Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria
June / July 2020

THE YARNER

The official newsletter of the MCAV

What's inside:

- **Bushfire Royal Commission**
- **Get to know a Grazier; learn the story behind the Woman from Snowy River**
- **Brumbies: where the MCAV stand, and an opinion piece from Andrew Rule**
- **Rainbow, a poem by Howard James and the history behind it**

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:

CANCELLED: July MCAV Board Meeting. In response to Covid this will now be held via Zoom link on Monday, July 27 at 7.30pm. Please let us know if you would like to 'zoom in'.

MCAV AGM:

TO BE CONFIRMED PENDING COVID RESTRICTIONS

A word from the President, Bruce McCormack:

Hello all and welcome to another edition of The Yarner.

Here we are mid-way through the year and things are as uncertain as ever.

Any plans that we had of holding a Get Together in 2020 now seem unlikely, which means we probably won't all get a chance to catch up again until sometime in 2021.

In the last two months the Bushfire Royal Commission hearings have begun, with daily reports able to be found on most major news sites. In short, little has been said about the effectiveness of cattle grazing as a way to minimise bushfire fuel loads. This is something we should be used to by now, but is always frustrating when something that seems so clear is ignored time and time again.

On the upshot, there has been much said about Firestick burning, which is something we are proud to be a part of culturally. We can only hope 'cool burns', overseen by those Indigenous to the land, finds its way to becoming main stream practice.

I've spent quite a bit of time in the bush over the years, and just recently we bought our cattle home from our High Country lease in the King Valley.

With Covid restrictions in full swing at the time, our muster was a smaller than usual affair. Only immediate family came along to help, and though it made the job that little bit harder there was something nice about the empty bush. Normally we run across campers, hunters, hikers and 4WDers, but this time we spent five days camped out and I don't think we saw another person. I imagine it was a bit like heading out 100 years ago, just the wife and kids, horses and a few dogs. It made me appreciate all the more how lucky we are here in Australia to have access to this kind of country and tradition, and how important it is to fight for it to remain.

In other news, it's also been a sad few months, with

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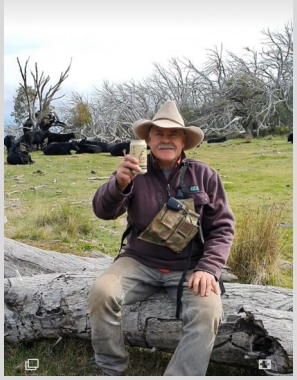
Want you Yarner posted?

This is our biggest Yarner ever, and we don't want anyone to miss out on all the MCAV news and information.

If you prefer to receive your Yarner in hard copy, please just let us know and we will add you onto our mail out list.

If you have a story for the Yarner, an issue y ou would like us to cover or want to send in a letter to the editor shoot it to us by email at secretary@mcav.com.au, or phone the office on 5775 1127.

We are also online, and post regularly to our Social media sites. So whichever way you want to receive your news, we have it covered.



THE YARNER

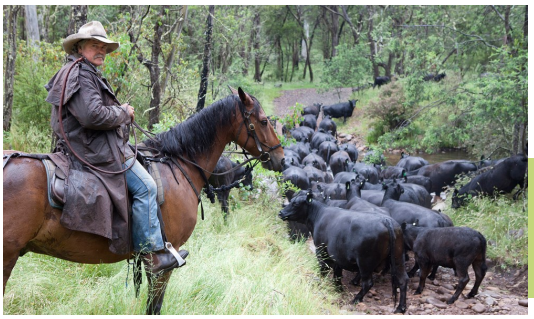
the passing of not one but two gentlemen strongly associated with the MCAV: Ken Connley and John Madigan.

Our AGM has also had to be postponed due to Covid restrictions, and we have re-scheduled for Friday, October 30. We hope to be able to hold this face to face, but will wait and see.

Please use this self isolation time to concentrate on yourself, family and things at home — I know I have suddenly found myself with more time, so we have been able to put work into younger horses, catch up on some overdue spraying around the paddocks and a few fences have finally been straightened on the farm at Merrijig.

Lastly, just like to wish our MCAV Vice President, Ben Treasure, a big Happy Birthday.

I wont mention the day—or the year—but would like to acknowledge all the years and hours Ben has put in. It's because of people like him that we are able to continue, so thanks Ben and we all hope you celebrated accordingly.



Hope to see all you sooner rather than later,

Bruce McCormack

MCAV president Bruce McCormack recently bought his cattle home from the High Country for winter. PHOTO: Melanie Faith Dove.

SPOTTED!

This screenshot was sent into the MCAV and shows politician Ryan Smith working from home. What caught our eye, however, was the photo above his desk. This pictured was captured by the incredible Melanie Faith Dove, and was taken at Wonnangatta Station when the MCAV was (briefly) allowed to take cattle back out as part of a grazing trial.
We know your support runs deeper than a photo on the wall Mr Smith and we thank you for that :)

Bushfire funds available for conservation works

There are just a few days left to apply for the Victorian Governments *Biodiversity Bushfire Recovery Grants*, which has a total of $900,000 available for on-ground works, community education and capacity building projects.

The funding will support projects in the North East, East Gippsland and South West regions of the state where the fires had an unprecedented impact on Victoria's precious plants and wildlife.

The program is unique because it not only provides funding for the rehabilitation of public land, it's also available to fire-affected private landowners focusing on environmental conservation on their properties, and as such could potentially be used by farmers wishing to plant out sections of their land. Grant applications close on 20 July 2020. For more information and eligibility criteria, visit environment.vic.gov.au/grants.

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Vice President: Ben Treasure

Secretary: Ken Heywood

Past President: Graeme Stoney

Treasurer/Associate Member: John Andrews

Special Projects Officer: Chris Commins

North East Branch reps: Lyric Anderson & Bruce Treasure

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Omeo Branch reps: Simon Turner & Darcy Fitzgerald

Gippsland Branch reps: Chris Hodge & Chris Cooper

Office Manager: Rhyll McCormack

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Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria
June / July 2020

THE YARNER

Alpine grazing reduces blazing

- Mountain Cattlemen's Association hoping for a return to the High Country

A recommendation from the New South Wales Deputy Premier, a $500,000 program in Canada and an acknowledgement that scientific knowledge is lacking are all reasons the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria (MCAV) want cattle grazing re-examined as a fire management tool.

Speaking last week, president of the MCAV, Bruce McCormack, said his organisation was not given enough credit - too easily dismissed as 'old farmers out of touch.'

With hearings for the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements currently underway, Mr McCormack said he was hopeful one of the inquiries conclusions would be to re-examine the benefits of grazing in Alpine areas.

"We keep saying to the Government, over and over, that we are here and we want to help make the High Country a better place, a safer place," he said.

"We have knowledge that stretches back to when Victoria was first settled – Mountain Cattlemen were here from the beginning, and we like to think we have something to offer for the future."

What they have to offer, Mr McCormack said, was knowledge learnt from on-the-ground experience.

"Grazing anywhere – whether it is on your farm at home or in the High Country – reduces fire fuel loads; it's as simple as that.

"In the State Forest and Alpine National Parks, where fire fuel loads are out of control, this can only be a good thing."

Senior Counsel Assisting at the Royal Commission, Dominique Hogan-Doran, said in an opening address that there was limited scientific research relating to the effectiveness of grazing cattle and reducing fire fuel loads.

"(The) background paper published on the website on Fuel Load Management acknowledged that there is limited research or scientific study of the use of livestock grazing as a fire management technique; although it acknowledged a recent European study which identified grazing as a practice particularly relevant at the interface of urban and densely vegetated areas."

NSW Deputy Premier, John Barilaro, has made a submission to the Berejiklian Government's bushfire enquiry, called for cattle grazing to be used as a fire prevention method.

He made a similar statement back in 2019, backed by Agriculture Minister Adam Marshall who said, "I fully support more back-burning operation in national parks. "Trust farmers, who are neighbours of parks to help as well … limited grazing of stock in some areas of national parks, would help, too."

Over in Canada, the province of British Columbia has partnered with its local cattlemen's association to help develop a program that will use cattle as part of a targeted grazing program to mange grass, fallen leaves and other natural fire fuels.

Some $500,000 has been given to the program by the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development – an approximate equivalent of Australia's DELWP.

Minister of Agriculture in British Columbia, Lana Popham, said in a statement the program will be a win-win for the province, as it both minimizes fire risk and supports B.C.'s cattle and meat industries.

"Reducing the risk of wildfires and adapting to a changing climate requires more action than the status quo of the last 20 years," she said.

With so many keen to embrace – or at the very least, consider – the return of grazing as a bushfire mitigation tool, the MCAV want to know why the Victorian Government steadfastly refuses to re-examine the facts.

"It is only in the last few decades that we have seen consistent, devastating bushfires in our High Country and Alpine regions," Mr McCormack said.

"Before that, in our areas at least, Mountain Cattlemen kept the fire fuel loads to a minimum by grazing and 'cool burns', a method they learnt first-hand from the local indigenous.

"All we can hope is this bushfire enquiry might give us some recommendations based on common sense, rather academic diatribe learnt from behind a desk and not in the bush."

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THE YARNER

Get to know a Grazier; Leigh Woodgate is the woman from Snowy River

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YOU could make a hundred movies about Leigh Woodgate and still not have begun her story.

She is everything you would expect to find in a John Wayne cowboy – tough, gritty, pig-headed and determined to defy the odds. Agile in the saddle, quick on foot and renowned for her patience with animals. Like an old bushy, she can survive for days roaming the mountains with nothing but her horse and her dog for company.

Or at least, the old Leigh could.

A horrific horse accident, broadcast on national television, has changed the course of Leigh's life.

In a coma for days 17 days, barely a bone was left intact.

Even now, 26 years later, she still battles daily with the challenges that have become her routine.

But despite this, Leigh is as determined as ever.

Leigh back in her Mountain Racing days

The cowboy in her has simply gritted her teeth and continued on, one slow step at a time.

Leigh was born and bred in the mountains around Buchan, a bush girl chasing the approval of her you-should-have-been-a-boy father.

Her Dad, John Robert but known as Grub, ran cattle on the Bald Hill Plains - heading out with legendary bushmen such as Buff Rogers and Froggy McMahon.

From the moment she could walk, Leigh was always one step behind her Father. In the cattle yards pulling at the hem of his oilskin, in the back of the ute helping slice open bales of hay and in the High Country, calling the cattle home each winter.

"We were always Mountain Cattlemen, and it was just a part of Dad and who he was," Leigh explained. "Back then we would head out for weeks at a time when we were taking them up or bringing them home from grazing – and all I wanted was to be a part of that life with Dad."

From an early age riding was Leigh's life, and as proud Mountain Cattlemen the family always travelled to the annual Get Together.

"One-year Ken Connley made a bet with dad that a woman would never win the Great Mountain Race, which was the race that started the Cattlemen's Cup," Leigh said.

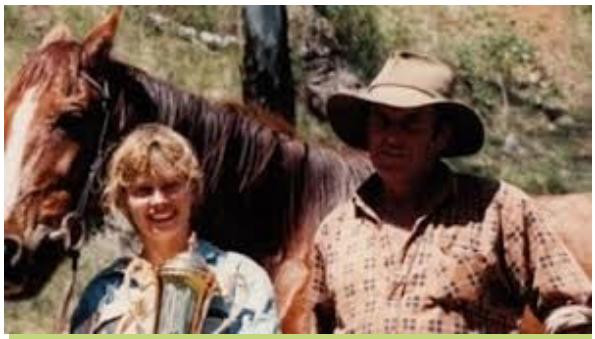
"I must have been in my early 20s or maybe younger, and it was all men on the mountain racing circuit at that time - but I was riding local trackwork so I knew I had it in me. Dad told Ken if there was anyone who was going to do it, it would be me – so I knew I had to win for him."

Leigh began training for the Cup, and even now can rattle off the names of the horses she rode in preparation.

There was MitchMac, a horse of Rita McMahon's, and a thoroughbred called Monkey owned by Ian Webb.

"I started travelling to a few Mountain races," Leigh recalled. "My first race my horse slipped coming down a hill and we both fell – but I jumped back on and still managed to finish third.

"That's when I think Ken Connley knew Dad was in with a chance to win the bet."



Leigh with her Dad, Grub Woodgate.

Like all country kids, Leigh never shied away from hard work.

After finishing her racing each weekend she would jump into her car and head off, ready to be back in the saddle at 4am the following day.

"I just loved riding, it was my whole life," Leigh said. "I was riding track 6 mornings a week, and competing at mountain races when they were nearby. Then, when I was ready, I decided to have a go at the Great Mountain Race – that was the one we all wanted to win."

Mountain Racing is not like a picnic meet.

There are no manicured home-straights and crowds tittering behind white bollards.

Instead, there are banners holding back delighted children and dogs straining at leashes, crowds in their thousands screaming enthusiastically and a course that would wind itself up mountains, between trees and across rivers.

Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria
June / July 2020

THE YARNER

"The Great Mountain Race was the pinnacle," Leigh said. "It's the one you wanted to win, especially if you were from a Mountain Cattlemen family like we were."

Leigh remains to this day the only woman to ever win the Great Mountain Race, which she did in 1990.

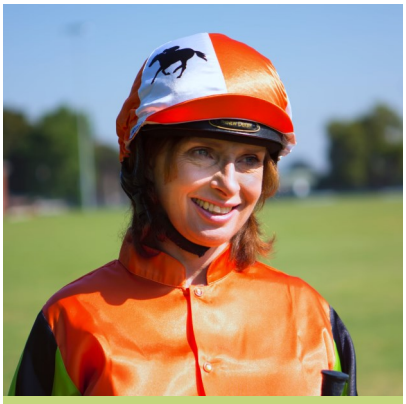
By that stage, the bet between her father and Ken Connley no longer mattered – because the prestige of coming first meant far more than any trophy or bet.

"I just couldn't believe it when I won," Leigh said. "I was racing against all the men, and these men were the best riders out there. It was the most incredible moment of my life."

Leigh and the Woodgate family continued to be a part of the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria – travelling to events, supporting the cause and grazing their cattle in the High Country.

Leigh moved to Melbourne and continued riding, moving into jumps racing.

But in 1994 Leigh was riding at Hamilton when her horse knuckled on landing the second last jump. The horses travelling behind thundered over Leigh's unconscious body, tearing apart her bones, muscles and leaving behind a body that would never fully recover.



Despite battling overwhelming odds, Leigh continues to ride track work even today.

"It took me 15 years to repair my shattered body and mind - 15 years of perseverance and dedication - to get back on the horse. I would set an alarm and get up five times a night to stretch, to work out, to do whatever the physios told me I needed to do. But there was never an option to give up."

Although Leigh no longer lives on the family property at Buchan, the Bald Hill grazing run still has Angus cows on it each summer.

"I'm still a Mountain Cattlemen, and I'm still proud to be that," she said. "It's something that my family have done for more than 100 years, and it's been built into us to be proud of our heritage."

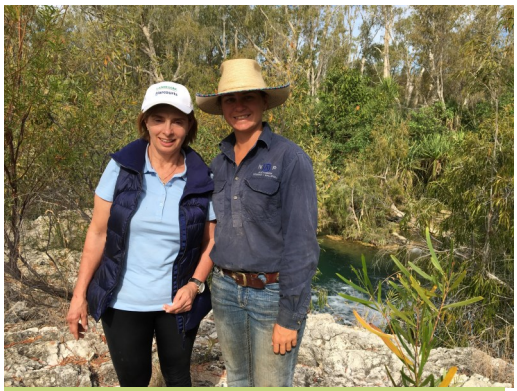
Unbelievably, Leigh also still rides trackwork. She is a little slower than she was 20 years ago, but that same delighted grin never leaves her face.

When her body aches – and it does ache – she thinks about the times gone by and pushes down the pain.

Focusing on all she has achieved, the triumphs, setbacks and eventual return to the saddle has helped Leigh begin a second career as a public speaker.

"The story of the only woman ever to win the *Great Mountain Race*, as well as countless other awards and accolades as a professional rider, is one of determination - the accident changed the course of my life forever," Leigh said. "I had to learn how to breathe, think, eat, talk and walk again. Step by step, I strengthened my body and my resolve.

"My will and determination to get back on the horse have got me through daunting adversity, and I believe I can inspire others to overcome the obstacles they come up against in their own lives."



Leigh is pictured here with her niece, Ellie, who she visited on Lawn Hill Station in Northern QLD last year.

Leigh was nominated as a National Jockeys' Celebration Day Ambassador and has an Australian Story episode dedicated to her experiences.

Today, at home in Melbourne, Leigh still battles the odds.

She rides two mornings a week and has countless rehab sessions afterwards to ease her jaded muscles. There are speaking engagements, phone calls with family and hours spent at the local racing stable and the gym.

Her inner cowboy has aged a lot in two decades, but is still as pig headed as ever.

"A bad fall isn't going to change my life," Leigh said. "It might make some things a little harder, but it doesn't change who I am."

For more information on Leigh and her story, or to book her for your next event, go to www.leighwoodgate.com

Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria
June / July 2020

THE YARNER

Letters to the Editor

For the first time ever, The Yarner has received some letters sent in by members covering a variety of topics. The letter were written to politicians and different Government departments, and show the determination of those within the MCAV. They are re-printed here with permission.

Dear MCAV,

Re: Horse Riding in Victoria's National Parks

As a long time trail rider in many of Victoria's diverse range of national & state parks, a member of the Australian Trail Horse Riding Association and a member of the Mountain Cattleman's Association of Victoria, I believe that horses in the high country are a national icon, a tourism attraction and a piece of living history. Further, brumbies should remain in genetically sustainable numbers in the high country subject to practical management & not be subject to wholesale slaughter as you policy states.

As a result I have been following the debate around Parks Victoria's plan to conduct ground shooting and in particular the case of Phil Maguire v State of Vic & Ors held 26 May 2020.

I was particularly disturbed when it was reported that Parks Victoria counsel is alleged to have revealed that it is their (Parks Vic) intention to stop all horse activity in every national park in Victoria during this case.

I find this statement hard to believe, since nearly every Park gazetted Plan of Management contains something like the following objective.

Continued provision of opportunities for a wide range of recreational activities that are consistent with protection of park values and, to provide opportunities for horse riding consistent with minimising environmental impacts and conflicts with other users.

And further, to quote from their website,

Victoria's diverse range of national and state parks offer many opportunities for exploration and adventure on horseback. The steady hoof beat of a sure footed horse and the solitude and peace and quiet of the natural environment can transport you in place and in time.

Horse riding allows you to really appreciate the passing countryside. As you amble slowly along a trail, there's time to be more attentive to the environment and to soak in the scenery. From your high vantage point you'll be better placed to catch a glimpse of wildlife and listen more closely to native birds.

I would appreciate it if you could confirm if this statement is in fact true or not.

Best Regards, Andrew Jackson

The MCAV contacted a variety of different Government organisations, including Parks and DELWP, and can confirm that there are no plans afoot to close any National Parks to horse riders. Having said that, it is not the first time the rumours have circulated and rest assured we are keeping a close on the situation.

Dear Dominique,

I hope you are well. In the Gippsland Times newspaper a report was written about a statement you made at the current Royal Commission into national natural disaster. That statement said *'Senior Counsel Assisting at the Royal Commission, Dominique Hogan-Doran, said in an opening address that there was limited scientific research relating to the effectiveness of grazing cattle and reducing fire fuel loads.'*

https://www.gippslandtimes.com.au/story/6816171/alpine-grazing-reduces-blazing/?cs=1450

As a lawyer I am sure you have also had a chance to visit the High Country or perhaps even camped or slept under the stars there in your leisure time. I hope so. This year was an unusual one up there. When I drove across the Dargo High Plains Road on the 23 December 2019 I was initially thinking of camping there for Christmas. Just me and my Blue Heeler. The fire burning 30 kilometers away at Omeo and the state (condition) of the National Park made me wary.

I've never seen the High Country look like this. Weeds and grass knee high, dust on my trail. A recipe for disaster. Leaving the park and coming to the first of the Treasure's lease holds I struck their cattle grid and fence. One side Alpine National Park, the other a Hereford leasehold. The long grass, weeds and dust were gone and green grass at a very low level prevailed. My research was complete. But then again I knew this would happen as soon as the Mountain Cattlemen (and women and kids) stopped grazing those trails.

So I was disappointed when I read what was reported about your comments in the Gippsland Times. Is that the only comment that proved newsworthy from a lawyer assisting in this inquiry? I am a member of the Mountain Cattlemen's' Association of Victoria and it includes many mums and dads and children. The heritage goes back a long way. Much was learned by the early cattlemen from the Indigenous tribes that roamed the region. Reduction of fuel load was one of them. Caring for the High Country was another.

Please consider our comments when you hear them. Our scientific research is over 130 years and generational. What I saw when I stopped for lunch on December 23 was a mistake. That mistake was made by a Victorian State and Federal Labor Government that is based in a city. The High Country of Victoria is not a city story.

Best Regards,

Peter F Hughes BCom(Commercial Law/Economics) GradCertCorpMgt GradDipEd

We would like to thank Peter for sending this letter in.

Letters continued on page 7.

Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria
June / July 2020

THE YARNER

Dear MCAV

During the bush fire crises this year I was motivated to express my grave fears regarding the management of our local National Parks. Particularly the Warby-Ovens National Parks, along the Ovens River.

These river flat areas are enormously fertile and in the first year of National Park declaration the cattle were excluded.

In this first year I personally saw grass growth over 2 meters tall and so thick it was often impenetrable that grass fell over instead of being eaten by the cattle and the following years prolific growth occurred.

This process has happened every year since and now we have 10 years of thick matt of highly combustible fuel that will burn with extreme prolonged ferocity.

It will generate enough heat to: ignite the upper forest canopy, kill any smaller emerging trees affecting the cambium layer up to a fatal extent, destroy the ancient hollow River Red Gums. Their hollows are vital to the breeding of many of our native birds and animals; and sterilize the ground delaying recovery and re growth.

This huge fuel load meant no cool, fuel reduction burns were possible at the appropriate time of year.

I received a reply to my previous letter from DELWP.

They claim, and I quote: "extensive scientific research has shown that cattle grazing is detrimental to the environment particularly along waterways and riparian environments."

I strongly dispute this statement and would like to point out living proof of my argument.

Without blowing my own trumpet I have a better than average knowledge of the North Eastern high country.

I have always been a keen trout fisherman, I have a strong interest in photographing the mosses, fungi and mushrooms that bloom deep in the high country gullies in mid-winter.

I have spent most of my life hunting foxes, feral cats, wild dogs and deer in these areas.

All of these activities demand careful observation in waterways and riparian environments as well as secluded areas well away from the beaten track.

In the high country there are 2 magnificent valleys that are – or were – a mirror image of each other.

Ken Heywood's Catherine Station on the upper Buffalo River.

The famous Wonnangatta Station on the Gippsland side.

Both were long term, remote, unfenced, cattle grazing properties completely surrounded by native forest. Both had wide, open grass land in the floor of each river valley with prolific growth during the winter months.

The summer grazing cattle would keep this grass down to a manageable level.

At the height of the bushfire season the cattle would keep the valleys like a well mown parkland. In the case of a bush fire, this lack of fuel would mean a fire would flash through quickly at a low intensity leaving the burnt ground a safer place.

The cattle had worn tracks through the blackberries following the river, giving access to the full length of the valleys.

The tracks would occasionally make entry branches to the river for drinking or crossing points

They often lead to excellent camping spots

The cattle are grazing animals and as such would not venture far into the surrounding native bush

As a fisherman I have used these cattle tracks to access and exit the rivers and turned over cow pats for the bait worms busily composting underneath.;

As a photographer and hunter I venture deep into the surrounding gullies and have seen that the cattle restrict their activities to only a short distance into the natural native forest.

The situation outlined above is still the case in the Catherine Station, where cattle have grazed continuously for as long as I can remember – and that is around 60 years.

In all that time I have not seen any deterioration of the valley, the surrounding native forest of waterway and riparian environment as the DELWP extensive scientific research claims.

<u>Wonnangatta Station:</u>

The first time I ventured into the Wonnangatta Valley I was struck by the similarities.

The cattle were keeping the whole valley like a parkland and had established their tracks around the blackberries and to river access points.

There were plenty of well grazed, easily accessible camping spots along the river.

The river was full of native blackfish, eels, blue crayfish as well as trout.

I enjoyed many trips to this paradise.

Due to various commitments I did not get a chance to return until after all the cattle were thrown out. Th open park land I knew and loved was gone.

The grass land was overgrown by wild tobacco, thistles and other weeds. Some of the best and secluded campsites had been locked off and the remaining sites have been left to become over gown with weeds and blackberries.

I headed off down river with the aim of fishing back to camp. I was looking for the old cattle tracks but there were gone.

Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria
June / July

THE YARNER

After skirting around the huge banks of blackberries that were bigger than I remembered, I found that river access via the cattle drinking / crossing points were completely overgrown.

I finally got to the river on a recently fallen tree that bridged the impenetrable blackberries.

I found the river badly overgrown to the extent that I could hardly cast a trout lure and I had to wade through deeper holes up to my armpits just to get back to camp.

Even then I was covered in blackberry scratches.

The whole valley floor parkland I remembered was replaced by a tangle of rushes and weeds interwoven with blackberry strands. Almost impassable!

I did not need extensive scientific research to realise that a lack of cattle grazing is detrimental to waterways and riparian environments.

Common sense tells me that the re-introduction of cattle would restore the current over-grown mess back into a use friendly parkland.

Reducing the fuel load would go toward making the valley a place of refuge in a bushfire situation as is the Catherina Station.

The cattle would eliminate the need to slash the campsites, saving huge amounts of time and money and manpower and machinery that could be re directed into many more valuable projects.

The annual high country musters used to be an Australian icon. The tracks we use today are a direct results of our pioneering cattlemen. The annual winter musters would attract willing horsey helpers from all over Australia.

My proposal: put the cattle back.

The years fires highlight the vulnerability of private properties and even whole towns that adjoin national parks.

I suggest a 200-300 metre buffer zone inside the forest/park boundary. I would include public access areas and camping areas in every national park. The fencing and stocking could be done with collaboration with CFA, local community groups, land holders and cattlemen.

During the winter months these areas would be fenced and heavily grazed.

These same areas would be thrown open to local firewood collection to clean up the fallen timber. Just before the fire danger period starts, and after the cattle and fire wood collectors have done their work, a controllable, slow, cool burn would reduce the understory fuel load to near zero.

In a bushfire situation the understory fuel load would be reduced enough so that the crown of the forest would not ignite.

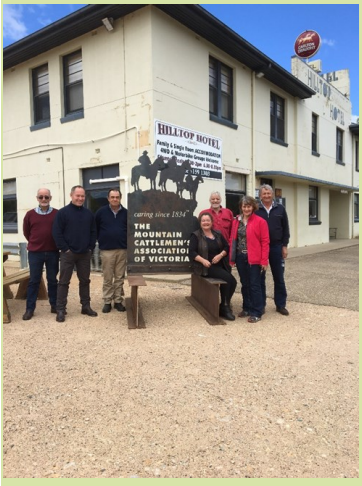
Properties and townships have an extra 200- 300 metre fire break.

The CFA trucks can safely enter this area without fear of snagging up on hidden stumps of falling into unseen washaways or wombat burrows. This buffer zone would give a place of escape for our native birds and animals.

Lets put the cattle to work.

Charlie Timma,

Tarrawingee.



VALE JOHN MADIGAN

John Madigan, a strong supporter of the Mountain Cattlemen's Association and talented blacksmith, has died after a two-year battle with cancer.

John made the renowned MCAV sculpture, currently at McCormack Park in Merrijig, at his own expense and donated anvils to be auctioned. He also came along to several G2G's.

Madigan won the sixth and last Victorian Senate seat at the 2010 federal election, taking office on July 1, 2011, as the first DLP senator since Frank McManus and Jack Little were both defeated at the 1974 double-dissolution election.

Our thoughts are with his family during this sad time.

Vale Ken Connley

Ken Connley has passed away, aged 74.

Ken was a legend of the High Country, and won the Mountain Cattleman's Cup an unmatched seven times.

Born at Omeo Hospital on 30 March 1946 to Jim and Grace Connley, he and his siblings, especially older brother Ron, spent their childhoods on the family farm near Omeo with the high country on their back doorstep.

He and wife at the time Joan had four children, Angela, Tarina, Sharlee and Christopher.

Ken was known for his antics around the high country, his skill with a horse and his love of a good time.

The MCAV and all its members are sincerely saddened by the loss. PHOTO: Herald Sun.

Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria
June / July 2020

THE YARNER

RAINBOW'S SADDLE

From the moment he first saw her it was love at first sight
She was all the Boss could think of as he tried to sleep that night
With her shaggy mane and knotted tail, she ran wild and free
He thought to himself, "I have to have her, she's the horse for me"
She was running with the brumbies in the Wonnangatta Hills
Led by the stallion, she had his spirit and free will
She stood her ground as the mob moved and fixed the Boss with a stare
As if to say "This is my country, come in if you dare"

A plan was hatched to yard that filly and cut her from the mob
He hired a breaker from the Lower Goulburn to do the job
The cattle yards were set up to make the brumbies drop their guard
With hay and chaff the trap was set to get them in the yard
One clear and crisp moonlit night while the brumbies munched away
The Breaker closed the gate on them and blocked their getaway
His prize was now within his reach, he looked at her with pride
He knew to break that horse meant time, and time was on his side

One by one the mob was freed till the filly stood alone
She was kept in the yard until she was taken to her new home
She was not what you'd call good looking, and she had a vicious kick
And given half a chance she'd bolt and head back to the sticks
She was trained to wear a headstall so she could be led
Away from the Wonnangatta Hills to the Crickstown Homestead
There to live her life out as the Boss's favourite mare
The bond between that man and horse was something very rare

She was broken to the saddle, and a special one was made
By a saddler down in Bourke Street, the best known in the trade
It was the well known Bulldog brand, made for mountain use
The same type other cattlemen had, and it took some hard abuse
At first she wouldn't take to it, or a bridle and bit
But patiently they worked with her and she soon accepted it
No other one did she carry in all her living years
Only the Boss ever rode her in that saddle from Kinnear's

The breaker called her Rainbow, and when he was asked why
The day he started breaking her, there was a rainbow in the sky
The Boss never called her by that name, to him she was "my mare"
To her face he called her "Girlie", and to her none could compare
He alone could shoe or brush her, no one else could do that much
She'd lash out with a lightening hoof at anyone else's touch
She never lost her free spirit, and never lost the Boss's love
And she was the only female his wife was jealous of

When praised on Rainbow's talents, his smile would break anew
But he always said "I did nothing, my mare knows what to do"
They worked as one together, it was a sight to behold
She knew which beast he wanted cut, she never had to be told
She took the Boss wherever he went, to the paddocks or further out
A sure footed horse on any ground, of that he had no doubt
To the sawmills at Mount Torbreck, or up on The Razorback
On river flat sand and stoney ground, she could handle any track

In the following years, Rainbow's saddle has been handed on
To be used on different stock horses on the family farm
It's seen work in the Top End on many a wild bush hack
It always gave a comfortable ride on any horse's back
It was taken up to Queensland, after Crickstown had been sold
And became a family heirloom, worth a damn sight more than gold
Now on display in Mansfield, on loan for all to see
A part of the Wonnangatta, and a piece of its history

This poem, Rainbows Saddle, was written by Howard James, and entered in the Don Kneebone award as a song a few years ago.

The mare, Rainbow, was a brumby filly that was part of a mob that roamed near the Wonnangatta. Her eventual owner, Reg Barnewall Bt, had her caught and broken her and she became his faithful mare for twenty years.
Rainbow's saddle is now called 'The Wonnangatta Saddle'.
Further information on the saddle and Rainbow can be found on page 10 of this Yarner.
Below is Howard, pictured at an MCAV Get Togethers.

Have you seen this?

An MCAV member has sent in this old photo, captured they aren't sure where. Do you know where, and if, this '"cow log" is? Email us and let us know! secretary@mcav.com.au

Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria
June / July 2020

THE YARNER

A Man, a horse, a station and a saddle

By Reg Barnewall Jnr

"What on earth has this to do with Mansfield?" might well be the question of the visitor to the Mansfield district when viewing a simple saddle on display at the Historical Society.

And these words ostensibly explaining why it is where it is.

Wonnangatta is not really a byword in that region of Victoria these days.

The simple and short answer to this is "quite a lot….concerning Wonnangatta over a rather brief five years of its history. This period spans nigh on seventy five years since an American citizen by the name of Oliver Smith, searching for gold bearing country, stumbled upon this fertile land".

"But Wonnangatta Station is 'over the Great Dividing Range and seventy odd miles (over 100 kilometres) from Mansfield- " could well be the rejoinder.

"Admittedly that is so", could be the riposte, "but in the five year period we are reviewing – and which has been overlooked greatly by the many chroniclers of Wonnangatta and its history (especially its unsolved double murder) – the mountain stockmen who managed and stocked the station all came from the Mansfield District and the Upper Goulburn. Additionally the cattle in their thousands put out to graze and which waxed fat on the station's rich mountain pastures were mainly bred in the Mansfield and Wangaratta area. At winter's end they were mustered and moved over the range to be marketed in Mansfield's sale yards. So it may be said that Mansfield was of pivotal importance to the story to be told."

The saddle:

The history of this saddle *per se* requires few words so it will be brief. The story of the men, the places and just one horse will take some time to unfold for the interested reader and will be a little longer. This account has become elicited through the saddle's placement within the Mansfield Historical Society's museum as a tribute to all the mountain cattlemen of the Victorian highlands.

A light, fully mounted stock saddle, designed to handle the tough usage called for herding cattle in the high, steep mountain country, this was constructed by that doyen of Victorian saddlers George Kinnear of Bourke Street, Melbourne, about the year 1922. On each flap of the saddle the bulldog trademark of its maker was clearly engraved in the shiny soft leather. Many years of riding saw these flaps become worn and were replaced years later by a local saddler at my own request.

It was made to the specific specifications of a grazier from the Upper Goulburn Valley named Reginald Barnewall, later to become Sir Reginald Barnewall, 12th Baronet of Crickstown Castle, Co. Meath in Ireland, on the death of his pioneering father in 1936. He was a leading figure in the station's history from the time of Wonnangatta's purchase by the Allen Brothers – also men of the Upper Goulburn - through the years of the ownership by the syndicate of which he was the prime mover until the subsequent sale to Guy Brothers circa 1934.

Barnewall's story will be related in later chapters of this record.

On one of his many early horseback visits to Wonnangatta he had taken notice of a brumby filly foal which was part of the equine "harem" lorded over by a stallion which had escaped from Wonnangatta some years before. He soon established his ascendancy over some brumby mares. Being himself bred on the station by former owners this big black stallion was very much "at home" and proudly held sway over the precincts of the station homestead. Thus this filly was his daughter her mother being a wild brumby mare.

Reg Barnewall was immediately attracted to this one's distinct equine personality and was to seek again the small group of horses to further study this filly. The more he saw of this yearling horse the more he became captivated with the idea of taking her to his property "Crickstown" on the Goulburn River.

He was to discuss with the station manager Bob Elliott the question of capturing her, handling her to the point of being tied up and led. In a nutshell this was all achieved - the filly led back to "Crickstown" broken in and returned to spend the rest of her days working on and from the Barnewall family holding.

How all this was achieved will be told in a later chapter but now suffice it say that, when returned to him broken in to both harness and saddle he had this very saddle on hand and so were united for the first time for both the saddle and this one horse which never in her nineteen years at "Crickstown" carried any other saddle. Nor to the writer's personal knowledge did any person other than Reg Barnewall ever ride this mare or mount in this saddle.

That is until my father passed this saddle to me on my discharge from war service with the Australian Imperial Forces - some years after Rainbow's demise. That was the name accorded this remarkable stockhorse by the man who broke her in…Charlie Cooper of Alexandra.

That is a brief sketch of the reason for having the saddle made, and its first years at "Crickstown".

Further chapters of Rainbow's story, by Reg Barnewall Jnr, will feature in the next edition of The Yarner.

Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria
June / July 2020

THE YARNER

The brumby issue within Victoria has exploded over the last few months after a court decision saw Parks Victoria legally allowed to shoot brumbies to control numbers. This sparked international outrage. All decisions are currently on hold pending the outcome of further court cases and cold weather, but please find below the MCAVs official stance of balancing brumby numbers in the High Country along with an opinion piece from journalist Andrew Rule.

Balancing brumby numbers in the High Country

A RETURN to traditional brumby control methods – that's what the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria (MCAV) wants to see happen in the High Country.

Public outrage has followed the Federal Court decision to allow brumby culling in the Bogong and Eastern Alps regions, but president of the MCAV, Bruce McCormack, said finding a humane way to balance wild horse numbers was most important.

"This is an issue that strikes at the heart of every Australian," Mr McCormack said.

"As a country, we identify with the brumby and the folklore attached to them.

"People are disgusted that Parks Victoria has been given the green light to shoot a piece of Australia's living heritage."

However, Mr McCormack said the MCAV recognised brumby numbers had risen dramatically since Cattlemen were removed from their grazing runs in the High Country.

"We wish to make it clear, the MCAV supports practical management of the brumbies – but we certainly do not agree with mindlessly heading out and shooting them."

Mr McCormack would like to see traditional brumby management techniques, utilised by Cattlemen for over 100 years, re-introduced.

These include a three-pronged approach of trapping, running and mustering brumby herds.

From there, the MCAV recommends re-homing suitable animals with discretion for condition, age and sex.

"We believe brumbies should remain in genetically sustainable numbers in the High Country," Mr McCormack said.

"There should be a balance struck between best land management practices as recommended by Cattlemen and brumby numbers – we need to remember these horses are a national icon, a tourism attraction and a piece of living history."

The MCAV believe brumby numbers need to be controlled by traditional methods.

Brumby cull necessary, but feral horses are easy targets

This article is from the Sunday Herald Sun, written by Andrew Rule. For more stories or info, head to www.heraldsun.com.au

The showbiz maxim "never work with kids or animals" is no joke. It's based on the human weakness for "cuteness".

It applies in politics, too. Politicians go from baby-kissers to baby-killers when they're forced to make commonsense laws about animals.

Blame showbiz. Films not only exploit sentimental attitudes, they form them.

"Don't shoot Bambi" is part of the language. Disney's celluloid fawn no doubt subtly influenced the attitudes that allow feral deer to infest millions of hectares of forest.

Eliminating one of Australia's greatest pests, the rabbit, was easier before *Watership Down*. And *Babe* made life harder for anyone involved with pigs.

Babe is about as real as Donald Duck but try telling that to anyone who saw it at an impressionable age. The ugly reality is that millions of feral pigs are helping millions of cane toads, mynas, rabbits, foxes, deer, cats, dogs, goats, camels and horses to wreck the environment.

These are not cute Babes or Bambis. They are the wrong animals in the wrong place, invasive species pushing endangered natives to extinction.

All of which is background to the debate about eradicating brumbies, as the State Government is determined to do.

A brumby is a feral animal. They are in every state in every type of country, but in the eastern alpine area they have run wild since the late 1800s.

Over time, they have become more inbred and physically inferior. Bleak mountain winters, poor feed, and generations of stallions impregnating their own daughters and granddaughters produce the sort of sad specimens that make "brumby" a damning description among people who know horses. There are exceptions but the point stands.

Australians have always been keen on horses, something probably inherited from British and Irish forebears who used the animal but did not eat it, unlike other Europeans.

Banjo Paterson elevated "wild bush horses" to iconic status with his great galloping rhyme, *The Man From Snowy River*.

Elyne Mitchell did a Bambi with her best-selling book *The Silver Brumby*, which gave feral horses a wonderful press for half a century. Then smart film makers turned Paterson's poem into a hit.

All of which makes it hard for conservationists to convince the public that brumbies should be eradicated — because it's so easy for a ragtag alliance of strange bedfellows to exploit all those sentimental cues.

On one side is the cold logic of conservationist science. On the other are the shrill protests of the other sort of greens: Brigitte Bardot crazy cat ladies and inner-suburban vegans who insist no animal should die except of old age in intensive care.

Feral animals are bad for Australia. But brumbies are not the worst of them — just easier targets than others.

The Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria has quietly ignored theatrical plans by activists to muster Bogong brumbies to save them from shooting. But it warns that the government risks alienating too many people by aiming to totally eliminate brumbies in Victoria.

Better, it says, to cull old stallions and mares regularly, sell or donate some weanlings to brumby lovers and leave only the best young horses in the bush to maintain a few heritage mobs. The millions of dollars saved could be diverted to getting rid of deer, pigs, wild dogs and cats. But that, of course, might be too hard.

They shoot horses, don't they? They do because it's easier.

Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria
June / July 2020

THE YARNER

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THE MOUNTAIN CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA

Burning issue for those who live in the bush

This story was printed in The Age almost 20 years ago

Raz Martin is sitting on a ridge in the mountain wilderness of East Gippsland watching a bushfire race from the upper Snowy River and praying it won't change direction. If it does, he says, it will kill the last brush-tailed rock wallabies in Victoria.

It would mean the extinction of a virtual sub-species, cut off from its now-rare New South Wales cousins for eons.

By last night, the fire had not invaded the Little River Gorge, where fewer than a dozen of the wallabies survive. But Mr Martin, a bushman and wildlife expert who has devoted years to preserving the wallabies, knows they could die today, tomorrow . . . or any time until it rains. And he's angry.

"If that fire reaches the gorge, nothing will save them," he says, explaining that a hot fire sucks oxygen from the air and kills by asphyxiation, whereas a milder fire in cool weather is harmless.

If the wallabies perish, he will blame successive governments for failing to prevent catastrophic wildfire by bowing to what he and others claim is a rigid ideology defying common sense - and thousands of years of Australia's natural history.
Mr Martin is a passionate conservationist and an advocate of fuel reduction, which he sees as the only sensible way to maintain natural habitat.

"The gorge hasn't burnt since 1952, and the amount of fuel there is terrifying," he says. "The litter is a metre deep - so much it has changed the diversity and number of species of plants that can live there. Plants that rely on fire to germinate are dying out. Now the animals are in trouble, too."

Little River Gorge is now a summer death trap. "If it's over 32 degrees we can't go in because one spark from a rock sliding down the hill, and it could go up," Mr Martin says.

"I have begged the department to do reduction burns or to let me do it. But they don't believe anybody understands fires but them."

Mr Martin worked for the Department of Sustainability and Environment until becoming a wildlife consultant. His work is mostly sponsored by one company and some public donations. A BBC film crew recently filmed him as part of an international wildlife series but he, like others who share his views, has had trouble being heard closer to home. Until the fires of the last week, that is.

Suddenly, the threat to the rock wallabies highlights the danger that uncontrollable, hot fires pose to native animals and plants already endangered by habitat loss, introduced predators and noxious weeds.

The only other Victorian rock wallaby colony, in the nearby Buchan River valley, was wiped out in the 1965 fires.

It is well documented, if not well known, that before white settlement, lightning strikes and Aboriginal "firestick farming" meant areas of bush and grassland were burned semi-regularly in a way that shaped the ecology and the landscape.

For more than a century, navigators and explorers noted smoke over the bush and plains.

Until the 1840s, countless small fires ensured there were few big ones. But the end of the Aborigines' nomadic way of life meant less bush was being burned off, and the open, park-like forests that greeted the first settlers swiftly became choked with flammable undergrowth.

Victoria's first recorded serious wildfire was in 1851, setting a pattern repeated until now. But some foresters and landholders adopted the Aboriginal way of "cool burns" in autumn and spring until prevented by tough new rules. Mr Martin is just one of a growing number who think they were on the right track.

From the time the Rogers family arrived in Victoria's most remote mountain district, Wulgulmerang, in 1903, they "burned off" the surrounding bush until the 1970s. The late Keith Rogers became a cattle breeder but he was also a keen amateur naturalist credited with discovering several alpine plants. His son, John Rogers, now 68, recalls his father riding his horse up gullies on a mild autumn or spring day, carefully lighting the undergrowth.

The resulting fire might go out that night, or several nights later. Meanwhile, it would creep along the forest floor, burning the litter and hollowing out trees and logs that would form nesting holes. After the first spring rain, green grass and seedlings would shoot all over the burned area, attracting wild animals in the ancient way.

Across the high country, at Nunniong, Bogong, Dargo and Licola, other cattlemen did the same thing, rotating their burns every four or five years. There were no helicopters and bulldozers to save their lives and livelihoods. The bush people had more to lose from bushfires than almost anyone but, ironically, they were partly blamed for the tragic 1939 bushfires, in which 71 people died.

John Rogers and other mountain cattlemen still smart at the perceived injustice of being blamed for lighting fires that experience shows were almost certainly caused by summer lightning.

As they see it, they were good citizens doing their civic duty. Until the 1960s, some Forests Commission officers would even send the mountain families bulk lots of matches to encourage springtime burns. "And now they call us arsonists," Mr Rogers growls in disgust.

He tells how, two years before the "Black Friday" fires in 1939, his father burned off the Buchan River valley. When the fire swept across the ranges from Omeo in 1939 it hit the burned area and stopped, saving the district. Dargo, where the Treasure family had burned off, was also spared.

In fact, it was legendary Dargo cattleman Jack Treasure who convinced an influential forestry officer, Hugh Brown, of the wisdom of fuel reduction burning. Mr Brown, now retired, was appalled by the destruction of the 1965 fires and never forgot it. He later perfected a method of lighting large areas of bush by dropping ignition devices from a helicopter.

"If you don't do fuel reduction when it's safe to burn then it's going to bite you on the bum," he says bluntly.

He suggests that since the 1980s the department has become increasingly entangled in red tape and green political influence that ignores the fatal realities of wildfire.

Paradoxically, he says, as fire-fighting technology has improved, the risk of extreme fires has risen because nature has been modified so much. In most seasons most fires are swiftly suppressed by air and ground crews so that the fuel load - dry grass, undergrowth, bark and sticks - builds, until a drought makes it an inferno-in-waiting.

When the inevitable happens - as in 1939, 1965, 1983 and, now, 2003 - not even the most heroic firefighting attempts can stop it.

American journalist Sebastian Junger, author of the book *The Perfect Storm*, spent months studying forest fires in the United States in 1992.

He wrote in an essay called Fire: "The list of what can be thrown at a fire is endless - and expensive. A more cynical view . . . is that the government puts out fires by throwing money at them until it starts to rain."

Raz Martin agrees, and raises the spectre of litigation as a hidden reason for the bureaucrats' reluctance to do anything but throw money at fires that are already burning.

"They waste tens of millions a year to put out fires that are usually no danger to life or property, but they won't reduction burn when they can because they are scared of burning somebody's back fence and getting sued," he says.

"With just $1 million spent on fuel reduction we could secure most of East Gippsland."