

A stirring sight

They came, they saw, and they conquered . . . they came to tell the people of Nunawading Province that Victoria was in danger of losing a magnificent living heritage.

They saw the genuine affection the people throughout the province had for them, and they conquered the hearts of all who saw them pass by.

All that is except for a lonely band of so-called conservationists who attempted to take the spotlight by dressing up as native animals.

But the crowd was not interested in dress-ups last Friday. Not when nearly 200 genuine cattlemen and women were riding through Ringwood on their hardy mountain horses showing the community that the Australia many of them thought had passed was still alive and well.

The cattlemen rode into Ringwood to protest against the Cain Government's plans to turn the entire Victorian alps into a massive national park which would stretch from Mansfield to the New South Wales border.

For the first time in their history the cattlemen were supporting a particular political party — the Liberals — but they were at pains to point out that electioneering had been forced on them. Over the past three years they had gone to extraordinary lengths to convince the Government that alpine grazing does not damage the environment.

The cattlemen were a stirring sight. They were clad in their usual attire of stockmen's hats, moleskin pants, oilskin coats and blue jackets and were representative of a Australia many in the crowd had only seen in books and on television.

The onlookers loved it. They saw a living heritage that belonged to all of them and they called out their support as the horsemen passed by.

It was an orderly demonstration and the co-operation between police and riders was excellent. Riders and police shared jokes and banter all along the route and one policeman said later that he wished all demonstrations were as orderly and entertaining as that one.

The cattlemen had camped on Thursday night at Eastfield Park, and in the glow of the campfires excitement started to build as the moment drew closer for them to deliver their

message to Nunawading voters.

During the ride the cattlemen were joined by about 20 Melbourne supporters who had requested to ride along side them to show their support.

The ride started at 10.30 am on Friday morning and the horsemen road up Eastfield Road Road to Mt Dandenong Road and down Maroondah Highway to Eastland. After completing a circuit of Ringwood Market it was back to the campsite and a shared barbecue

with members of the public.

Before lunch started, however, the guests heard speeches by the president of the Mountain Cattlemen's Association, Jim Commins and Liaison Officer, Graeme Stoney.

Mr Stoney told the crowd that cattlemen were not a political lobby group but had decided to support the Liberal Party in the Nunawading election because they had been given no choice.

CONSERVATION GROUPS CRITICISED

"We have decided to support the liberals because they are the only party with a sensible range of conservation policies," he said.

Mr Stoney criticised conservation groups which had been campaigning strongly throughout the electorate in support of particular candidates.

"There is no question that it is every Australian's right to have a voice at election time, however we believe that conservation groups which are subsidised by taxpayers should have to observe a certain code of conduct.

We don't believe it's ethical for them to enter the political arena when they enjoy public subsidies," he said.

Mountain Cattlemen's Association president, Mr Jim Commins said cattlemen had a long tradition of hospitality and were not seeking to keep the alps for themselves.

"We want to see the high country remain a multiple use area that can be used by all Victorians.

"If the alps are to remain in good heart it is vital that grazing continue to be used as a management tool," he said.



Onlookers loved the spectacle of the Mountain Cattlemen, and called out their support as the horsemen rode past Eastland Shopping Centre last Friday. They later shared a barbecue with members of the public.

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THREE DAYS OF RALLYING



Nunawading electors were shown in no uncertain terms last week that small businessmen and farmers were sick and tired of interference from Governments, unions and pressure groups. Ringwood was the setting for three major rallies which proved beyond a doubt that the protesters meant business.

On Thursday the Australian Small Business Association conducted a rally at Ringwood Civic Centre and called on the Government to remove all the impediments which prevent unemployed Victorians from obtaining jobs.

The federal president of ASBA, Mr Pete. Boyle, told the audience that Australia was going down the gurgler so fast that it just didn't matter.

"The dollar has dropped 50 per cent in two years — it's becoming funny money," he said.

"The unions just don't seem to understand what is happening to the country. "You'd have to be deaf, dumb or blind, or live in Canberra not to understand what is happening in the real world."

Mr Boyle said that the public sector had to be rejuvenated to get the country moving again.

\$18 Billion goes begging

The timber industry was well represented at the rally and Greg McCormack of the Sawmiller's Association said that restrictions placed on the industry had reduced its operating area to only four per cent of the state.

"Victoria produces only 40 per cent of our wood fibre. We import 60 per cent or \$2 billion worth annually," he said.

"But the irony is that we are sitting on a natural resource worth \$18 billion. It's a renewable resource and if we had access to it it would generate thousands of jobs."

Mr McCormack said that if the Alpine National Park went ahead tourism would have to increase by 700 per cent to replace the jobs that would be lost as a result.

Cattlemen Ride

On Friday the Mountain Cattlemen put their case to the electors. Liaison Officer for the cattlemen, Graeme Stoney, said they were

acting on behalf of all the people who opposed the plans that Government and extremists had for the high country.

Mr Stoney lashed out at the Australian Conservation Foundation by saying it was too much to see cattlemen's taxes being used to support a group which was campaigning for their downfall.

He said a member of the Cattlemen's Association would be quite prepared to participate in a public debate with ACF Chairman, Dr Geoff Mosley.

Free Meat

On Saturday morning farmers who oppose the Government's decision not to allow meat to be marketed through supermarket chains on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings, handed out free meat to consumers at Target Square, Ringwood.

A spokesman for the farmers said the Government's attitude was senseless and was harming the meat industry. "Other industries can market their products throughout normal retail hours in all the usual outlets. Why can't we," he asked.

It appears that one thing is certain as the Nunawading election draws closer. Radical minority groups are being opposed strongly by members of what was formerly known as the 'silent majority'.

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