very thing that my early submission was based on, — "interference with the present method of control in the alpine regions".

I quote — "B1 Avon - (c) Construction of roads or tracks and the entry of vehicles not to be permitted other than for management purposes. (d) Grazing within it be terminated as soon as practical, but not later than three years after the acceptance of these recommendations."

Both recommendations mean interference with access.

Should L.C.C. recommendations be adopted in the Avon area, it is a sensible presumption that the same will occur, as it has already, in other areas of the Australian highlands and areas under the Crown.

Natural usage and care is being, and will be, practised by those graziers and people who understand the problems. These people have arrived at this understanding through many years and some generations of practical experience.

A further presumption is that the fire hazard will lose none of its dreadful menace fol-

lowing action to restrict usage. Lately, fire danger periods in seasons have disclosed an extra danger — that of the "Fire-bug".

There is a risk when thinking of fire-bugs, of overlooking a possible reason for this obsession, and that is, self-protection.

One has only to think of the many serious fires that have occurred in National Parks in recent times, to realise that there is a significant increase of fires deliberately lit.

Couple this with the fact that much valuable property lies in the natural path of wild fires, and you have a reason.

We have always had among us, those few unfortunates who depart from the normal and commit themselves to "Shock Value" behaviour, by crime or unusual behaviour for various reasons known only to themselves.

I say "Shock Value" behaviour because I believe that much of our modern entertainment and media action uses the tactics of shock to attract our attention. This is another form of advertising.

So, place property owners in risk of dreadful loss not only of their stock and property, but also of their very lives, and you increase immeasurably the chances of people taking action to protect themselves.

Considering then the state our alpine bush country is in now, and what it is sure to be after a period of stagnation under unwise restriction, any increase in fires that are lit deliberately, makes the likely result almost too fearful to think of.

My concern stems from an earnest desire to help to bring about a more sane and practical attitude by all Australians to the conservation problem, and to the support by all experienced people of the Association for Protection of Rural Australia.

My concern is also an unselfish one, as I have much less to lose in material ways than many who have shown little interest up to date.

Let us, therefore, appeal to all who love this our country, to try to communicate with those earnest, well-meaning conservationists who need practical education.

Please study the real world about us, and look beyond the doctrines of politics, permissive society and self-interest, to the preservation of our lovely country and its unique ecology.

Yours etc,

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**3TR**

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