

*Uncontrolled runoff has resulted in severe gully erosion.*

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# The Dirt Doctors

A Jubilee History of the Soil  
Conservation Service of NSW

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A wide-angle photograph of a mountainous landscape. The foreground is a rocky, sparsely vegetated slope with patches of dry grass and small shrubs. In the middle ground, there are large, irregular patches of snow or ice on the slopes. The background shows a range of mountains under a clear blue sky, with more snow patches visible on the peaks and ridges.

■ CHAPTER SIX

*The Range War*

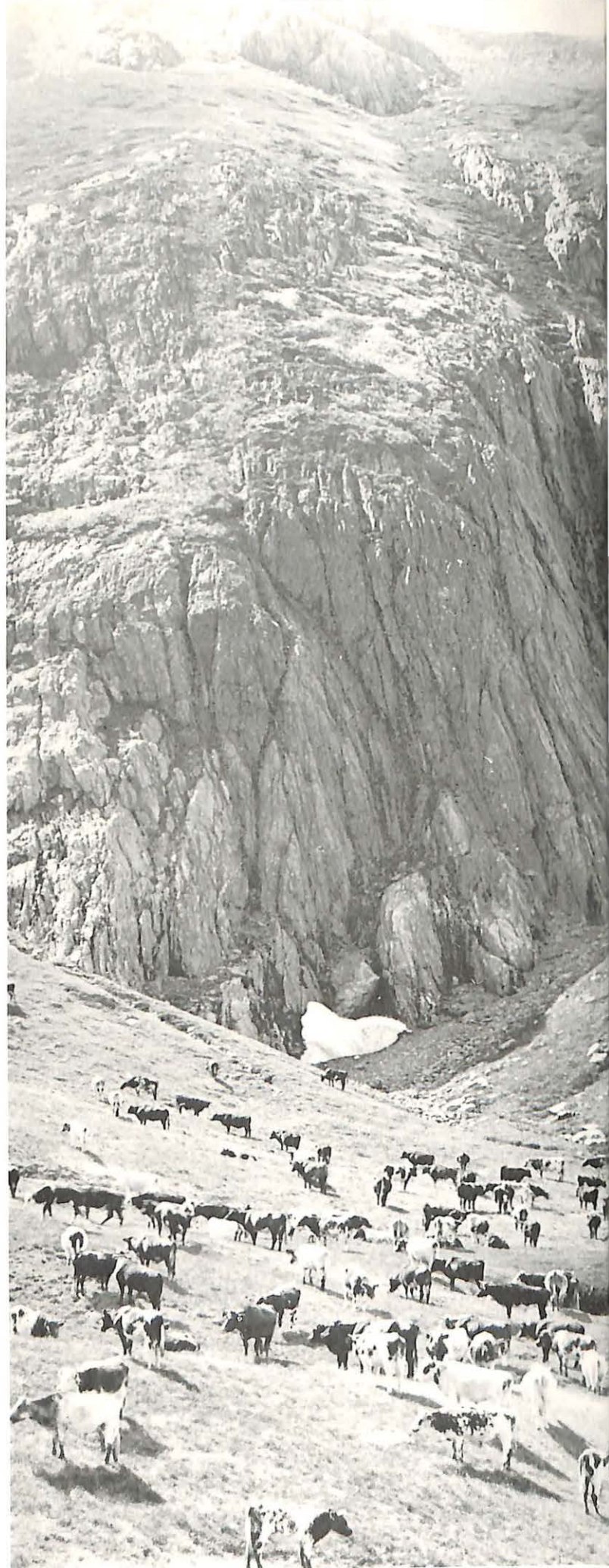
**T**he Snowy Mountains began yielding to white settlement in 1823 when Captain Currie of the Royal Navy rode his horse over the Limestone Plains, upon which Canberra is now built, to reach the open tableland country known as the Monaro. Squatters quickly followed the reports of new country and every part of the tableland was taken up with large sheep and cattle runs. The new region stretched from near Michelago in the north down to the Snowy River and the border with Victoria. Its natural boundary to the west is the High Country and to the east lies the forested escarpment of the coastal ranges.

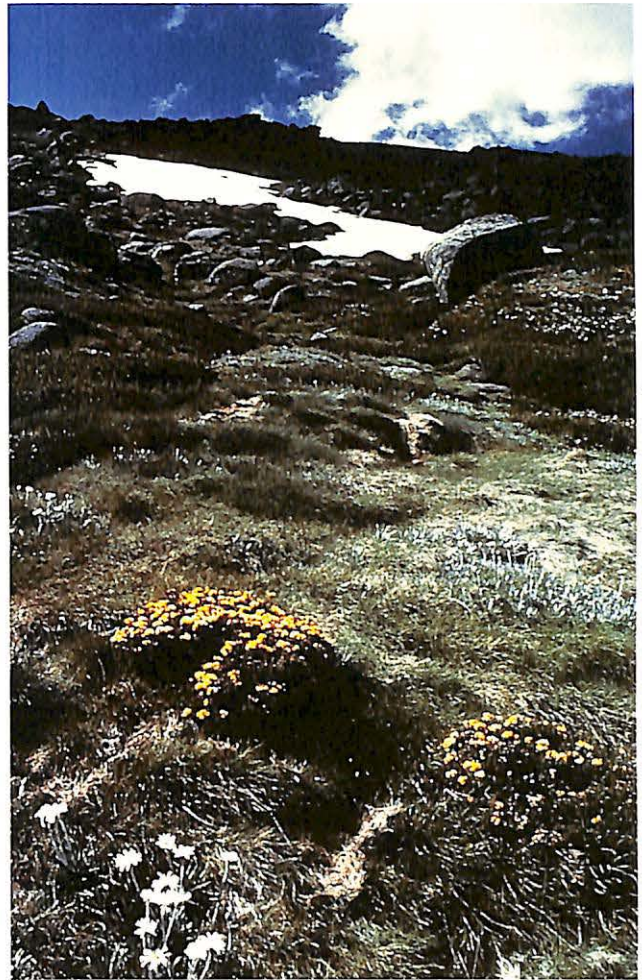
The mountains that look down upon the Monaro from the west are usually blanketed in deep snow during winter and their bleak prospect protected them from the changes taking place on the tableland below. Aborigines ventured up there in summer to collect bogong moths and cook them in small fires among the shelter of granite boulders. The snow that impeded the white settlers also fed two great rivers that ran west and took water out to much drier country. The Murray and Murrumbidgee rivers formed a drainage system that shaped south-western New South Wales and parts of Victoria and South Australia. The High Country waters a large part of the driest continent and influences people, plants and animals way beyond its mountains.

The mantle of snow lifts in the late spring and summer in all but the coldest pockets, and it was not long before intrepid settlers began taking their stock up into the High Country to graze upon a flush of growth that fed on the moisture of melted snow. A young stockman nearly lost his life, and his herd of cattle, in a late blizzard at Gibsons Plains in October 1834. That area is now known as Kiandra but it was then named after Dr Gibson of Goulburn, who had his men take cattle up on to the high plains via Gundagai and Tumut for summer grazing.

Outstations were established on the headwaters of the Goodradigbee River in 1839 by Terence Murray of Yarralumla, who had made his way over the Brindabella Mountains to find new country for his cattle. Although the gold rush to Kiandra in 1859 did not last very long, it left a track to Cooma that gave access to pockets of open grazing land along the way. This was quickly taken up by those who had failed on the goldfields and some who had hoped to supply the miners with food.

*Preceding Page: The Rooftop of Australia — the setting for the Range War. (Photo Jacob van Gent)*





*The alpine meadows that were at the centre of the conflict between Monaro graziers and those who wanted to protect them against soil erosion and to retain them for nature conservation.*

The greatest livestock invasion of the High Country coincided with the Robertson Land Acts, which started to diminish the runs of the large Monaro squatters in favour of free selectors. The closer settlement that followed led to severe overstocking on the Monaro as the larger holdings tried to maintain their flocks and herds and the selectors crammed stock on to their blocks to meet Government regulations, debts and the promise of wealth. Suddenly, the High Country was seen as relief grazing and a new form of nomadism evolved to replace the moth hunters.

By 1860 a distinct pattern of alpine grazing had developed whereby thousands of sheep were driven up into the alpine meadows and woodlands to graze

*Heavy stocking by cattle quickly removed vital ground-protecting vegetation from the alpine soils and allowed erosion to occur. Club Lake Creek catchment between Mt. Kosciusko and Mt. Carruthers. (Photo courtesy of the Tyrrell Collection)*

the spring and summer pastures. An early winter or a late blizzard could make this a hazardous venture and heavy losses were commonplace. Even so, the advantages of so much free grazing outweighed such losses. For example, H.T. Edwards carried one sheep to 0.4 hectare on Bibbenluke station in the 1880s but it depended entirely upon sending between ten and twenty thousand head up to Kiandra for the spring and summer of every year.

Only the unwritten law of the range applied to the High Country until the Crown Lands Act, 1889, made provision for the Department of Lands to allocate snow leases that ran for seven years. Unfortunately, this was merely to raise revenue and had nothing to do with proper management of the alpine ecosystem. The graziers took exactly the same view but perhaps for what we would now say were the wrong reasons. Few bothered to apply for a lease and pay for what they had been using for nothing. The Government interpreted their reluctance to apply for leases as a boycott to ensure that the system would fail.

The Department of Lands countered with a wider range of leases with varying terms and costs to cover different alpine environments. They ranged from scrub licences that ran for fourteen years to annual leases, but the end result was an administrative nightmare. The law was amended in 1917 to allow the snow leases to run for fourteen years only. These were more attractive to the graziers, who now had an incentive to pay the fee, invest in fencing and build rudimentary stockyards and huts on their leases. The leases had an average area of 2763 hectares and were soon incorporated into the management strategies of the properties whose owners were lucky enough to have this additional grazing at little cost.

The leaseholders were not all locals from the Monaro or the eastern Riverina, the areas on either side of the Alps. Many wealthy western landholders purchased leases as drought insurance and then rented them out as agistment to local graziers when they were not using them. There were also itinerant drovers who used the High Country as illegal 'grass thieves'. Added to these were the city speculators who obtained a lease to fatten stock or who simply wanted to hold a lease in case the chance arose to convert the land to freehold.

Some graziers ensured that neither their home runs nor their leases were overstocked. Others showed less concern for the High Country and the effect their stock and fires could have upon it. There was little leadership from the State Government because there were very few controls over the way the leases and permissive occupancies could be used. The

LANDS, 1899-1906

#### For Public Recreation and Preservation of Game\*

LAND DISTRICTS OF TUMBARUMBA AND COOMA.

Partly within resumed areas 842, 991, and 992.

No. 41,191. Counties of Selwyn and Wallace, parishes of Kosciusko (Selwyn and Wallace) and Munyang (Selwyn), containing an area of about 100 square miles. The Crown Lands within the following boundaries: Commencing on the left bank of the Murray or Swampy Plain River, at the most northern corner of portion 3, parish of Kosciusko, county of Selwyn; and bounded thence by that bank of that river upwards to the northern boundary of resumed area 991; by that boundary bearing east to the summit of the Snowy Mountain; thence by that summit to a point west from the confluence of the Snowy River with Spencer's Creek; thence by a line east to that confluence; thence by Spencer's Creek and the creek forming the boundary between snow leases blocks 86 and 10 upwards; and by the creek forming the boundary between snow leases blocks 85 and 91 downwards to the left bank of the Crackenbach River; by that river upwards to the southernmost corner of snow lease block 84, on the summit of the Snowy Mountain; by that summit southerly about 6° chains to the south boundary of resumed area 992; by that boundary west to the east boundary of improvement lease block 1270 of 3,000 acres; by east and north boundaries of that lease north and west to the surveyed track along the range forming the western boundaries of resumed areas 992 and 991; by that track generally northerly to the intersection with the south boundary of portion 3, parish of Victoria, county of Selwyn; by that south boundary east to Geelhi Creek; by that creek downwards to the south boundary of portion 3, parish of Kosciusko first above mentioned; and by south and east boundaries thereof east and north, to point of commencement.

[Ms. 1906-20,908]

#### For Travelling Stock.

LAND DISTRICT OF ALBURY.

Within Government population area

*The New South Wales Government began reserving alpine land from grazing with this 1906 notification.*

clauses that prevented the destruction of timber were to protect the Crown's commercial interests rather than the environment.

#### First impact

Richard Helms, a remarkable self-trained natural scientist from the Australian Museum who could repair a watch, pull out a tooth and describe the natural and social science of the High Country, sounded one of the first public alerts on the effects of uncontrolled grazing around Mount Kosciusko in the *Agricultural Gazette* of 1893. He described the area as 'splendid grazing country and covered on the open parts with a dense coating of grass, assuming in many places a carpet-like compactness'. Helms added that the sweet grass sward was greedily eaten by horses, cattle and sheep. His generous description of the value of the area for grazing was qualified by some disturbing changes caused by indiscriminate annual burning to bring on a burst of green grass. Frequent fire was exposing soil to erosion and it could already be seen washing into watercourses. He warned that

'The more or less constant diminution of humus in the soil of the slopes is a danger not generally recognised.'

The uncontrolled use of fire in the High Country disturbed Helms greatly and he addressed the Royal Geographical Society of Australia on the subject stating, among other things, 'That ignorance and maybe greed should be allowed to interfere so drastically in the economy of nature is pernicious, and should not be tolerated.'

Added to the concern being expressed by people such as Helms was a growing awareness of the value of the water that was being shed by the Alps. There had been a Royal Commission into the distribution of the Murray waters as far back as 1902 and the establishment of the River Murray Commission in 1915 followed, albeit tardily, one of its recommendations. The Burrinjuck Dam was built on the Murrumbidgee during the First World War. Together, the two rivers carried the dream to water the west and turn the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area and the Murray Valley into an agricultural Garden of Eden that promised endless prosperity for the State, and indeed the nation.

Vague steps were taken to protect the catchment but they were in name rather than action. In December 1906 the Government of New South Wales designated an area of about 160 square kilometres as the Snowy Mountains National Chase for the purposes of public recreation and the preservation of 'game'. This took in the country from the Murray River, over the summit of Mount Kosciusko and down to Spencers Creek. By October 1925 it had been increased to 280 square kilometres and the preservation of native flora was added to its objectives. However, there were no staff to ensure that even these objectives were met, and grazing and burning went on just as before.

The Commonwealth Inspector-General of Forests and Acting Principal of the Australian Forestry School in Canberra in 1930 was C.E. Lane-Poole, a distinguished forester of international experience and repute. He was concerned about soil erosion in mountain catchments and began a research project on the catchment of the Murray River. That project was completed in 1932 by a young and energetic forester who loved the mountains and the outdoors and who would also leave his mark on environmental conservation. This was Baldur Byles, who became an employee of the New South Wales Forestry Commission in 1933. Readers will recall that Byles represented the Commission at that historic meeting late in 1933 that led to the establishment of the Erosion Committee. He was also a foundation member of the Catchment Areas Board.



*Baldur Byles, later in life, when he had made an indelible imprint on Australia through his work to save the alpine catchments.*

When Byles began working in the mountains in 1930, the only concern for the environment came through the Crown's ownership of the trees. Lessees could not mill or sell timber without a Forestry Commission licence, as was the practice for all commercial timber harvesting. However, there were no safeguards against indirect damage to trees through grazing and burning. There was also an awareness that the management of native vegetation was inextricably intertwined with soil erosion in what might still be argued is Australia's most important catchment. It was this combination of trees and soil erosion that took a forester into the High Country to carry out research into the impact of grazing.

Byles covered the High Country on horseback, in the same way as the graziers whose imprint he was studying. This was the first objective study of the impact of mountain grazing and its findings were not pleasing. Byles noted that the graziers knew full well that their fires dried out the alpine swamps and bogs; indeed, one of the main reasons for so much burning was to improve access for horses and livestock. The other reason was, of course, to encourage new grass growth and hopefully fight back the eucalypts in the areas below the treeline. Baldur Byles concluded that fire was the main culprit in soil erosion and also impaired the value of the Alps as a water catchment:

*throughout the Murray Plateau, the country is, on the testimony of men who have mustered cattle there all their lives, definitely drier now than it was thirty years ago. They point out again and again swamps and creeks which were formerly impassable but where now a man can ride without any danger of sinking. Consequent upon the drying of the swamps, the creeks are getting lower, and I can foresee the time when some of them will not last through the summer months.*



*Crown Lands.*

36. The Minister may, upon the recommendation of the Local Land Board, lease by auction any Crown Lands not being under pastoral or conditional lease, which may be usually covered with snow for a part of each year and unfit for continuous use or occupation. Such land shall be leased in areas of not less than one thousand two hundred and eighty or more than ten thousand two hundred and forty acres, and during the currency of the lease shall be exempt from sale or other lease under the provisions of the Principal Act or this Act. Every such lease shall commence from the day of sale, and shall withdraw the land from any annual lease or license under which it may be held, and rent therefor shall be paid annually in advance not later than the last day of each year of the lease, subject in default to forfeiture, by notice in the *Gazette*. No right of impounding any stock of the outgoing licensee or lessee shall vest in the holder of a lease under this section until one month after the commencement of such lease. The prescribed fee for the survey of the land and the first year's rent shall be paid by the purchaser at the time of sale, and upon default the lease may there and then be reoffered for sale. The lease shall have a term of seven years, and at the expiration thereof the lessee shall have a right of extension for a term of three years,

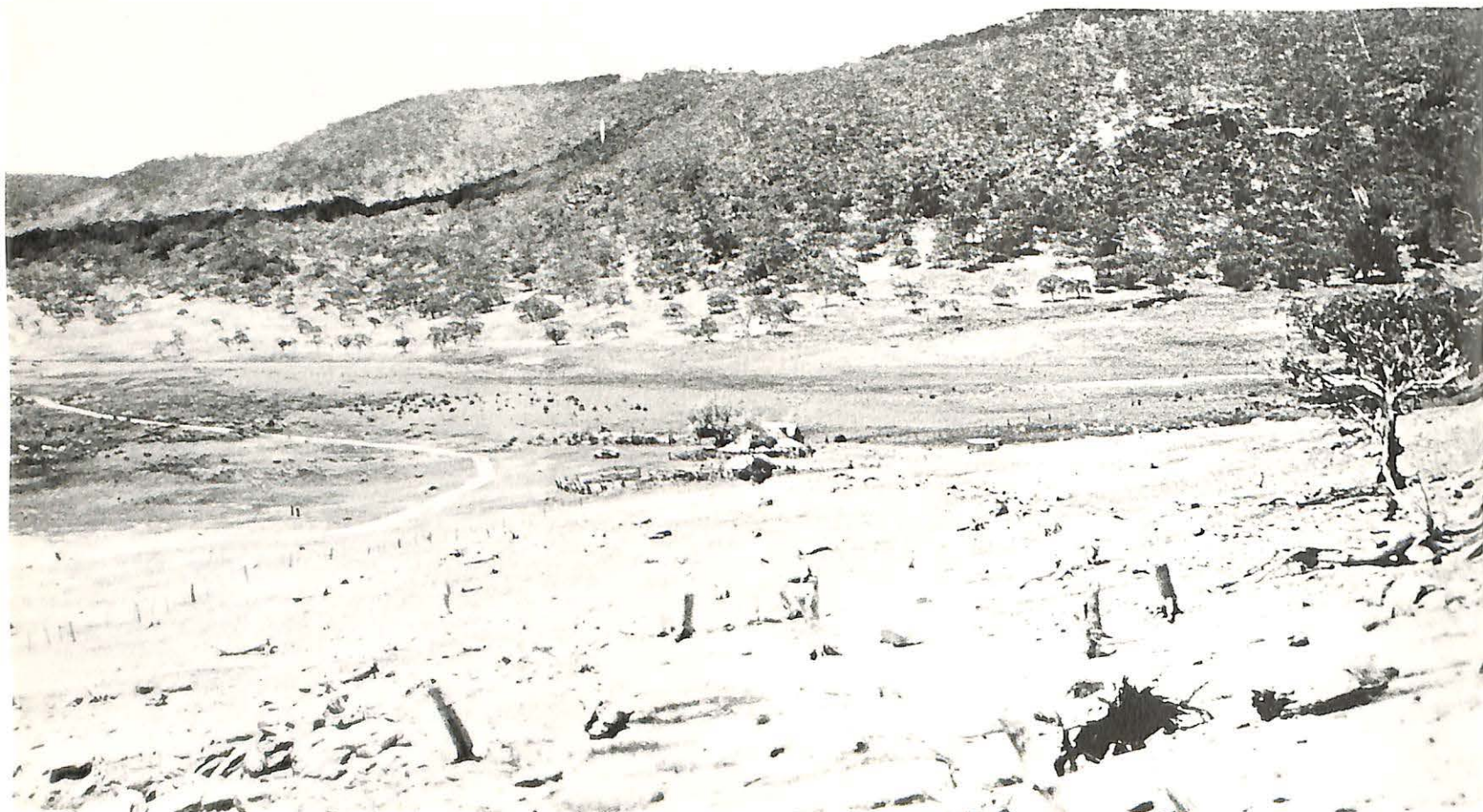
Leasing of snow lands.

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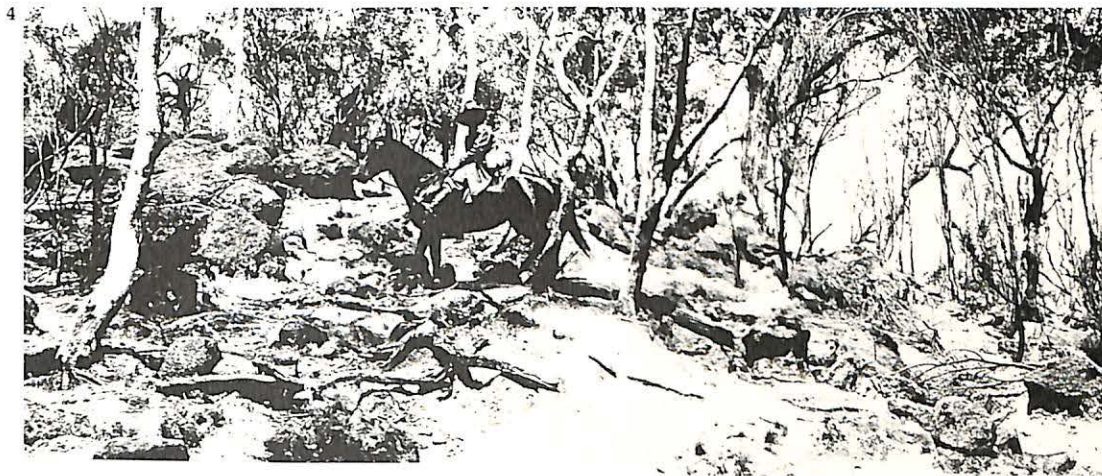
subject

1. The Snow Lease provisions of the Crown Lands Act of 1889 formalised grazing on the Snowy Mountains lands. Previously only the unwritten law of the range prevailed.

2. Clayton prepared an illustrated folder as a result of his 1940 inspection and the caption he gave this photograph read: "All the soil has been washed off this hill and the flat below is covered by useless coarse erosional debris". (Photo courtesy Pat Cranfield)



3. Sam Clayton, standing centre, together with Jim Pendergast, seated left, and Jack Whittet from the Department of Agriculture on an inspection of the High Country in 1940 using packhorses to carry camping equipment. Clayton never forgot his days in the Light Horse and would use any excuse to carry out a horseback inspection of the mountains he loved. (Photo courtesy Pat Cranfield)



4. One of the 1940 inspection party on horseback between Ingebira and the Snowy River on a track that had been badly eroded by travelling stock. (Photo courtesy Pat Cranfield)

5. Some of the members of the Kosciusko State Park Trust photographed outside the Chalet at Charlotte's Pass in 1945. The naturalist, Noel Roberts, who the Government appointed to help ensure that nature conservation was considered, is third from the left, while Garfield Barwick (later Sir Garfield), who took pride in moderating what he considered to be the extreme views of both sides in the grazing dispute, is second from the left holding a fishing rod. (Photo courtesy Pat Cranfield)



Management of the High Country became a life-long obsession for Byles and he was one of the most influential individuals in the long struggle for its conservation. However, he did not at first support the call to prevent alpine grazing and end the snow leases. He believed that grazing could continue provided that fire practices were changed by employing rangers to police the area. Byles also made the first recommendations for the rehabilitation of badly eroded areas.

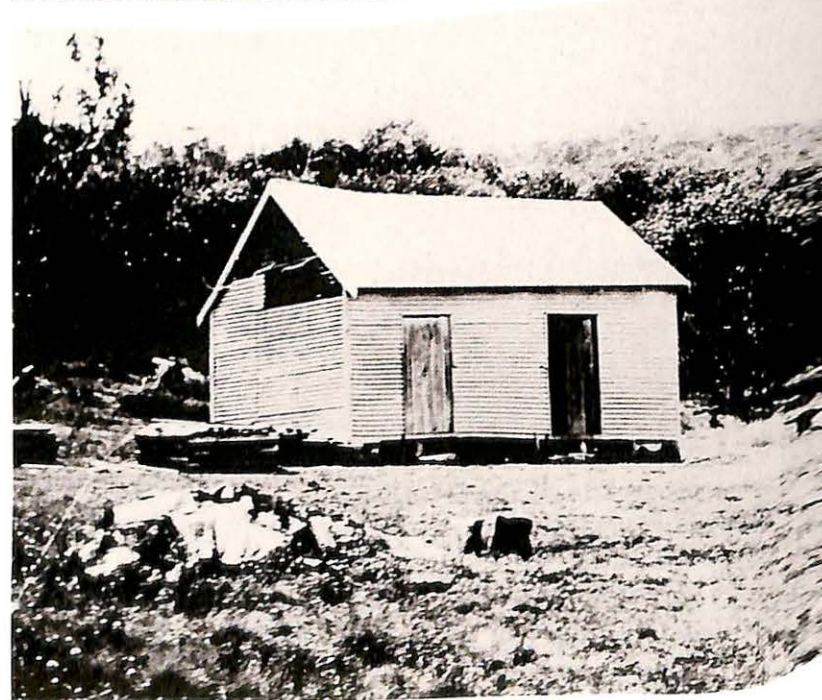
### The move against grazing gathers momentum

Quite suddenly, a new group of people emerged to covet the High Country. In the early 1930s adventurous bushwalkers from the city carried packs across alpine meadows and camped along mountain streams in the land that had belonged to the horsemen who had made the 'Man from Snowy River' a legend. These young people held different ideals and, with no allegiance to the grazing industry, they saw another use for the High Country. Their leader, Myles J. Dunphy, formed the National Parks and Primitive Areas Council in 1938 and immediately proposed that about 400 000 hectares of the High Country should be set aside from grazing and conserved as the Snowy-Indi Primitive Area. Not surprisingly, Myles Dunphy was also at the 1933 soil erosion conference.

Dunphy's proposal received wide support, not the least of it coming from the Leader of the Opposition in the State Government, William McKell. More support for protecting the High Country catchments came from a group that included many farmers. The Murray Development League was formed in Albury soon after the Hume Reservoir was built in 1936. This well-organised group published a monthly journal called *The Riverlander* in which they railed against the loads of silt that were coming down the Murray and being deposited in their brand-new dam.

### Clayton and McKell ride the range

In January 1942 a party of men on horseback, leading packhorses that carried their gear, went to look at the Alps. They were not mountain cattlemen looking for strayed stock. This party included the Premier, William McKell; Jack Tully, the Minister for Lands; Jack Seiffert, the Member for Monaro; Charles Harnett, the District Surveyor; Hamilton Mathews, the Surveyor-General; Dave Mackay, horsetailer; and Sam Clayton. The men met at Kiandra and made their way to the Boobee Hut on Happy Jacks River where they stayed the first night. Premiers and their departmental heads do not often go riding together unless,



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of course, there is urgent business that can only be done from the back of a horse.

Once again, Sam Clayton and William McKell recalled different versions of an event that led to a milestone in resource management in Australia. Clayton said that one of the first things he did when he became Chairman of the Catchment Areas Board, through his position as the Director of Soil Conservation, was to take the other members of the Board to inspect the impact of grazing in the High Country catchments. The terms of the snow leases were about to expire and would be automatically renewed by the Lands Department. At this early stage, Clayton was not totally opposed to grazing the High Country but he wanted its control taken out of the hands of the Department of Lands and much stricter limitations placed on stocking rates. The Board voted to oppose the renewal of the leases in their present form and wrote to McKell seeking his intervention in the matter.

The Department of Lands representative on the Board at the time was Lester Ferrier, whom Clayton described as a well-informed District Surveyor who had been promoted to head office. Clayton knew that if Ferrier voted with the other members of the Board to end the snow leases he would be vilified by the Lands Department. He used a break in proceedings at the Board meeting to draw Ferrier aside and say: 'You needn't agree to this or sign the determination because it will take the snow leases away from your Department, and your Minister and your Department will crucify you if you sign it.' But Ferrier put his name to the Board's decision, saying to Clayton, 'I'm convinced so I will sign it.' According to Clayton, the Department of Lands never forgave this man of high principle and character.

While this was occurring another District Surveyor helped bring matters to a head. Charley Harnett, whose territory extended over the Monaro and the High Country, presented a plan to his seniors in the Department of Lands to allow closer settlement of the Snowy Plain. Harnett was himself a son of Monaro, having been raised on a grazing property in the Eucumbene Valley, and he carried the traditional view that undeveloped land was wasted land.



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1. Soil erosion in the alpine area that was caused by a combination of grazing and frequent burning.

2. Boobee Huts on Happy Jack's River where Sam Clayton's 1942 inspection party stayed during the horseback ride through the High Country. (Photo courtesy Klaus Hueneke)

The notion that the grassy plain which funnelled clean water into the Gungarlin River could be subdivided and alienated from the Crown annoyed Sam Clayton immensely. He and Harnett had been enemies since they clashed many years earlier over the subdivision of the mallee lands. Clayton had maintained that Harnett and the Department of Lands were sending settlers into poverty on tiny blocks that would be blown and washed away as a result of their efforts to eke out an existence.

Clayton's opposition to the renewal of the snow leases and the proposal for closer settlement got him to the Premier's office where he says he persuaded McKell to go for a horseride in the mountains. Clayton wanted the Premier to see the damage that had already occurred and visualise the impact closer settlement would have on the area. However, McKell's version of the events that led to the historic horseride is a little different. He said that it was his long love affair with the mountains that made him bring Clayton, Harnett and Tully together on the ride. As McKell recalled it:

*I decided when I became Premier there were things I was going to do. One of the things that was always in mind was the Snowy and Kosciusko, the whole of that area. The whole area was so much to me, because I was born down there. I was born in Pambula and as a boy I used to go out with my father getting stock for his butcher's shop and I developed an affection for the area. I said I am going to do something about a Kosciusko State Park, I am going to have a look at the whole area and get the complete picture. So I got in touch with my officers and away we went.*

Doubtless, both Clayton's and McKell's stories about how the horseback inspection came about are correct. There were simply different forces operating to bring these key players together. First, there was Sam Clayton and the decision made by the Catchment Areas Board to oppose the renewal of the leases. Second, there were the representations made by Myles Dunphy and the National Parks and Primitive Areas Council. Third there were the pragmatists such as the Murray Development League who wanted water from the catchment. Finally, all these claims fell upon the ears of a Premier who was committed to environmental conservation and resource management, particularly in the High Country where he had his own vision of harnessing the water for irrigation and electricity.

At first it did not appear that everything on the horseride would go Clayton's way. McKell insisted that both Harnett and Tully also come on the trip. Clayton, ever the gentleman — and supreme strategist

— thought about Harnett's invitation and said to McKell that the trip would be a nightmare if he and Harnett spent the whole time arguing. Therefore, he would remain quiet and give the Premier his opinion only when asked. This, he said, would allow the Premier to make up his own mind. But Clayton also knew that Harnett was inclined to overstate his case and that this would not go down well with McKell. The man is best described by Clayton himself:

*Harnett was a big, handsome man, big wide rimmed hat, curved pipe, heavy tweed jacket with double patches and reinforced leather elbows, riding britches and revolver, bowie knife, anemometer, prismatic compass, extendable telescope and a few small survey instruments in a strap over his shoulder and about six pouches over a wide body belt. Buffalo Bill Cody would have looked like an amateur.*

*Mr. McKell had never seen him before and was impressed. Harnett had thoughtfully brought a tremendous sombrero for the Premier to protect him from the severe sun and the wind at the high altitude. He put this on him and let his city hat sit in the car which was to drive away and meet us in a few days elsewhere. We started off and the wind was tearing the Premier's hat nearly off his head. He had to hold the reins with one hand and his hat with the other. I let him ride for a mile. McKell was in distress. I said I will ride back to the car and get your hat. Better to be sunburnt than have your head torn off. I went back and arrived just as the cars were about to leave and gave McKell back his hat.*

*Well, Mr. Harnett proceeded just as I told the Premier he would. He inundated him with his opinions, he never let up. The Premier was a very patient and gentlemanly man. So Harnett and I disagreed on everything and I hated his guts for what he did in the southwest and what he was trying to do here, yet I did not hate him personally because he was a good tempered man and he was sincere. His views on agriculture were quite wrong, but he was genuine in them. He always carried a pocket edition of Banjo Paterson and that night he read to the party 'The Man From Snowy River' and other poems. He gave them atmosphere.*

Clayton and Harnett, the two protagonists who had so much in common with their love of horses and country, escorted the Premier and the Minister for Lands around the areas that had been damaged by grazing and frequent burning. It is difficult to know what explanation Harnett gave for the dried-out peat swamps, eroded gullies, caved-in stream banks and bare slopes that Clayton made a point of showing the Premier. The chances are that Harnett would have presented the traditional view that it was wildfire and natural erosion that caused these problems and that controlled grazing and fire would eventually eradicate them if only the High Country could be left in the



*Above: Fire has always been a contentious issue in the High Country and in the Australian environment generally. These snow gums have been killed by fire but there is still no agreement on how fire should be used as a management tool in the mountains. The evidence at the time of grazing showed that the mountains were burnt too frequently for regeneration to occur.*



*The snow gum Eucalyptus pauciflora that grows at the treeline in the High Country where regeneration is important to hold the soil and protect the catchment. (Photo Jan Mason)*

hands of the graziers, the people who knew how to manage it best.

Despite the serious intent of the horseride with Premier and Minister, there were lighter moments as these men with arduous responsibilities took in the rarefied mountain air instead of the equally rarefied debates that normally occupied them in Macquarie Street. Clayton got up early to find long icicles hanging from the roof of the hut where they had spent the night. Large chunks of ice were broken off and placed

in the pockets of Tully's greatcoat as he slept under it. Upon rising, Tully donned the coat and put his hands in his pockets to warm them. Grasping ice instead of warmth, he was amazed at how cold it had become overnight to produce such a phenomenon in his coat pockets and exclaimed, 'It certainly gets cold up here in mid-summer.'

Clayton asked McKell to take the mountain catchments out of the control of the Minister with ice in his pockets but knew that he would not take such a radical course. McKell liked Tully and Clayton's own Minister for Mines and Forests, Jack Baddeley, had taken little interest in the Snowy Mountains issue. Nevertheless, it was on that ride that McKell finally decided to create the Kosciusko State Park and change the snow lease system.

Clayton returned to the mountains for another long and detailed inspection in March 1943. Dave Mackay was once again the horsetailer and used the opportunity to catch an outstanding grey brumby stallion near the Tin Mines below The Pilot. Dave named the stallion Cascade Blue and took him back with him.

Charley Harnett was on that trip too but became separated from the party and had to spend one night alone without food or gear. Clayton's field diary records little concern for Harnett's discomfort but he spared a thought for the mountain graziers and cattlemen whom he wanted brought under his control. He said of 'Sancho' Jack Smith:

*He was left in charge of sheep in the mountains at the age of nine for five weeks by himself after his father was taken to Cooma with appendicitis. Now a battler in the mountains for grass — I hesitate to be hard on a man like this.*

Meanwhile, a Bill that eventually led to the end of alpine grazing for people like Jack Smith was being drafted in Sydney and was introduced in Parliament by Jack Tully on 22 March 1944. The Kosciusko State Park Act became operative on 5 June 1944. It provided for 541 600 hectares of the High Country to be set aside in the State Park to protect its catchment values and provide a recreational resource. Grazing was permitted only where it did not conflict with these uses. To ensure that these objectives were met, the Act provided for the area to be managed by the Kosciusko State Park Trust. The Chairman of the Trust was to be the Minister for Lands and the remaining members were to be a representative from each of the Department of Lands, Soil Conservation Service, Forestry Commission and a tourism interest. In addition, there were two representatives from outside the Government who were appointed by the Minister.

Both Sam Clayton and Baldur Byles were appointed to the Trust to represent their respective organisations and, along with the naturalist, Noel Roberts, were the only strong conservation voices among those who still saw the park in commercial terms. This situation was exacerbated when the Act was amended in 1952 to allow the Minister to nominate four members representing private interests.





1. The Pilot, snowcapped, in the distance. This is the country that Sam Clayton's 1943 Party rode through. The area near the Pilot was where the Party's horsetailer caught a magnificent brumby stallion. (Photo courtesy Snowy Mountains Hydro Electric Authority)

2. While grazing may have been having one form of impact, technology and the unbridled hunger of post-war development had another. This shows gravel winning during construction of the Snowy Mountains Scheme.

3. "Blue Gum", or Judith Cassell, was widely known and respected through her column in The Land newspaper. Here she is taking notes on the side of Mount Twynam amongst erosion on a stock route across the mountains. Her diligent and objective reporting about the impact of grazing in the High Country helped gain support for the Service from the wider farming community beyond the Monaro.

4. The same area showing how a masonry waterway was built from the local stone soon after 1958 when the Snow Leases above 1476 m were withdrawn and the Service commenced rehabilitation work. It was soon found that once stock were removed the area could be repaired more easily than at first thought possible.

5. Contour banks on the roof of Australia — another example of the first rehabilitation work in the High Country. This bank is on the side of Mount Carruthers looking towards Khancoban with The Sentinel on the right. Dick Condon is in the centre.

6. The constant tramping feet of tourists causes erosion too and part of the work of the Service has been the design and construction of new walking tracks. This is one of the work teams in the mountains in the early 1960's with the Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation members on the left in hard-hats and the Soil Conservation Service members of the team with more traditional head gear on the right. Seated holding the cup is the Foreman, Peter Swane, and standing is the District Soil Conservationist, Allan Plummer.

7. The Summit of Mount Kosciusko. The caption on the back of the original reads "... before the building of Observatory by Clement Wragge".

8. The Top of Australia now supports a good cover of grass and other soil-protecting vegetation.

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This opened the way for Leo Barry, the Chairman of the Snow Lessees Association, to gain a position on the Trust. Clayton and Byles found themselves outnumbered on many of the conservation issues about which they felt so strongly.

The other impediment to conservation of the High Country was the lack of funds to enable the Trust to perform the function it had been given by Parliament. It was a savage irony that the only funds the Trust could rely upon were the fees it collected from the graziers for their snow leases. The park that had been established to help protect the alpine catchments was therefore chronically short of funds and compromised in the way it gained the small amount that was available.

About the only joy that Sam Clayton got from the Kosciusko State Park and the Trust was that the Soil Conservation Service was given the task of examining all the snow leases and setting new stocking rates. Clayton did most of the inspections himself and loved the hundreds of hours of horseriding that this involved. He was assisted by Tom Taylor from the Service, and his old foe, Charley Harnett, also came along from time to time. He and Clayton must have retained their mutual disdainful respect because:

*It was a miracle that Harnett didn't shoot me or I drown him in one of the river crossings. He would have sunk like a stone with all that gear on him. One of his deputies, a surveyor, died on the job, in his bed one night. The altitude didn't agree with him. Fortunately, it agreed with me and being an old light horseman, I liked riding and looking at country. I loved these mountains.*

The revision of the snow lease system in 1944 resulted in 10000 hectares of the Kosciusko summit area being closed to grazing.

The large leases taken up by western graziers were eliminated in favour of smaller areas for those adjacent to the mountains on the Monaro and eastern Riverina. Stocking rates for each lease were set and rangers were employed to ensure that they were not exceeded. The rangers did make an honest effort to see that the rules were obeyed, and they counted the stock as they moved on to the leases each year.

Peter Treffry is now a Special Soil Conservationist with the Soil Conservation Service but he started his working career as a jackaroo after graduating from Hawkesbury Agricultural College in 1953. He worked for Max Leitch of Bulgary, Collingullie, near Wagga Wagga and one of his tasks was to take the sheep and cattle up to the two snow leases each year. Peter recalls how one year they had an extra twenty-five rams late in the season and, as was the practice, notified the

stock ranger at Yarrangobilly Caves. The ranger would not let the rams on to the lease before an equal number of ewes had been mustered, counted off and taken back to Bulgary.

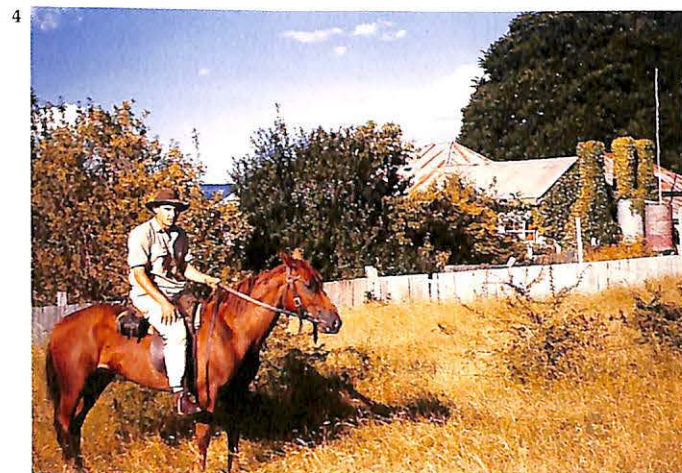
The rangers' conscientious efforts to control the overall stocking rate on each lease were undermined by the habit of sheep and cattle to selectively graze certain areas. Livestock converged on areas that were moist and always had green growth or removed particularly palatable species from between the less attractive tussocks to leave the inter-tussock areas bare of soil. In theory, the stocking rates seemed very conservative but in practice selective grazing mitigated against their usefulness. The use of fire also continued. Burning was entrenched as a mountain grazing tradition and many of the lessees would send their men up to the leases to light up the bogs, meadows and woodlands a month or so before the stock were allowed to enter. Peter Treffry recalls how he soon became adept at 'the one-handed art' of flicking matches from horseback and having them land alight on the ground. Wax matches were still in use in those days and they made excellent incendiaries.

In 1946 the Park Trust requested a Joint Advisory Committee of the Linnean and Royal Zoological Societies of New South Wales to carry out a natural history survey of part of the Park. The Committee recommended the removal of grazing and the appointment of an ecologist as Director of the Park, or failing that at least as a consultant to the Trust. None of these recommendations were acted upon but the report represents one of the milestones in considering the natural values of the High Country as equal to its importance as a water catchment.

### **The Snowy Mountains Scheme**

In contrast to the Trust, the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Authority was allocated all the money it needed to remodel the mountains by creating mighty water storages and making rivers run in different directions from those which nature had fashioned. The S.M.A., as it came to be known, was formally established in 1949 and also owed its beginnings to William McKell. He was now Governor-General and convinced the Prime Minister, Ben Chifley, to undertake the Scheme in the interests of national defence. The link with defence was rather tenuous but McKell was able to persuade Chifley that this was the most favourable approach to getting Federal Government funds for the Scheme.

Today, people might wonder whether the Snowy Mountains Scheme would be approved if it had to run the gamut of contemporary environmental impact



1. Leo Barry, as Chairman of the Snow Lessees' Association, was a tireless fighter for continuation of alpine grazing. (Photo courtesy Gordon Barry)

2. The trigonometrical station at the summit of Mount Kosciusko — 1898.

3. Grazing markedly affected snowgum regeneration in the Snowy Mountains. Both areas were burnt in the 1939 bushfire but the exclusion of stock from the Kosciusko Water Reserve (right) allowed regeneration. No regeneration at all occurred on the grazed area to the left.

4. Peter Treffry mounted ready for a day's stockwork on the Snow Leases, while working as a jackeroo at "Jounama Station", Yarrangobilly, in 1955. Old Jounama Homestead in the background. The station is now part of Kosciusko National Park.

assessment and its accompanying legislation. The conservation movement is now a powerful force and a zealous public may take a very different attitude to the changes wrought upon the mountains by what was hailed as the greatest engineering feat of its time. Postwar development frenzy drowned the voices of those who spoke out against the Scheme because of its impact on the mountains.

The geologist and geographer, Dr W.R. Browne, deserves a place in the history of the battle to protect the High Country. He had always been interested in both the natural history of the mountains and the need to control soil erosion within them. One of his attacks on what was happening in the High Country was made while delivering the David Memorial Lecture at the University of Sydney on 21 August 1952. Browne had a tendency to speak 'tongue in cheek' and added a little exaggeration to drive the point home:

*There is no longer a soil erosion problem in the highlands: there is little soil left to erode. The glory that was Kosciusko is a barren, stony desert; the spoliation of our heritage — man's triumph over Nature — is complete.*

Browne became a forceful spokesman for the protection of the mountain catchments and influenced Dunphy, Byles and Clayton. Later on he would lead the successful protest against the proposal to build one of the dams on Spencers Creek, high up on the beautiful alpine meadows around Mount Kosciusko itself.

Sam Clayton was also deeply troubled by the impact the men, machines and money of the S.M.A were having on the High Country catchments. However, he sensed that William Hudson (later Sir William), the Director of the S.M.A, shared his concern for soil erosion because it threatened his water storages with siltation. Clayton believed in the Snowy Scheme so his approach was to get to know Hudson and try to work with him so that procedures could be modified and rehabilitation after disturbance by construction work could be properly designed by the Soil Conservation Service. It was not long before the Authority also employed its own research team to study soil erosion, siltation and the impact of grazing the snow leases.

During this period a young soil conservationist named Alec Costin was making his mark upon the management of the High Country and would go on to become the leading Australian authority on alpine ecology and mountain catchment management. Alec Costin was the first Soil Conservation Service cadet to be put through University. He began studying

agricultural science at Sydney University in 1942 and graduated with Honours and the University Medal in 1947. Until some tension entered the relationship, Sam Clayton would refer to Costin as his 'brightest cadet'.

Upon graduation, Costin was sent to Cooma to open the first Soil Conservation Service office in the town. His love of alpine ecology led him to embark on a PhD thesis on the ecosystems of the Monaro. Costin's monumental study was published in 1953 and is now regarded as a classic for its meticulous study of natural ecosystems and the impact livestock and fire had upon them. Costin found that while some ecosystems could be safely grazed with very light stocking rates, it was impossible to prevent catchment degradation. This was because, regardless of every good intent, cattle and sheep will concentrate on the wetter areas and/or the most palatable plants and degrade those areas. Fencing these areas off was economically out of the question so the only alternative was to take the stock out of the mountains. As for fire, Costin wanted the indiscriminate burning halted immediately and the development of a proper fire management plan.

Sam Clayton and Gordon Kaleski had big plans for Alec Costin so in 1950 they sought to bring him to head office. Costin wanted to continue his research and chose to resign and stay in the mountains. He completed his work and then travelled overseas to examine the impact of grazing on alpine country before taking a position with the Soil Conservation Authority in Victoria. Clayton was annoyed about Costin's 'defection' and did not communicate with him. That little stand-off developed some real tension when Costin returned to the summit area of Kosciusko and took some photographs showing that the highly eroded areas were not regenerating even after grazing had ceased. He circulated a report that included the photographs and notes explaining that once damage had occurred to these alpine ecosystems, they would require extensive rehabilitation work. Clayton came across one of the unpublished reports and was furious about Costin — now a Victorian — commenting on catchment management in New South Wales.

#### **A formidable alliance**

While Clayton refused publicly to acknowledge Costin's findings he now privately held the view that the catchments were in grave danger of being degraded to the point where rehabilitation would become impossible. He conferred with William Hudson and together, in the mid-1950s, they began a cam-



Sam Clayton, on the right, and Gordon Kaleski on another horseback inspection. The year is 1950 and they are at Pretty Plains Hut collecting evidence on the impact of grazing on the High Country.



Sir William Hudson, who put the huge Snowy Mountains Scheme in place, was concerned that sediment from erosion caused by livestock grazing the alpine catchments would lessen the life of the Scheme's storages. (Photo courtesy Snowy Mountains Hydro Electric Authority)

paign to revoke all leases above the 1476 metre contour line. They combined their resources to fight a bitter duel with the Department of Lands. Fortunately, two private organisations published reports that captured the public interest and gave Clayton and Hudson the support they so badly needed.

The Murray-Murrumbidgee Development Committee carried out an inspection tour of the catchment early in 1955. The organisers had invited Sam Clayton along but he declined. Alec Costin, who had left the Soil Conservation Service in 1950 to take up a position as Principal Research Officer of the Soil Conservation Authority of Victoria, did attend. His hand was certainly there among the recommendations that were published in April 1955 as 'The Condition and Administration of the Murray-Snowy-Murrumbidgee Catchment Area'. It recommended that all high-altitude snow leases should be revoked, that soil conservation work should be increased in the catchments, and that more ecological research should be undertaken. The greatest threat to the Department of Lands lay in the recommendation that the High Country should be placed under the control of a powerful new body called the Murray and Snowy Mountains Catchment Authority.

Two years later, the Academy of Science added its influential weight to the argument. In 1957 it published a report on the condition of the high mountain catchments of New South Wales and Victoria. The committee that made this report was chaired by J.S. Turner, Professor of Botany and Plant Physiology at the University of Melbourne. Also on the committee was Alec Costin, who by now was the Senior Research Officer, Alpine Ecology Section, CSIRO, and stationed back in the mountains at Island Bend. The



Alec Costin was the first Soil Conservation Service Cadet. After completing his mammoth work on the Monaro he went on to become an acclaimed authority on the High Country.

report to the President and Members of Council of the Academy stated:

*Your Committee is unanimously of the opinion that there is serious deterioration of the vegetative cover of all these catchments and a decline in catchment efficiency; also, that there is widespread surface soil erosion, which is likely to reach extremely serious proportions if not checked.*

The report compared the tiny proportion of revenue that was earned from grazing to the value of the water for generating electricity and irrigation, and recommended that all grazing should cease in areas above 1476 metres. The Committee was critical of the dominating influence of the Department of Lands on the Kosciusko State Park Trust and recommended that its Chairman should be the Minister for Conservation. It also stated that no private member of the grazing industry should sit on the Trust as the Department of Lands already represented the interests of this group. This relationship had developed during the history of the snow leases but the Committee of the Academy of Science wanted that liaison ended.

*A photo taken by Sam Clayton in January 1957 of illegal grazing on regeneration works carried out by the Snowy Mountains Authority in Perisher Creek valley.*



An indication of the close relationship between the Kosciusko State Park Trust and the graziers who leased the High Country can be seen in the submission the Trust made to the Committee when it was gathering evidence. The Trust noted its deep concern about soil erosion but considered that major bushfires were its greatest cause and that pasture improvement and controlled grazing were one of the best ways to prevent it. Leo Barry, the Jindabyne grazier and member of the Trust, forcefully articulated the views of the Snow Lessees Association at public meetings and in the local press, saying that grazing and burning actually reduced soil erosion because it prevented wildfire.

It is important to mention that not all Monaro or eastern Riverina graziers were in favour of grazing the High Country or the snow lease system. Some believed that the system of cheap relief grazing encouraged poor management of the homestead properties as well as the leases. Others were content to use the leases while they could but would readily give them up with a change in Government policy. However, the Snow Lessees Association, with its forthright and outspoken members, did maintain a constant vigilance against any possible loss of what they claimed was a traditional right to graze the High Country.

That same view often came from the Trust whose membership could easily vote in favour of grazing. It angered Clayton immensely that his view was over-ridden and that the Trust's statements were so opposed to his own beliefs and the research results of his own organisation. The main thing that had stayed Clayton's hand to date was his reluctance to take on the Minister for Lands, Billy Sheahan, whom Clayton described as:

*... one of the toughest men in the country. At full blast he could have eaten me and my gentle Minister, Ern Wetherell, who didn't like fighting. Billy Sheahan was a fighter and if there was one Minister in the Government who I hated to lock horns with, it was him.*

Sheahan was the Member for Burrinjuck, the eastern Riverina seat that included Gundagai and Tumut where many of the graziers held snow leases. He knew many of them personally. To him, they were not wealthy squatters but farmers with mortgages to service and families to raise. It was hardly their fault if they had taken the opportunity to get a lease and were now dependent upon it. Sheahan was one of McKell's hand-picked candidates from the 1940 election campaign and a fearsome advocate of the underdog.



*Billy Sheahan, as Member for Burrinjuck, represented many Snow Lessees in Parliament. Sheahan saw them as people with a living to make and families to raise, rather than as wealthy squatters.*



*Ern Wetherell, as Minister for Conservation, gave strong backing to Sam Clayton in the battle over the snow leases.*

This was 1957; by now Clayton had worked under a number of Ministers and was a good judge of their capacities and commitment. Although Wetherell might not be a fighter who spilled blood, Clayton knew him to strongly support his Department of Conservation in Cabinet and as a man who would stand up to Sheahan if he believed in his cause. So Clayton began preparing Wetherell for the bitter feud that would follow when Clayton played his trump card. He secretly took Ern Wetherell on one of his guided inspections of the mountains and fed him the results of his experience, that of his many officers now stationed in the area and Costin's research.

Next, Clayton took the Catchment Areas Protection Board on a similar inspection. Alec Costin's knowledge and position with the CSIRO meant that Clayton was obliged to invite him along. To make his point about the impact of grazing, Costin suggested that they go and inspect Ginnini Swamp in the Brindabella Ranges. This swamp was in a less favourable environment for sphagnum growth than many in the higher altitudes around Kosciusko yet it was in perfect condition simply because grazing had ceased in the Brindabellas some years earlier to protect Canberra's water catchments. The members of the Board were already impressed with Costin's evidence and

that visit to Ginnini Swamp totally convinced them about the detrimental effect of grazing and the burning that went with it. Clayton had won the day, but not without Costin's contribution. His resentment towards him melted and Clayton walked over to Costin, put his hand on his shoulder and said, 'You can call me Sam'.

Dan Murray, who represented the Department of Lands on the Board, was the only member who remained unconvinced that all grazing above the snowline should be banned. The Board met in Sydney and voted to veto the renewal of all leases above 1476 metres. Murray rushed from the meeting, furious and shouting that he was going straight to see his Minister who, he said, would tear the Board to shreds. Clayton liked a lot of the people he opposed and described Murray as 'a strong capable man with the highest courage and determination and integrity'.

Murray arrived at Sheahan's office and poured out his indignation, certain that his Minister would pick up the phone and destroy Clayton as well as the decision the Board had just taken. But Sheahan sat there unmoved. Clayton had been given a master stroke of luck. Only minutes before Murray had arrived, Joe Cahill, the Premier, had phoned Sheahan to tell him that he had been promoted to Attorney-General. Sheahan was a barrister and to become Attorney-General was the peak of his ambition. He told Murray that there was nothing he could do, it was now up to the new Minister for Lands, Roger Nott.

The Trust, also under the control of the Department of Lands, promptly rejected the Board's authority and claimed that its Act had overridden the Soil Conservation Act and that it had complete control over all land use matters in the Park. This split between two Government organisations caused a similar division in Cabinet. The Minister for Conservation, Ern Wetherell, backed Clayton and the Board and threatened to resign if the leases were renewed. The Minister for Lands, Roger Nott, declared that he would resign if they were terminated.

The Member for Monaro, Jack Seiffert, sat on the Government benches but supported the graziers in their fight to retain the leases. He raised the matter in Caucus and in the House, and led a deputation of graziers to see the Premier. Seiffert also took the matter to the ALP Executive who convened a special night meeting to be addressed by Clayton and George Vincent from the Lands Department. At that meeting, Seiffert sprang to his feet, pointed at Clayton, and shouted to the Executive: 'That man, a public servant, has more power than the Minister for Lands, in fact anyone else except Wallace Wurth.'

Clayton would have quietly relished this as a back-handed compliment but replied modestly, saying that he had no power at all and that everything he did was merely through his responsibilities for the Catchment Areas Protection Board under the Soil Conservation Act.

'You are the Board,' said Seiffert in anger. Clayton responded by pointing out that in fact the Minister for Conservation was the Chairman of the Catchment Areas Protection Board. This arrangement still exists today, whereby the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Affairs is the Chairman but in practice the duty falls upon the Commissioner of the Service. Clayton knew as well as most others that the Minister never attended Board meetings and that Seiffert was more than half correct.

Both Clayton and Vincent chose to show slides of the High Country to the Executive. Clayton asked Vincent how many slides he was going to show and learnt that he intended showing his entire collection of one hundred and fifty. On hearing this, Clayton said that since he only had twenty, would it be all right if he spoke first:

*I showed about 15 really good slides. No repetition, no insult to their intelligence. And I explained how important it was to correctly interpret what you were showing. Then Vincent started on his 150 with his wrong interpretations which became evident in time. He had a weak case, and he weakened it further with futile repetition. He had no idea how to interpret, how to interest and how to hold an audience. We all had to be revived with coffee and biscuits.*

*Some of the Executive asked me some very pertinent questions and the better the questions the better I liked them. It showed they understood me. It was not a political question so they were allowed to think logically. Fortunately. They told the Minister the following week, the Executive unanimously agreed with our decision to exclude stock. This clinched the matter. The Executive told the Cabinet, and Cabinet told the Minister; from that moment the decision was the Government's. Not the Catchment Areas Protection Board's and not mine. But the task now was to implement how to get the stock out of these rugged mountains that had been grazed almost a century.*

### Reaction

Many of the graziers who lost their leases did not accept the ban on grazing and took their stock back up the following summer. Others who occupied adjoining leases were less than zealous when it came to repairing fences and their stock had a handy habit of straying on to the now-vacant leases. It was said that the Department of Lands stock rangers supported the graziers and failed to report breaches. The rangers

employed by the Trust could not police all the illegal grazing so Clayton had the two soil conservationists who were employed on rehabilitation work made off the high alpine meadows. Those soil conservationists who suddenly became mounted stock police were Lindsay Durham and David Clothier.

David Clothier was brought up on a sheep property at Queanbeyan, on Monaro's edge, and as a small child he saw the drought-stricken sheep from out west being transported by rail to Cooma from where they would be walked up to the snow leases. He also vividly remembers the year 1938 when he was a ten-year-old boy and his father left a copy of *Soil Erosion* lying on the kitchen table. It was written by a man called Sam Clayton. Young Dave Clothier read it from cover to cover and decided there and then that he would become a soil conservationist.

That he did, and his long career did not come to an end until 1987 when he retired as Deputy Regional Director, Soil Conservation Service, at Orange. He joined the Service in 1949 and after some experience at Walcha was appointed to Cooma to design the rehabilitation works at the Eucumbene Borrow Pits where material had been excavated for the construction of the Eucumbene Dam. Later he moved higher up in the catchment to work from the Soil Conservation Hut at Carruthers Peak. This became known as the 'hut that flew' because it was flown in, piece by piece, slung under a helicopter. Clothier also let the truth fly fairly loosely with his invention of the rare 'alpine trotting duck' that had many of the foreign workers, unused to the perversities of the Australian sense of humour, searching the alpine lakes in vain for this 'rare and endangered species'.

Rehabilitation work, and campfire yarn-spinning, were interrupted by the awkward task of impounding stock that belonged to graziers whom Service officers would have preferred to work with, rather than against, in the long battle against soil erosion. It also hurt Sam Clayton to be hated by graziers he had once considered his allies. David Clothier says that Clayton's feelings were only protected by the courage of his convictions. Clayton made certain that his officers were always available to help correct soil erosion problems on any Monaro properties, both to repair the broken relationship with the Service and also to help increase productivity on properties whose owners had lost their leases. But that was not so easy and Dave Clothier can remember being greeted with a shotgun on one farm visit.

Controlling the illegal grazing was made difficult by the lack of good horsemen who knew the country



The Finn Mulcher in operation along the Guthega Link Road. It sprayed grass seed mixed with chaff and bitumen to stabilise soil on reshaped areas along roadside batters to prevent them eroding.

and who could be employed as stock impounding officers. Neville Gare, the Superintendent of the Kosciusko State Park, who was an ardent supporter of the ban on grazing and had developed many of the conservation policies along with Byles and Clayton, wrote a strongly worded memo to the Trust on 15 March 1960 that said:

*I believe that unless we have stout-hearted, conscientious, and physically fit rangers in the southern section of the Park, who are virtual strangers to the district, we will never have proper control over grazing practices here.*

Some of the stockmen or rangers employed to police the illegal grazing turned a blind eye to the stock they were supposed to be impounding because of their local allegiances. Gare's emphasis on fitness was partly due to the arduous work but also the need for self-defence with the very real threat of violence always in the air. The following excerpt from a report made on 10 February 1959 by C.H. Harvey, a stock ranger employed by the SMA, is but one example of many encounters with irate graziers. Harvey was driving a mob of sheep found grazing illegally to one of the loading ramps so they could be trucked to the impounding yards when the owner and his brother rode up:

*He kept on repeating 'You stinking old bastard. You've lived on the sheep all your life and now you're doing this. You ought to leave this stinking bloody job.' All the time he*

*was saying this he kept riding around me. He had a big stick in his hand which was about four feet [122 cm] long and two inches [5 cm] thick. He kept on poking this stick at me every time he spoke, and he was speaking all the time. He is a big man and I was really afraid he was going to hit me.*

*I have never seen a man as angry as Archie Turner. He had saliva in the corners of his mouth. I would say he was frothing at the mouth. He continued riding around me, poking the stick at me and abusing me for some minutes. I was too upset to know exactly how long he did this, but I think he would have done this for about five or ten minutes. Eventually this time I expected him to hit me any second. He said 'Call your dogs off the sheep, we're taking them.' I said 'You do so at your own risk, by force.' He then put his dogs on the sheep — he had two or three dogs, and I called my dogs off. One of my dogs was a bit slow getting off the sheep and Archie Turner hit him with a stick. The dog is a very keen working dog and although it whinged it stayed with the sheep after it was hit, so I caught it and held him as I did not want my dog to follow the Turner's sheep.*

*When Turner put his dogs on the sheep he said 'You can go and report this as quick as you like, you smooth-tongued old bastard.' I said to him 'Mr. Davies [the SMA Horse Superintendent] is over at the yard, you'd better go and see him.' He said 'We won't bother, we'll bloody likely pull him off his horse.'*

Finding places to hold impounded stock while notifying the owner could be a problem. It could be difficult to find the public saleyards open and sometimes graziers would try and interrupt the road journey to the place of impoundment. Not only were they vehemently opposed to the principle, but impoundment was expensive and inconvenient to the owner, who had to pay the cost of freight, feed while in the





*Above: Packhorses were exchanged for faster transport in the 1970's. The helicopter is transporting hay to the slopes of Mount Kosciusko where it will be used to mulch soils exposed by a combination of grazing and badly-placed walking tracks.*



*Left: Moving people and materials in the Snowy Mountains Summit area in the summer was difficult. Initially, packhorses were used then Haflingers like that pictured here. From there the Service progressed to four-wheel-drive vehicles and then to helicopters to transport staff, supplies and rehabilitation materials to the summit works.*

yards and any extra handling charges before regaining the stock. Then there was the cost of getting them home again.

More than one grazier gave chase to livestock being trucked away to impoundment. Sometimes the truck driver, with a mind on having to live in the area and where the next job was coming from, would release the cattle when pulled over by an angry party of graziers. Such impromptu releases and the threat of serious violence to those impounding officers who tried to escort their bovine or woolly charges to 'gaol' meant that truck drivers carrying impounded stock were provided with an armed police guard during some of the most tense periods.

William Hudson and the SMA had won wide support for the vast engineering scheme with one of the best public relations campaigns in Australian history. The SMA was constituted under Federal legislation and Hudson used his independence from New South Wales politics to put pressure on the State Government to act over the illegal grazing. An example of his forcefulness is the letter he wrote to the Minister for Conservation on 12 February 1959. It was written only two days after the incident between Harvey and Turner, which helps explain the terse and very direct tone:

*Dear Mr. Wetherell*

*I am sending this communication to you as I am unable to contact Mr. Clayton who is out of Sydney.*

*Several thousand stock have been driven into the prohibited areas of the Snowy Mountains for grazing in open defiance of your Government's regulations. The Authority, acting in accordance with your Conservation Service's request, commenced rounding up some of this stock for impoundment. However, threats and interference by graziers have intimidated some of the men required for impounding the stock. To avoid violence we are not forcing the issue at this stage.*

*It is quite apparent that the graziers are flouting the regulations and will continue to do so unless strong measures are taken. It would appear that no assistance is being given by the Lands Department Rangers employed in the Area. Bearing in mind the Authority's financial obligations for compensating your Government for the loss of rentals and our interests in the preservation of the soil in the Snowy Mountains Area, the Authority is vitally concerned. Do you wish us to proceed with the rounding up of the stock?*

*Yours sincerely  
W. Hudson  
Commissioner*

There followed a long dispute between the Minister for Lands and the Minister for Conservation in which Jack Seiffert was a major catalyst. Seiffert maintained a relentless campaign for the renewal of the closed leases and caused Clayton to write long letters that went out under his Minister's signature. Fortunately, Premier Cahill supported the closure of the leases so it remained for the few rangers employed by the Trust, the SMA, and the officers of the Soil Conservation Service to enforce an unpopular regulation in a harsh environment, both ecologically and socially.

Clayton did not leave his officers to carry out this unpleasant work while he buried himself in head office, far from the conflict. He made many trips to the area and David Clothier recalls how he would ring up to say he was coming with some important bureaucrat whom he wanted to convince about the legitimacy of putting an end to the grazing. Clothier would be told to have the car neat and tidy and in roadworthy condition. One example of the trips Clayton made was in April 1959 when he brought the Under-Secretary of Lands down for an inspection. They boarded the train in Sydney the night before and took a sleeping berth to Cooma, where they went on a day-long tour of works in the mountains with Clothier. In the evening they took a return train to Sydney and arrived next morning in time to go straight to the office.

### **The National Parks and Wildlife Service**

The Trust had lost a large source of its income and was saved from complete disintegration only by an annual grant of \$30000 from the SMA to carry out soil conservation work in the catchment. This work was contracted out to the Soil Conservation Service but Clayton himself had ceased to attend regular meetings of the Trust and went only if there was some specific item of business on the agenda that related to his organisation. The Trust itself was moribund, bereft of finance, staff, facilities and policies.

The person credited with bringing the Trust out of this mire is Baldur Byles. He is still remembered for his great physical stamina, matched by a tenacity and conviction to reform the management of his beloved high mountain catchment. Byles also encouraged Sam Clayton to continue the fight and told him that even if he achieved nothing else in life but to get livestock out of the mountains, he could look upon his life in old age and see it well spent. Byles also made an effort to take those on the Trust who did not agree with him on long hikes through the mountains so that they could learn from each other and discuss their differences while relaxing around an evening camp-

fire. People such as the grazier Leo Barry, lawyer Garfield Barwick (later Sir Garfield, Chief Justice of the High Court) and Alec Costin all spent time hiking, observing and debating with Byles.

Garfield Barwick held an important position on the Trust because many members who could not make up their mind to back those such as Clayton and Byles or the opposing side of the Department of Lands and the graziers tended to follow his lead. Credited with a brilliant legal mind, Barwick took delight in weighing up all the evidence and then acting as a moderator. The greatest breakthrough for the conservation forces on the Trust came when Byles, Costin and Barwick went to inspect Costin's research plots. There were some exclusion trials where livestock had been kept absent by fencing for several years. Each side of the fence told the story very clearly — outside the exclusion trial the ground was bare and devoid of cover, inside the fence there was a healthy sward. Barwick was still not convinced that grazing had caused the damage in the first place; his legal mind would not rule out that the original damage may have been caused by the huge 1939 bushfires. But he was now prepared to admit, for the first time, that grazing prevented regeneration and rehabilitation.



*Dr Grahame Edgar's report recommended a complete ban in Kosciusko National Park.*

The persistence of Baldur Byles was rewarded with a Trust that started to vote for his conservation reforms, but there were setbacks. In 1963 a major fire swept through the mountains and the graziers exploited this to show what happened when their management was removed. This was followed by a severe drought and increased pressure was placed on the Government to reopen the area that had been closed to grazing. Surprisingly, after all the difficulties of policing the original closure, approval was given for the leases to be used once again from 1966 to 1968. The win for the graziers held out the hope that

this arrangement under the name of temporary drought relief could be made permanent.

Ironically, it was a Minister for Lands who made the most far-reaching change to the Snowy Mountains with respect to grazing and many other conservation management policies. Tom Lewis, Minister for Lands in the Askin Liberal-Country Party Government, had been impressed by the United States National Parks Service and established the National Parks and Wildlife Service of New South Wales by Act of Parliament in 1967. This put all the State Parks under a Director based in Sydney and abolished the Trusts, creating local advisory committees with greatly reduced powers and responsibilities in their place.

Kosciusko National Park was the finest jewel in the new Service's crown and Lewis appointed himself as Chairman of the advisory committee. Moreover, he chaired the meetings and imposed his strong will on the Park. What he could not achieve through the advisory committee he could do as the Minister responsible for the entire Service. With vision, determination and endless energy, Tom Lewis changed the administration of nature conservation in New South Wales.

Lewis stayed his hand on the grazing issue while the Snow Lessees Association kept up a campaign for the return of their former grazing rights. Then he responded to one of their deputations with the promise of an independent inquiry into grazing throughout the entire park. The Premier made an announcement on 21 February 1968 that the person chosen to conduct the inquiry was Dr Grahame Edgar, a former Director-General of Agriculture.

The Edgar Report was presented to the Government in May 1969 and perhaps somewhat surprisingly, given the background of its Chairman, it recommended that all grazing be banned in Kosciusko National Park. This was a major blow to the Snow Lessees Association who promptly rejected the report, claiming that it was both biased and inaccurate. However, the Askin Government stood by the report and the era of mountain grazing was ended.

### Epilogue

This time the stock were taken out of the Park without bloodshed or major incident. True, infringements occurred and impoundment followed but the National Parks and Wildlife Service was given more resources to carry out its work. There was now also a much better informed public, thanks to the work of the Soil Conservation Service, the SMA and an environment movement that was gaining momentum day by day. It was this lineup against mountain graz-

ing that encouraged members of the Snow Lessees Association to keep their organisation alive and lobby for a revision of the decision against them.

As recently as 1973 the Snow Lessees Association was still operational and held a symposium in Cooma to try and influence public opinion. Peter Cochran spoke at the meeting, which was attended by about forty people and repeated the view that only local mountain cattlemen and sheepmen knew how to manage the country from which they had been forcibly removed:

*To those of you who have been falsely led by the preachings and propaganda of ill-advised, inexperienced, dictatorial bureaucrats please take heed because your education of the true conservation of our Park is about to begin. We true conservationists will not tolerate the desecration of this Park which was the birthplace of our forefathers, the Men From Snowy River. We have been pitched out of our land bit by bit and now is the time to halt this cancerous spread of ignorance that 'mechanical conservationists' have displayed to cause our Park's destruction.*

Such rhetoric would have had Clayton reaching for his spurs. Perhaps because he had now retired, and perhaps through the Association's persistence, a small section of the park around the Blowering fore-shores was opened for relief grazing in 1976. And while that too has been discontinued, the grazing issue is still not entirely dead. Nor will it be for some time to come, while memories linger and alpine meadows are perceived to be unused by people who measure country only by the number of sheep or cattle it can run. It is still common to see an obviously rural car or station utility sporting a windscreen sticker that proclaims 'Mountain grazing prevents mountain blazing'.

This is not to imply that grazing and regular burning are the only dangers the High Country faces. Tourism, and the millions of tramping feet of the people it brings to the mountains, can also have a devastating impact if it is not carefully managed. Hopefully, the pioneers of environmental conservation in the High Country have helped bring about changes, both in land management and in public attitudes, that will be difficult to reverse. The ghosts of Sam Clayton and Baldur Byles, and all the other fighters for the mountain catchments, should not be asked to don their spurs and ride the High Country to fight another range war over the future of Australia's best-known catchment.

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