

Over quite a number of years past there has been an increasing number of Four Wheel Drive vehicles and Trail Bikes frequenting the remote and, once upon a time, inaccessible mountain areas in East Gippsland.

Whilst the owners of some of these vehicles - and there are some Four Wheel Drive Clubs included - do proceed carefully with all due regards to the environment and the care of property and live stock which inhabit those areas, there are far too many persons who have a total disregard for the environment, property and live stock.

The result is that we have had many complaints of wilful damage, slaughtering of cattle and larcenies and indiscriminant use of firearms.

Unfortunately the Police of this District have been badly handicapped in their endeavours to patrol these areas in an effort to apprehend offenders and keep all incidence of crime to a minimum.

Early in 1973, with the aid of vehicles supplied by some of the cattlemen of that area and the good personal assistance given by the same cattlemen, we were able to check on a number of vehicles in the vicinity of Connors Plains, the result being a number of prosecutions for breaches of the Firearms Act and the confiscation of about \$1,000.00 worth of unregistered firearms.

At times we have to rely on our friendly Forest Commission to assist us in penetrating these areas for specific searches, rescues etc.

Now we have one Police Department Four Wheel Drive vehicle stationed in this District and this vehicle is to be joined by two others at an early date this year.

The result is that from now on I intend to make good use of these vehicles with regular safaris into the country where most needed and very vigorous application of the law will be made in respect to those persons who transgress and who in the past have escaped detection because of our inability to follow them into Four Wheel Drive country.

This article is to serve warning to all persons who visit the mountain country and high plains, that we also can get in there now, and will do so frequently.

This is not to deter those who conscientiously observe all the correct procedures when visiting the scenic spots.

However, a word of warning to all users - (I bring to your

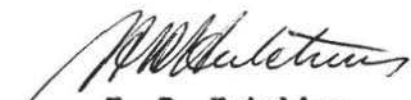
Notice a small article appearing in the Bairnsdale Advertiser a few weeks back by a spokesman from the Lands Department) - the driver of any vehicle which strays off a defined track in the forest area can be prosecuted.

I hope that this timely warning will have the desired effect on those to whom this article is directed and I hope that the members of the Mountain Cattlemen Association will find some satisfaction in our approach to a hitherto difficult problem brought about mainly by the limitation of our mobile equipment.

In summarising, I want to make some points clear:-

- (a) We have no power, nor would we want that power, to stop people visiting mountain areas;
- (b) Our presence in these areas would be not only to assist people whenever possible but also to clamp down on trouble makers;
- (c) We would endeavour to deter persons entering these areas when they are ill equipped to do so.

They inevitably become lost and costly searches have to be mounted with a risk of injury or even death to members of the search party.


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Superintendent of Police.

BAIRNSDALE.