

Let It Be Known

The Victorian mountain bushlands, like Nature's forests of the whole earth, came into being, not under the influences of mankind, but were here before the pathways of his faltering footsteps. They were here long before man came. They may be here long after his departure. The mighty law of opposing forces, which provides the harmony of the whole universe, is the cradle of being. Out of this confliction arose the primeval forests; not controlled by mankind, but providing his shelter, his food, and a resting place for his mortal bones.

There is no need to control the bush; it can control itself; as it had done for millions of years before any interference was brought to bear upon it. When we found this country under its natural conditions we found good forests and good balance. We cannot improve on that, but we can assist, in repayment, where the assets are there for our usage.

Man's interference is not needed for the well-being of this bush. The bush has a fine peaceful balance proven over time. Man has now a scientific un-balance that cannot find a resting place. Leave the bush at peace with Nature, and remove the so-called scientific bodies out of it. Their knowledge is as limited as those who teach them. Followers, all.

Control is costing this State millions annually. The mountain bushland is the hideout, and the unsuspecting public are the recipients of directed teachings. We had quite enough of this type of control, resulting in the horror bush fires in Gippsland in 1965, when between two and three thousand square miles of bush was ruined. It roared onward unchecked by any significant previous burns.

Neither are huge National Parks, under the control of Government bodies, the answer to the well-being of the mountain bushlands. Nor is this interference the desired thing for those who want to see the bush in its natural environment. The whole of the bush is already the State's National Park, as is, and should not be changed or charged; that is unnecessary interference again, obviously for the curtailment of the huge resources that are there for the country's needs.

Where there are timber resources for useful purposes these areas should be given in charge of private enterprise over long term arrangements so that they can be looked after, taken, and reinstated.

Where there are areas that can be grazed profitably, such grazing should be encouraged under private enterprise. And where mining or any other primary production can be carried on profitably without unduly damaging farming or grazing lands it should be encouraged under private enterprise also. None of these things are going to pollute the rivers or affect the water supplies whatsoever. To say that they would is just shear rot.

The unnecessary millions of dollars that are being poured into the mountain bushlands could be put to far better uses, and the people employed in this wastage should be turned to profitable work. The millions of dollars per annum saved could be put to storage dams on all our river systems; enough dams to hold all our wasting run-off waters. But we cannot fill dams where there is an accumulation of grass and rubbish in the country above them. Every sensible farmer or thinking person knows this. It is a known fact.

If we have a tank by our house to catch rain water off the roof we do not cover our roof with moss and grass and sticks and leaves to stop the run-off. We want the run-off to fill the tank. If the roof of Victoria (the mountain ranges) is allowed to accumulate long, rank, and rotting grass, leaves, bark and a variety of debris it is an affront to Nature and a serious "disaster" fire hazard. This also checks the run-off. Water so checked either evaporates again into the air or seeps deep into the structures of the earth - perhaps never reaching the upper reaches of the river systems at all.

Where the rain falls we find the best production. And we should use to the best of our ability the land where the rain falls; and then take the rest to other fertile areas.

If the Victorian bush is not allowed to be burned in a patchwork manner, as it has always been burned by natural lightning strike conditions, it will become one of two things, or both - a dead and decaying land devoid of living things, or a blackened earth, raped by horrible fires running unchecked.

The Forests Commission has accepted this principle of protective burning, but the areas burned are of little protective value. There is not enough burned. The mountains from Mt. Howitt to the Tambo Valley have never been in such a mess of undergrowth and dead and decaying debris. The few strips and patches burned along some major range tops between are in no way adequate to prevent a raging summer fire driven by a hot north-westerly wind. The spot drop hazard is frightening. Uncharred woolly bark, long ribbon-like bark hanging from the forks of trees, inflammable rubbish accumulated without check since 1939, would carry "spot drops" for miles beyond any control effort. Fire fighters could be baked without any possible escape. The living things of the bush would have no escape, nor the birds of the air. The bush here is in far worse condition than it was in 1939. I know it, I have seen it, and no man in his senses could dispute it.

An equally bad fire hazard can be seen in the Mt. Buffalo National Park. A frightful mess. Situated on the north-west corner of thousands of square miles of mountain country that if ignited in heavy hot inland wind conditions would no doubt explode across the whole of the mountain chain to the south-east.

All the living things of the bush have, in the past, depended upon the protective patchwork burning of the bush by Nature's lightning strike fires. They travel to these areas to live upon the lush regrowth. They graze on, and keep this regrowth in check. They flee from fire to these patchwork burns for protection where the bush is reinstated to live again in harmony with Nature, where lime and potash, released by burning, are available to carry on the never ending cycle of a living soil that supports a world of living animals, birds, insects and flowers.

Without this ever changing cycle we would find, in its place, a decaying bush being over-run with insect plagues that have to be sprayed by aerial attack to keep them in check. This method, of course, could start off endless chain reaction, as other insects could be wiped out also. Fire is the natural balancer to check these infestations.

Lightning strike fires occur when cool southerly sea breezes meet inland hot winds. Thunderstorms build up in these conditions; down comes the lightning to patchwork burn the bush under the cool wind-change conditions which may last up to four or five days, giving sufficient time for such burns to link up with similar burns that may have taken place over a period of six or seven years previously.

There is great variety and difference in summer period conditions over the years - drought summers, mild summers, hot summers and lightning strike periods in varying summer conditions. It seems that Nature burned the bush during some of these summer conditions. Unbelievable perhaps, the natural time to burn the bush was during the summer. Autumn or spring burning could be bad because of equinoctial wind conditions. Within this pattern the things of Nature adapted themselves to fit the environment. After millions of years it worked, and continues to work where not upset.

Two men and an aeroplane, under appropriate direction, could reduce our bushfire hazards safely enough and keep it back to desired natural proportions each year, while we would no longer be faced with the magnitude of some recent past fires, and the former park-like conditions may be gradually brought back as they existed in earlier times. This could be done without the millions of dollars spent on heavy machinery, Forestry roads, costly equipment and personnel. What a waste when we go back to consider how nature did the job without even one piece of machinery.

The mountain cattlemen of Victoria, who know this functioning so well, strive to work accordingly, and endeavor to carry to the general public their deep understanding of these bush laws. It is

vital now that this be done, before would-be controlling bodies seek further to ruin and despoil - unwittingly perhaps.

It is of paramount importance that grazing in the mountains be carried on in conjunction with patchwork burning to reduce the intensity of holocaust fires that ruin the mountain bushlands and fill our catchment reservoirs with dirt from fire roasted mountain sides.

There has been a very wrong approach in the management of the bush. Heavy burning brings on heavy regrowth. This resultant heavy regrowth in time provides a greater fire hazard build-up. Repetition of this places the bush in an unbalanced condition, with the open, grassed, park-like aspect giving way to further thickening of undergrowth. A series of light burnings is necessary to bring the bush back to its natural state. Then grazing is necessary to check and reduce, each year, grass that would otherwise become long and dry, thus reducing a long dry grass fire hazard build-up. Such grazing does not reduce the grass root system; it strengthens it, and the competition between grass and undergrowth reaches a natural balance. Having reached this natural balance again, we have reduced the wild-fire hazard considerably. This is the correct scientific approach to work on, and it is simple to work this way.

Gathering and weighing the combustible fuel on the forest floor to determine fire intensity sounds scientifically nice, but in the first place that accumulated combustible fuel should not be allowed to accumulate to any great proportion; this is only inviting trouble with wild-fire when we come into drought period conditions.

Serious bushfire devastation occurs in drought period conditions and we should avoid that. The weighing of combustible fuel on the forest floor apparently is to determine fire intensity in a given area under given conditions, such as: Wind intensity, direction of wind flow, humidity, temperature, gradient of terrain, anticipated created fire draught, spot drop estimate etc. etc. All this effort is just scientific fooling about, and there is no room for it in practical, down to earth commonsense application.

The Forests Commission is doing its best under the pressures to which they are subjected. I hope they remain. If they do not spend so much money they might. They are certainly curtailed in their efforts by scientific application - bird watchers, butterfly catchers, parks associationists and many others, who know little about the true ecology of the bush and its functioning. Such people, who, travelling through the bush, seldom get one hundred yards off the roads or beaten tracks.

We have a Soil Conservation Authority which is watching all this also. I hope they draw nearer to the Forests Commission and the Mountain Cattlemen to bring about good arrangement for the management of the mountain bushlands of Victoria and its products.

The cattlemen have this to their credit: In running their business they also manage (somehow) on corned beef and damper to pay their way, their rates and their taxes. This is an extremely important industry of the mountains that people know so little about. Past numbers of cattle in these mountain areas of eastern Victoria have been estimated at 40,000 head, though they are recently diminishing in numbers. Most of these are breeding herds that supply fattening age young cattle to the markets in the lowlands. It is an important industry to the mountain areas, and should be looked after and further promoted where possible. These cattle go a long way towards reducing grass fire hazards where they graze. The personalities of the cattlemen and their mountain cattle supply everlasting interest and intrigue to the travellers .

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