

THE YARNER

The official newsletter of the **MCAV**

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"Grazing is a passive method of reducing fuel and creating firebreaks in the High Country.

"It is not the complete answer, of course, but it is indisputably an important tool in reducing fuel, especially grass, in the bush and on the High Plains" -
President of the MCAV, Bruce McCormack. This is a GENUINE photo taken on the Dargo High Plains on January 6 this year, showing an area grazed versus un-grazed. PHOTO: Mick Sweeney



Presidents report

- A word from Bruce McCormack

In other circumstances, I should have been talking here about the recent success of our Merrijig Get Together.

Of thousands gathering to celebrate the heritage and traditions that we hold dear. Of horse races, kids games, dog high jumps and heritage parades. Of rodeo buck outs, poetry competitions, tug of wars and forum discussion's.

Instead, as we all know, our beloved 2020 Get Together was cancelled just days out from the event after the Shire of Mansfield was declared a State of Disaster by the Victorian Premier.

This was no ones fault, and though we agreed with the decision it did not make it any easier.

So now here it is the first week of February and all our usual photo reports, stories and information has been

put on hold while we consider where we head now.

Yes, we have event cancellation insurance which will help cover the costs outlaid before the event – but now the big question becomes what next? It is the second year running we have had serious weather impacts on our event – first a heat wave at Oxley then bushfires.

It has been talked about before, but I do think we will have to revisit changing the date of the Get Together on a permanent basis. When it should be changed to is up for debate, but let's at least start having some discussions around the topic ahead of 2021.

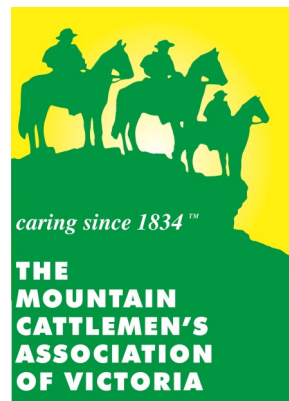
A change of date would of course mean losing some guests, as every weekend is bound to clash with plans somewhere. But it is also a chance for us to change things that weren't working, embrace things that were, and make the Get Together an event that is even bigger and better.

In other news, many of you have been impacted by bushfires. We have had grazing members lose stock, hay supplies and everything in between. We have Associate Members who have lost their homes, their cars and in some cases, loved ones.

The bushfires have been devastating across the board. Now more than ever it is time for our voice to be heard.

As a group, we know how to help better manager the High Country. There is no band aid fix – there is years of work ahead to return the bush to the way it once was, but we need to take that first step.

The MCAV do not claim that cattle grazing is the be all and end all. But we certainly think it is one way of



**We want to
say thanks**

The decision to cancel any event has massive ramifications, not just financially for organisers but for those who had marked the dates in their social calendar.

We were expecting 1500 people to come along to our Merrijig Get Together, and had sold almost 1000 tickets online before hand. Refunding all of these was a long, involved process—and yet we have not had one complaint. Every single person has been patient, understanding and most often than not, the only question they have is when will the next Get Together be hold. We don't know the answer to that yet—but we owe you all a debt of thanks.

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managing bush fire fuel loads - along with cool burning and better management to name a few.

We have been busy getting our message out to media outlets, trying to encourage people to think outside the box for a Parks and Forest that is a happier place for all.

Despite time being of the essence over the last two months, we have still made a conscious effort to attend meetings when we can.

One of these saw myself, Rose Faithfull, Andrew Kee and Chris Commins head to Melbourne for a meeting with DELWP.

The meeting was to discuss changes being made by Minister Lily D'Ambrosio that will mean hunters in areas licensed under the Land Act will no longer be required to notify MCAV leaseholders of their intention to be out shooting.

We do not agree with this change, nor do we support it.

We have made a submission to the Minister as such, calling for her to keep the laws as they are as well as calling for the establishment of buffer zones around private property, which would mean hunters are unable to legally shoot next to farms.

Although we appreciated being invited to the meeting, I can not help but feel it was little more than lip service—a ticking of governmental boxes to satisfy hierarchy, with no real intention to hear what we have to say.



We will continue to talk to the Minister and DELWP about his over the coming weeks and will let you know how things progress.

On another note, the MCAV office will be sending out a survey as we start to plan out our 2020 year – please fill it in and return it if you can so we know what you consider important.

Until next time,

Collector looking for plates

The MCAV has been contacted by a collector of plates, who is currently searching for a set of those released by the Mountain Cattlemen's a few years ago.

"I am a Victorian number plate collector and have a set of almost all the different types of standard and special interest plates within Victoria in my name," Campbell Thompson wrote to the MCAV.

"One of the plates I have found difficult to obtain is the MCA special interest plates. I can see that they were issued between 000MCA and 099MCA—however many between that series aren't on a car.

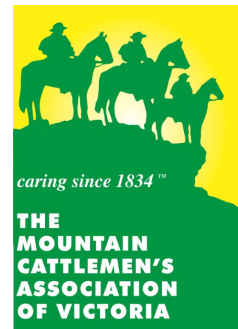
"If any member part of the club has a set lying around and would be interested in selling, I would be more than happy to send an offer.

"My plates are often on display at numerous events and very few people know about the MCA plates so it would also be a great opportunity

for other plate collectors to gain some insight."

If you have a set that you are interested in selling,

you can contact Campbell on 0425 419 055 or email him at thompson.c33@gmail.com.



MCAV Board & People you can contact:

President: Bruce McCormack

Vice President: Ben Treasure

Secretary: Ken Heywood

Past President: Graeme Stoney

Interim Treasurer/ Associate Member: John Andrews

Special Projects Officer: Chris Commins

North East Branch reps: Lyric Anderson & Bruce Treasure

Mansfield Branch reps: Cass & Jack McCormack

Omeo Branch reps: Simon Turner & Darcy Fitzgerald

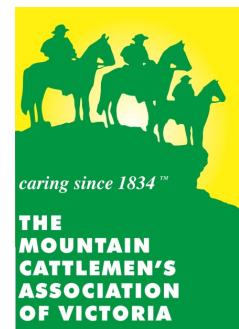
Gippsland Branch reps: Chris Hodge & Chris Cooper

Office Manager: Rhyll McCormack

Get Together Coordinator: Cass McCormack

Email: secretary@mca.vic.au

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Bushfires: Commins sisters return home to help save the family farms

This story was printed in The Australian on January 6, written by journalist Rachel Baxendale. The MCAV gratefully thank both The Australian and Rachel for their permission in letting us feature the story in this edition of The Yarnar.

FOR the Commins sisters, letting their parents and brother battle the fires threatening their Omeo district properties in East Gippsland alone was not an option.

The fifth-generation mountain cattle farming family successfully defended their home from the fires that burned all around their Swifts Creek and Benambra properties as teenagers home for summer holidays in 2003, and they're doing the same as professionals in their early 30s in 2020.

As authorities declared a state of disaster and ordered people to evacuate on Friday, Wangaratta GP Genevieve, Melbourne communications consultant Sally, Melbourne agri-finance professional Dee and several family friends talked their way through a police roadblock at Harrietville to drive over the top of Mount Hotham to their parents' house north of Swifts Creek, and 2000ha cattle property at Benambra. Sally, who left her 15-month-old daughter at home in Melbourne with her husband, said she believed police let them through only because they were in convoy with their brother Alastair's girlfriend, Jackie McGrath, who had a slip-on firefighting unit on the back of her ute. All three Commins sisters are experienced firefighters, having spent their university holidays working as part of Environment Department firefighting crews based at Swifts Creek.

A contingent of 10, including the Comminses parents, Bruce and Kate, brother Alastair, who works on the family farm, Ms -McGrath and three family friends took on the challenge of defending their properties.

They spent Saturday morning running sprinklers over the house and sheds, filling gutters, and moving horses to the home paddock, as well as cleaning up around sheds and opening gates for cattle to escape on the Benambra property.

"Around noon, the ash started falling really heavily at home," Sally Commins said. "I called Dad and said you'd better get back here, because things were looking a whole lot worse at home. We didn't have flames at home (on Saturday), but it was the same as 2003, where it went the darkest orange you can imagine. Really dark, heavy ash falling, and embers. It was very tense for a few hours."



Photo: Sally and Genevieve Commins returned home to help save the family's properties in Victoria's East Gippsland. PHOTO: The Australian & Rachel Baxendale.

A wind change mid-afternoon did not help, with gusts making fires to the south, north and west of the properties unpredictable. Sally Commins said she saw two Chinook helicopters flying to Omeo to evacuate 50 vulnerable residents, and two Black Hawk Helicopters that flew in supplies.

Unlike others near Omeo and Benambra who suffered terrible stock losses, the Comminses survived Saturday unscathed. Yet the threat remains, with hot weather predicted by the end of the week, fires still burning and all roads out blocked indefinitely.

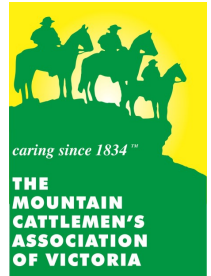
Said Sally Commins: "If you're going to stay and defend, you need a plan, and all hands on deck."

A sunburnt country

Poem by Troy Gerdes

I love a sunburnt country, a land of sweeping plains.
But I've gotta tell ya mate, I like it better when it rains.
The countryside is dying and there's just no end in site,
and just to run salt in the wounds, the bush has caught alight.
The landscape is on fire, from Brisbane to the Gong
And everybody's asking "where the hell did we go wrong?"
But we can get through this one if we help each other out,
take care of your neighbour, that's what Aussies are about

The rain is gunna fall again, the good times will return
But living in Australia means at times its gunna burn
So if you need a helping hand, just give a mate a call.
We're all here to help you out, and catch you when you fall
The CFA, the SES, the fireys and police
All put their lives upon the line to help to keep the peace
So hats off to these hero's and thanks for all you do
And I hope when this is over we can make it up to you .



Obituary: Neil James Walker

24.11.1935 – 7.1.2020

NEIL James Walker was farewelled by family and friends at the Strathbogie Hall after he passed away peacefully on January 7.

Interred at the Strathbogie cemetery, Neil chose to be buried at 'home' – the tiny town where he grew up, married and raised a family.

Neil met his childhood sweetheart, Olga, at the local primary school – and although love did not blossom straight away, the pair were firm friends until they married in 1957. The pair went on to have six children – Anthony (deceased), Deb, Andrew, Paul and Peter.

During the eulogy, Peter remembered his parents as being a formidable pair.

"Mum and dad's partnership would stand the test of time," he said. "In the many photos they are always together and smiling or laughing.

"Through good and bad times they showed a resilience that would be an inspiration to us all - Mum and dad were soul mates and a great example of what marriage can be."

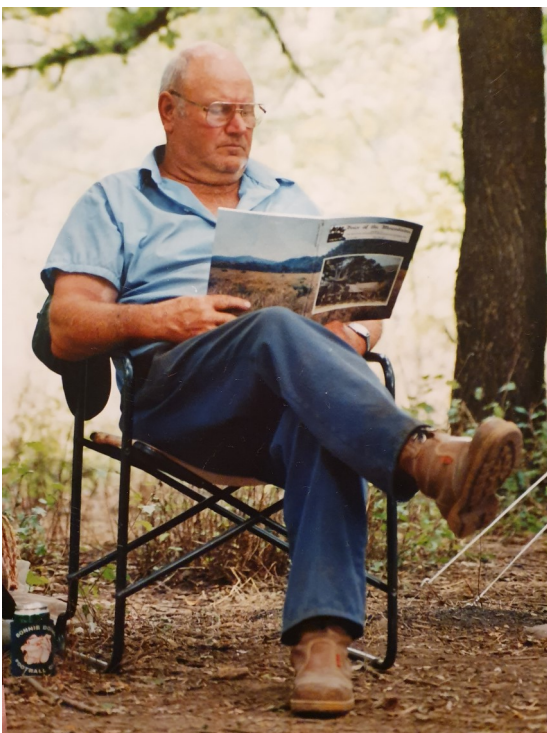
Neil was described as being a quiet man with a personality that attracted those around him, an honourable and honest man whose handshake was his word and bond, and a loving husband, father and grandfather.

Neil, who worked as both a farmer and in the logging industry for many years, sustained a serious injury in 1975 which saw him lose the use of his left arm. In hospital for many months, Neil's family continued the work on the family property "Sunnyside".

Eventually, he returned to work in the local mill and continued to fall trees, drive dozers and trucks.

Always the quiet achiever, Neil was quick remembered during his funeral service as being quick to lend a hand, offer a smile or the lend of a piece of farming equipment.

After years on the farm Neil and Olga sold up at Sunnyside and moved into Mansfield, chasing a quieter retirement.



Although still busy helping out at his daughter Deb's place in Merrijig, Neil was finally able to relax a little.

After moving into Mansfield Neil embraced his role as both a grandfather, and a town gardener – no one is sure which he preferred more.

His little vegetable plot was ever bountiful, and his chook house and farm fresh eggs provided many a Saturday breakfast for him and Olga.

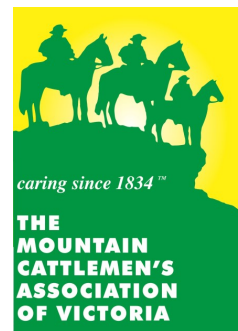
Neil always maintained a keen interest in the going ons of the Mountain Cattlemen.

He was the first to head up to the McCormack lease and check on cattle, and when the Government briefly introduced a grazing trial at Wonnangatta Station, Neil and Olga were one of those to put their hands up and volunteer in minding the cattle on-site.

After a brief fight with cancer, Neil passed away peacefully at the Mansfield District Hospital earlier this month.

He will forever be remembered as a kind man who looked for the good in all he came across.

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Get to know the MCAV Board: Chris Hodge

In a new column that will hopefully become a regular in the Yarnier, we take a look at each of our MCAV Board Members.

Who they are, where they are from and why they believe the work of the MCAV is important.

This edition, we talk to Chris Hodge, elected at the September AGM as a representative on the Gippsland MCAV branch.

Name: Chris and Clelia Hodge, children Lloyd and Charlotte

Position on the MCAV board: New Gippsland Branch rep

Where is your farm/grazing lease located: Dryland farm at Valencia Creek breeding Hereford cattle. Moroka, north of the road near the Moroka Hut that is now in the Park.

Tell us a bit about your farming operation: Spent a lifetime purchasing a small farm at Valencia Creek. Have previously run cattle on Mt Wellington plans, Mt Kent, Dairy farm Flat, Little River, Newplace Creek and Moroka NP. First ride into Moroka with cattle in 1968. Current alpine lease was transferred to Celia and I by Bob Dunsmuir for helping them run their cattle on Mt Wellington and Moroka for many years. By coincidence our lease is just outside, but surrounded by the ANP

Why do you choose to be part of the MCAV: To try to preserve our culture and reduce the damage being done to the bush.

Best advice you ever received: Never argue with a fool. Because anyone observing will not be able to tell the difference.

Worst advice you ever received: Park Ranger (David Chief Ranger ANP Wonnangatta Moroka Unit) just after the ANP was created to include Moroka. "Don't worry no one could ever mount a case to stop cattle grazing at Moroka because it is in such good condition after 100 years of management by cattlemen and it is consistently identified by tourists as the most iconic place in the park unit because of it."



Chris Hodge and the family, pictured on a recent holiday to Tasmania.

Dates for the diary

This year, we are laying out our MCAV Board Meeting dates early so that you have plenty of notice to come along.

The dates are as follows:

MCAV BOARD MEETINGS:

March 30, 11am @ Savoy Club in Myrtleford

July 27, 11am @ Traralgon Vineyard in Traralgon

MCAV AGM:

September 28, 11am @ a location to be confirmed.

A note about MCAV Board meetings

The more people, the better—that is the way we feel about MCAV Board meetings.

The meetings are not only a chance to hear about what's happening in an official capacity, but it's also a great way to put faces to names and catch up with those who live on the other side of the hill.

We have tried to spread out our meeting dates and locations to encourage visitors from all across the MCAV grazing regions.

For those of you who have not been before, it is important to note a few things.

Agendas will be sent out prior to all meetings, but please let us know a week out if you are able to attend so that we can let the venue cater appropriately.

Only Board members are able to vote during a meeting, but that does not mean we aren't listening. We have the newly created Board Associate Member position (held by John Andrews) which was created so that members have a 'voting voice'. John is more than happy to discuss anything you would like him to raise. Shoot an email to secretary@mcaav.com.au and John will then be able to discuss issues during meetings.

We are also adding time for general discussion during each Board Meeting, where we will invite all those present to take the floor. This way, you can let us know any issues, things you want followed up etc.

For items that require Board investigation or something that needs to be signed off, you are welcome to again email the office and we can add the topic into our agenda.

Most importantly, we want your feedback—both at our meetings and at any other times during the year. We need to know what our members want so that we can remain a strong group focused on the right issues.

See you in March at Myrtleford!



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Howqua Hills relaunch

- Third edition printing of much loved local book

The much anticipated third edition of the Howqua Hills Story will be launched next Sunday at the Mansfield Railway Station, with a host of high country legends attending to mark the occasion.

First published in 1985 by Chris Stoney, the book will now enjoy its third run after being reviewed and edited by Graeme Stoney – complete with updated photos, information and historical data.

Graeme is no stranger to history, having been an integral driver in the recently launched High Country History Hub, an online historical reference facility at the Mansfield Historical Society.

He is also actively involved at the Society itself.

Graeme and Chris will be joined at the launch by well-known identities Ian Stapleton and Les Blake, both of whom will speak not only on the book itself but of their links with earlier Mansfield.

Les will recall some stories about the timber industry.

"Howqua Hills and the Howqua watershed is an iconic valley loved by locals and visitors alike," Graeme said.

"Chris and I felt it was important that its history, its people and important events are recorded for posterity.

"The Howqua valley has experienced Aboriginal occupation, gold mining, timber production, Alpine grazing and an amazing growth in visitor numbers.

"It has experienced bushfires, droughts, and floods and its visitors are an important contributor to Mansfield's economy."

Of course, Graeme jokingly said the most important contribution the Howqua Hills had made to Mansfield was their famous blackberries - "they make the best jam, even better than Tolmie," he said.

"The legendary Howqua Track has grown from originally a wagon track to a rough four wheel drive track to logging road and is now a wide forest road maintained by the Shire - it is significant for our history that it is still referred to officially as the 'Track'," Graeme said.

"Our book records some of the stories of the early forestry and cattlemen and contains many photos never before seen publicly.

"It has a full chapter devoted to the timber industry and one on the local Mountain Cattlemen families."

The new Howqua Hills Story is 177 full colour pages, with quality paper used throughout.



Graeme and Chris Stoney, pictured here with the third edition of their much loved book the Howqua Hills Story.

The Mansfield Historical Society will host the launch of the Howqua Hills Story third edition on Sunday, Feb 23 at 2.30.

Everyone is welcome to attend the launch, where copies of the book will be available for the special price of \$50.00.

Graeme and Chris will also be on hand to sign copies purchased during the event.

For those that are unable to make the launch, the Howqua Hills Story will be available for purchase next week from the Mansfield Historical Society and several Mansfield shops.

Copies can be posted out by the Mansfield Historical Society to those who live outside of Mansfield at cost.

Please let the Mansfield Historical Society know if you will be attending the book event for catering purposes 57791094, or email them at mansfieldhs@bigpond.com.

It is recommended you bring a chair and hat.

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Dargo Mural: The Cattlewomen of the High Country

By Simon White Art

My name is Simon White, and I am an artist from Loch Sport, in Victoria.

I specialise in designing and painting murals for a variety of clients. These include private outdoor and indoor murals on water tanks, caravans, sheds, garages and walls – as well as mural commissioned by businesses, local councils, historical societies and community groups.

I have completed many large-scale murals around Victoria and New South Wales over the last few years, including a number of historical murals that provide an artistic snapshot of times gone by.

I have recently completed two such murals in the beautiful town of Dargo, which is located in the High Country of Victoria.

One of these murals show the miners of the area from the nineteenth century and is located inside the Dargo Store.



Artist:
Simon White

Mining plays an important role in the history of the local area, and this mural was commissioned by the owner of the store, Kerry and Pete Leemon, in order to ensure Dargo's history is recognised.

The late mural on the exterior wall of the Dargo General Store depicts the droving cattle women of the area and was commissioned also by the Leemon's to recognise the hard work of these women, and the farmers of Dargo.

Most of the current drove of Dargo are women who originate from the Treasure family.

The treasure family have been droving cattle to the high country for generations, and continue to do so.

The advantage of taking cattle to the High Country is not only to provide much needed feed for the cattle in these difficult dry months, but also to maintain the grass to minimise impact from fire.

The Treasure family drove the cattle during December each year, and will continue to do so into the future.

The townspeople of Dargo are very proud of their beautiful town and worked hard planning and petition for funds to enable the creation of these murals, as they aid in the preservation of their history and help to attract tourists to their wonderful town.

Their attempts for government funding were unsuccessful, as funding for the arts in country towns is hard to come by, so Kerry and Pete commissioned and funded the murals themselves.

This is evidence of their dedication towards preserving and celebrating the past, present and future of the beautiful town of Dargo.

The Dargo murals, along with many of my other murals from a variety of locations, can be viewed on my Facebook page at [Simone White Art](#).



The mural painted at Dargo by Simon White, picturing the cattlewomen of Dargo, most of whom originate from the Treasure family. The painting was commissioned by the owners of the Dargo General Store, Kerry and Pete Leemon.



Simon also painted a mural on the interior of the Dargo General Store, celebrating the history and important contribution mining had made to the local area.

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Alpine grazing should be considered at bushfire commission

By Marian Macdonald

As Prime Minister Scott Morrison receives feedback from the states about the terms of a bushfire royal commission, Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria president Bruce McCormack has only one wish - to be heard.

"Cattlemen should be given the opportunity to be part of a royal commission," Mr McCormack said.

"I think with fuel reduction burning and cattle grazing, we can reduce the intensity of the fire.

"There's been a big resurgence in calls for more alpine grazing but it's been mainly from the general public.

"We haven't heard from any government body."

Mr McCormack said that, although it would take an Act of Parliament to allow grazing in the Alpine National Park, it would be simpler to offer access to state parks.

Grazing would help in places where fuel reduction burns might be too damaging to the environment.

"You can burn the alpine ash and graze the snow gums," he said.

"The snow gums can't handle too much heat.

"Hundreds of years ago, lightning strikes would burn out regularly and there was a lot less stuff on the ground.

"When there's a lightning strike now, they send dozers and machinery to put those lightning strikes out.

"Nature had its own way of managing fuel loads but people have bugged it.

"We can't stop fires but we can reduce their intensity.

"We can help do that by grazing our cattle in some sections next to where it has been burned."

The University of Melbourne research in 2017 found snow gums were under threat from repeated fires.

On average, after three successive fires, half of all snow gums were dead.

Environment and Climate Change Shadow Minister David Morris refused to say whether he would support greater alpine grazing.



"I think it's putting the cart before the horse to talk about whether particular solutions are appropriate ahead of a full inquiry," Mr Morris said.

"There may be merit in all sorts of ideas but I think we need a complete investigation before we start talking about particular solutions."

From May 2015, the Victorian government changed the law to limit grazing in the Alpine and River Red Gum national parks.

This story was written by Stock and Land journalist, Marian McDonald, and featured in the paper on February 13. Stock and Land prints weekly.

"Nature had its own way of managing fuel loads but people have bugged it."

"We can't stop fires but we can reduce their intensity."

We will be at the MAN FROM SNOWY RIVER festival

The Mountain Cattlemen's Association is heading to Corryong in April to take part in the annual Man From Snowy River competition.

No, we aren't donning boots and helmets and hitting the competition circuit—but we do understand we have a lot of our own, including some of the Faithfull kids competing—but rather will be there to talk with those interested in better management of our Parks and Forests.

This is a great opportunity to meet with members, as well as connecting with new faces. President Bruce will be on hand to help manage our stall as well, so if you are in the area drop by and say hi.

The MCAV tent will be located near the campdraft arena.

The MFSR festival runs from April 2—5. For more information on the

Can you represent the MCAV?

During the Man From Snowy River festival the MCAV will be taking part in the street parade at Corryong, and we would love you to join us!

Bring the kids, the horse or even the dog and wear your best MCAV shirt.

The parade takes place on Saturday, April 4, at 10.30am at the main street in Corryong. It is recommended you arrive at least half an hour early if you wish to take part.

