

Hidden bounty of high plains

By SHANE WRIGHT

JACK Treasure is the voice of the bush.

For his 81 years he has lived and worked Victoria's high country.

His cattle property, Treasure Station, is one of the oldest in Australia and it is the highest.

An old dirt road through the Alpine National Park leads through some of Jack's property to the eastern side of Mount Hotham.

For at least three months of the year the road is blocked by snow.

A radio phone is the only contact with the outside world. The Treasure family has done without electricity and gas since it settled in the Dargo High Plains almost 140 years ago.

Jack Treasure is best known as the driving force behind the Mountain Cattleman's Association.

It fought for, and maintained, high plain grazing rights for the cattlemen of Victoria.

NSW highland farmers lost their rights to the lush plains around Kosciusko, but their Victorian counterparts won the political battle to maintain their lifestyles.

Kosciusko can be seen from Jack's place on a good day.

While attacked by en-

vironmental groups, Jack says he and his fellow highland farmers are the real environmentalists.

"I care for every tree, the plants, the animals, I want it to continue to live and thrive," he says.

"The cattlemen would not do anything to harm

this bush — it is too precious."

The Treasure family crossed the Great Divide on the backs of five horses in 1859, moving to the Dargo area to capitalise on the gold miners of the time.

In the 1870s they moved into beef cattle.

Now, Treasure Station sports four homes, each built by family members who have decided to remain on the property.

Jack and Marcia, his wife of 50 years, built their home by hand through a winter thick with snow.

Jack only had one year

of formal education and a scattering of correspondence courses.

Determined to overcome this handicap, he has spent his life reading Cicero, Aristotle, Lawson and Paterson.

His poetry is drawn from the bush which cuts the High Plains off from

civilisation and at night he entertains friends by reciting or even singing a few verses.

Everything revolves around his love for the bush. "It is beautiful, truly beautiful, because it is natural, part of you," he says.



Healthy outlook: For 140 years, Jack Treasure's family have lived and cared for Victoria's high country.