

**A Brief History of the Bluff Hut as told by Graeme Stoney to Wendy Jubb
Stoney April 2007.**

**For a full history of the Bluff Hut see “The Howqua Hills story” by Chris Stoney.
This book is being up-dated by Graeme Stoney and will be released in 2016**

The much loved and visited Bluff Hut was burnt to the ground in January 2007 by a fierce bushfire that came from the North through the Bluff Saddle like a volcano. The fire was part of the fires that burnt more than a million hectares in the Victorian High Country this summer.

Before the hut was built, cattlemen mustering camped under the snow gums in the Bluff saddle. It was often wet, miserable and cold so Eadley Stoney organised various Mountain Cattlemen to build the Bluff Hut.

In December 1955 the galvanised iron and other materials were taken to the end of the existing jeep track between Bindaree and Pikes by the Forests Commission. ..The original jeep track, was only extended to the Bluff Hut from Pike’s Flat about 1960, well after the Bluff Hut was built. It was steep and rough with sections the early 4wd had to reverse up and then go forward again.

In the December school holidays 1955 , Eadley’s son Graeme, aged 15 and a school friend, Ron Davidson, camped at Pike’s flat and packed the iron and building materials from the Howqua River to The Bluff with a string of packhorses, up the narrow and dangerous bridle track.

The original site selected for the Hut was what is called “The First Water”, about a mile east of where the present Hut stands. Young Graeme and his youthful friend dropped all the building materials there, however when the senior Cattlemen came to build the Hut, they decided to bring everything back to the Bluff saddle. This decision was based on the fact that if early snows fell it was far easier to drop down the bridle track, out of the snow, with the horses and cattle, than from The First Water.

Eadley Stoney, together with Jack Ware, Ray Kelly, Jack Davon, Archie Cameron and others, all contributed, in one way or another, to the building of the original Bluff Hut in the summer of 1956. That year was one of the wettest on record and the builders of the hut were working in appalling conditions including knee deep mud – visitors commented that the conditions endured were “sub-human”.

Eadley Stoney was the main organiser as he had the largest cattle numbers on the lease. Jack Ware brought his bush skills and the original hut was a testimony to his talent with the adze and broad axe. It is a tragedy that this history and craftsmanship has now gone up in smoke.

The posts for the original hut, the beams and the tie beams were obtained from snow gum around the site. Two tie beams, which went across the hut holding the posts

together, were cleverly sawn with a cross cut saw from one snow gum log on site. The roof timbers were local ash, shaped by Jack Ware into a work of art.

The entrance door was in two halves, like stable doors, for three reasons. One reason was that you could keep the bottom door shut against the snow, open the top door and step out. The second reason was it was easier to pack half doors on a horse than a single door because everything in the original hut came in by packhorse, including the ex army beds. The third reason was you could close the bottom door to keep the dogs and horses out but open the top door for extra light and air.

Graeme Stoney tells of many a time when the snows came early and the horses would put their head in the top of the door looking for a feed. They had icicles six inches long hanging off their whiskers, which clanked around their nose and mouth.

Another story that should be told is that in the late 1960's, a very young Charlie Lovick and Graeme Stoney went up in June, looking for stragglers. It was a drought year. They camped at The Bluff Hut. Charlie rode out to the Lovick Run on King Billy and Mt. Clear, on his own and only in his mid teens and Graeme was to sweep The Bluff run, riding one of Lovick's very good horses called Playboy.

Obscure cattle tracks led Graeme down the Long Spur which runs from Barclays Old Yards towards the Jamieson River. Not finding any cattle, he was about to return when he heard the murmur of the river. Thinking "I'll just have a look," he rode down as far as possible, tied Playboy up and walked a hundred yards to an almost vertical drop to the river. Peering through the scrub, Graeme saw a narrow little 'run' with a huge trout feeding in it. A few yards below, there was a deep pool, obviously where the fish lived. Grabbing a rock, Graeme silently blocked its only retreat into the big pool. The fish went berserk; Graeme stripped off and jumped in, wrestled the fish and got it. He claims that when he put a forked stick in the fish's mouth to carry it on his horse, he had to keep lifting his arm or the tail dragged on the ground. Nevertheless, we all know Mountain Cattlemen tell tall tales around the campfire!

On return to the Bluff Hut without any cattle, Graeme hung the trophy fish from a beam in the Hut so that when Charlie Lovick walked in after dark, he bumped into it. "Geez, where'd ya get that bastard! I've been out mustering and you've been out fishing!" The boys ate the fish, but not before drawing a charcoal outline of the monster on the back of the Bluff Hut door which could still be seen, until it was burnt down this year.

In somewhat controversial circumstances (the controversy generated by purists,) the Bluff Hut was extended in 1982 – 1983, by High Country Adventure, a partnership of John Brewster, Jock Dyason and Graeme Stoney. A decade of remote back country skiing was provided to the public in Australia and from all over the world. Guests included the then editor of Four By Four magazine Ron Moon and wife Viv.

When Chris Stoney took over from Graeme, the hut continued as a base for the Stoney's cattle lease and 'Bluff and Beyond' trail ride operations . It remained a welcome refuge for hikers and four wheel drive visitors Over the years it is known to have saved several lives.

With the cancellation of the Alpine grazing leases by the Victorian State Government in 2005, Parks Victoria claimed rights over the Bluff Hut.

When the fires started in December 2006 a group of concerned people including the Lovick's and the Stoney's, ran the gauntlet of the fire front which was burning around the Eight Mile and had a major clean up around the hut. Despite this action the hut could not withstand the ferocity of the fire that came a few days later.

The Stoney family and friends pledged to re-build the original Bluff Hut and adjoining refuge as a matter of principle, for the people of Victoria; and this will happen next spring.

The decision has been made not to try and replicate the original hut, but build another bush hut in true bush style. Suitable timber has already been accessed and plans are being drawn up by David Stoney, who along with his father Graeme, are organising the project

Some generous donations have been received including from ARB, David Muir and Silcar. Many smaller but very welcome donations have made the going easier. This support is very much appreciated, by the Stoney's, their friends and supporters of the Bluff Hut.