

THE MOUNTAIN CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA

NEWSLETTER

April, 1984

Summary of Inspection Tour

ON the 11th and 12th April to fulfill a longstanding invitation, the Ministers for Planning and Environment and Conservation, Forests and Lands (The Hon. Messrs. E. Walker and R.A. McKenzie) accompanied by their personal advisers, Miss Jenny Love and Mr. Max Kitchell, as well as Government press representatives, Steve Guest and research scientists, visited the Nunniong area and the Bogong High Plains to see for themselves what the cattlemen and the researchers could show them.

ON arrival by aeroplane at Benambra on Wednesday morning, the visitors were met by members of the Mountain Cattlemen's Association from all branches who were waiting with four-wheeled drive vehicles to convey and escort them to the Nunniong and Native Dog Plain areas that day.

A fog bound landing strip at Benambra caused some delay, but a fine warm day followed. The party proceeded via Omeo and Tongio then up Ezard's logging road to the Nunniong Plateau. The first stop was at trial plots established by L.J. Liaing, a Forest Commission Officer, some ten or twelve years ago. One of these plots has had the surrounding wire netting fence maintained to exclude all grazing animals and adjacent to it is a plot bounded by a plain and barbed wire fence to exclude all cattle and horses.

CATTLE and wild horses had been grazing round the plots very shortly before the visit as shown by the traces left and it is in an area much favoured by grazing animals. In spite of a summer season that has had unusually regular falls of rain which resulted in more green blades of grass than is usual in the totally protected plot it was easy to recognise a potential fire hazard devoid of wildflowers with enormous ramifications if extended over a large area. The surrounding well grazed area that still had a nice selection of late wild flowers could hardly fail to impress the visitors with its much safer environment for wild life and trees as well as an aesthetically pleasing area to look at and walk upon.

AFTER a barbecue lunch and brief inspection of evidence of rabbit caused erosion of past years that is now healed, the tour proceeded to Native Dog Plain by the headwaters of the Buchan River, and Rocky Plain where excellent recovery from extreme drought and the very beneficial effects of well managed protective burning and water conservation were observed. The party returned via Benambra to Omeo to stay for the night.

THE next day of inspection was on the Bogong High Plains where the tour and discussion was led by researchers Dick Williams, David Ashton, W. Papst and Harm Van Rees.

IT was clearly obvious to all that in areas where cattle grazing had been prevented for a period of years, woody shrubs were dominating. A mossbed area in this environment is particularly vulnerable to a drought time fire and subsequent flood when its most valuable silt trap value could be destroyed or seriously damaged.

IN experimental work the pattern of regrowth is being studied on plots that have been chipped bare and protected from cattle. However, the results could be clouded or misleading because of the obvious presence of many hares that may eat certain species and not allow them to survive as it is normal for all grazing animals to have a distinct preference for young shoots of plant growth.

AN interesting segment of discussion that the scientists present could not make informed comment upon, was about the theory that snowfields over heavy ground cover are less valuable as water catchment areas because there is much more loss to evaporation in these circumstances.

IN summary I am sure the tour was interesting and informative and as would have to be expected the visitors were reticent about their impressions.