

Chapter 1

PASTORAL EXPLORATION & EXPANSION

Definitions

In this chapter:

- 'livestock' includes sheep, cattle, & horses
- 'squatter' means owner of livestock who initially occupied large expanses of Crown land for grazing without tenure, and subsequently sought government consent for their use of such lands under colonial Orders-in-Council pre-dating 1862
- 'pastoralist' means holder of a license for pastoral purposes under provisions of the Victorian Land Act, 1862, and includes squatting tenancies continuing under that Act
- 'small new pastoralist' is a subset of 'pastoralist' and includes smaller operators who licensed the more limited (smaller & less productive & often more challenging) rangeland grazing opportunities made available under the pastoral provisions of the 1862 & 1869 Land Acts
- 'station owner' means the owner of a large lowland pastoral property formerly held under squatting tenure and subsequently significantly converted to freehold

Background

Snow country grazing began as a natural extension of the early squatting occupation of Australia.

Squatters were the first Europeans to settle most of the Australian countryside. They were bold and opportunistic adventurers who took sheep and cattle far beyond the official limits of early British settlements and initially took possession of land without prior permission. As they were beyond the reach of governing authorities grass was free, for a time; but more significantly there were vast new lands to occupy with the hope of one day building a claim for ownership. The squatting movement was a massive land-grab, a stampede for riches. It was financed by free settlers who had money to purchase livestock, employ shepherds, drovers, and overseers; to plan and execute journeys of exploration; to implement occupation strategies; and most significantly to wait out long lead-times before their investments would yield a return. Squatting could be immensely profitable, often spawning large freehold estates. But it was also a risky business. In the earliest years there were no rules. Later, when laws governing pastoral occupation were framed, there was only very limited certainty of continuity.

Squatters were at the frontier of contact with Australia's indigenous people – and being unfettered by the far distant institutions of British law, blood sometimes dripped from their hands. Peter Gardner has documented how the Kurnai tribes of Gippsland were massacred by the early squatters, led by the once celebrated, now controversial Angus McMillan.¹ There was no slowing this assault until a government presence was established at Port Albert in 1844, but even then bloodletting went

¹ Gardner, Peter, (1987) Our Founding Murdering Forefather

on until the last of the Kurnai finally came out of the mountains in 1854, half starved, and surrendered to the now dominant European culture. Thence forth they lived on the fringes of a few squatting stations, trading favours and their labour as stock hands for food, clothing and alcohol. With their hunting and gathering lands trampled and degraded by sheep & cattle, and their populations diminished by murder, disease and social dislocation, there was little else they could do. This same sad story was repeated in the Murray district, at Omeo, in fact everywhere that squatters went. It's hard to imagine how it could have been any different. The business of squatting was about occupying vast areas with European livestock; aboriginal rights to the land were not recognized, and any obstacles in the fortune seekers' path were swiftly and sometimes brutally removed in the absence of law enforcement.

The great irony was and remains that without the aboriginal people, squatters would have had nowhere to go. The landscape that confronted the first European settlers in Australia was ready-made for pastoral occupation – there was grassland everywhere, even within the forests and woodlands. But this was not nature's fortuitous bounty. As Bill Gammage has amply demonstrated in his masterful work *'The Biggest Estate on Earth'*,² it was a cultural landscape sculptured by the skilful and purposeful use of fire by aboriginal Australians over tens of thousands of years. Had the European settlers of 1788 been the first humans to walk on the continent, they would have had to deal with a vastly different landscape, often dominated by thick scrub and not immediately suitable for broad scale sheep and cattle grazing. To imagine what that would have been like one only has to visit what remains of the country's forest lands, especially in the south-east of the continent which, in the absence of the routine and intricate cool burning regime that characterized aboriginal management, is now scrubby and dense with post-wildfire regrowth, and quite useless for grazing. Yet my informants (see Appendix F) described how many such areas were once open woodlands with a highly productive grassy understory. So, the squatting tsunami would not have been possible had aboriginal peoples not prepared the way.

A further irony is that it was aboriginal people who actually led many frontier squatters to the best grazing lands and thereby had a hand on the dagger that slayed their own extended communities. Individuals from tribes already decimated by white occupation were engaged by squatters to lead them to new grazing lands in adjacent territories. One cannot blame the guides for the consequences of their actions. Their own communities had already been virtually expunged; and as survivors they needed to find themselves a place in the new reality. Squatters valued their knowledge of the terrain, as it gave them a competitive advantage in the mad rush to occupy new lands. There is plenty of evidence confirming the role of aboriginal guides in the rapid expansion of the squatting frontier; we will see this later in the stories of Angus McMillan, the Hunter Brothers, the Gray family, and other squatters and stockmen associated with the mountain region.

Squatters created wealth by breeding livestock, building up large herds and creating new pastoral runs. They generated income by selling sheep, cattle, horses, and wool. Money could also be made by buying and selling properties. In the early phase of rapid pastoral expansion breeding stock was easy to sell as there was a huge demand from new entrants to the squatting business. But perhaps it was better not to sell, but build capacity instead? Of those who chose the latter path, some were very successful, amassing fortunes that have been passed down from generation to generation. But success was not guaranteed. It was not uncommon for squatters to lose everything when livestock

² Gammage, Bill, 2012, *The Biggest Estate on Earth. How Aborigines Made Australia*. Allen & Unwin. ISBN: 9781743311325

prices periodically fell, and borrowings suddenly became unserviceable. A classic example was Angus McMillan, the self-styled 'discoverer of Gippsland' who, over a period of 20 years built a pastoral empire comprising 6 squatting stations only to lose all but one (the least valuable) in 1861 when his financiers finally lost patience with him & took possession of his assets – leaving him virtually homeless.³

The lawless, free-booting nature of squatting – marching into the wilderness, occupying someone else's land & claiming a proprietary right to it – belied its dependence on government support. For once they took possession of grazing land the next question was how to keep hold of it? From 1833 permits to depasture livestock were issued by Commissioners of Crown Lands appointed by the NSW Governor. Thereafter, when a good patch of grazing land was located and stocked with sheep or cattle under the supervision of an overseer, the squatter ran to the nearest Crown lands office to register his claim. On presenting a sketch plan of the run, an estimate of the carrying capacity and some money, he was issued with a temporary but exclusive right to graze the described area. This right could be renewed annually, at the Commissioners discretion. It provided proof of the holder's 'ownership' which was enough to send any potential rivals packing. But it did not provide security of tenure, beyond 12 months, and that was a source of great frustration to those who were investing considerable sums of money in squatting ventures. Eventually, in 1847 new regulations were issued from England which guaranteed squatters occupancies for up to 14 years, provided the annual rent and all other associated fees and charges were paid up.⁴

Rules and conditions governing the issue of pastoral licenses which applied to the District of Port Phillip and subsequently the colony of Victoria, were conveniently collated and published in a special edition of the Victorian Government Gazette magazine on 20th February 1850.⁵ This was the general arrangement:

- size of a run to be no greater than 25 square miles unless a larger area was required to achieve a carrying capacity of 4000 sheep
- to rent a larger area that area needed to be divided into 2 or more runs
- estimate of carrying capacity to be initially based on the applicant's advice; penalties for deception
- 4000 sheep were equivalent to 640 head of cattle (includes horses), hence a ratio of 6.25 sheep to one head of cattle
- Yearly rent to be £10 plus £2 for every 1000 sheep (or equivalent of cattle) in carrying capacity above a threshold carrying capacity of 4000 sheep.

Ratios of Sheep to Cattle used in determination of run size & rent during the squatting era varied a little over time as the following table indicates. It is worth keeping these in mind for general reference.

³ Gardner, P, 1987, *Our Founding Murdering Forefather*

⁴ Billis & Kenyon, 1932. *Pastoral Pioneers of Port Phillip*. Powell, J. M., 1970. *The Public Lands of Australia Felix*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press. P xviii; & 1969. "The Squatting Occupation of Victoria 1834-1860", *Australian Geographical Studies*, 7, p.22

⁵ Victorian Government Gazette, 20/12/1850, pp 171 - 178

Table 1.0 Various Livestock Ratios Used During The Squatting Era				
Instrument	Detail	Ratio		
		Sheep	Cattle	Horses
Order in Council 9/3/1847 – re size of runs & rents	4000 sheep / 640 cattle	6.25	1	
1854 Stock Assessment Act – rate of tax (in shillings and pence)	Sheep 2P; cattle 1sh; horses 2sh	6	1	0.5
1862 Land Act Sec 98 max. size of new runs	5000 sheep / 1250 cattle	4	1	
1862 Classification of Runs & Rent to be paid (in shillings and pence)	Sheep 8P; cattle 2sh	3	1	
1869 Land Act, sec 6, Rent on Runs to be paid (in shillings and pence)	Sheep 8P; cattle 4sh	6	1	

The arrangements introduced in 1847 remained in place generally until 1862, and thereafter they were on phase out. New pastoral licenses issued under the 1862 Land Act were also annually renewable for a period of up to 14 years, but at a higher rate of rent based on carrying capacities systematically assessed by the government. These tenancies were also subject to a competitive auction requirement where interested parties bid for the right to acquire the license at the predetermined rental. And in a big plus for tenants, new pastoral licenses could now unequivocally be mortgaged, clearing up some earlier confusion. On the other side of the ledger the early land acts took the first tentative steps to accelerate the release of Crown lands for agricultural settlement. Squatters did their best to slow and even subvert the process.⁶ However, the 1869 Land Act

⁶ They were well positioned to do so because they were, as a group, comparatively wealthy and were socially and politically well connected; some were members of parliament. So they had a clear ability to influence the shape of laws governing the sale and administration of Crown lands. They also had an intimate knowledge of their own local areas, and were keenly aware of the productive and strategic value of lands potentially available for agricultural selection. To a significant extent they were able to frustrate and stymie the endeavours of colonial governments to fast-track mass agricultural settlement. They had financial power at land auctions; they targeted the most well-watered and fertile lots, which once acquired made the selection of surrounding areas less attractive; once they had purchased the maximum area permitted for an individual, they often (improperly) sponsored others to bid or apply for land on their behalf. Nevertheless, despite gaining freehold ownership to much of their licensed Crown land pastoral runs, I don't think anyone is claiming that their success rate was 100%. Legitimate agricultural selections by new settlers did occur on all runs, so all squatters suffered some reduction of their pastoral domains. This loss of land was off-set and perhaps in many cases outweighed in the longer term by the ability to increase productivity of the land retained. Under the pastoral licence system, only the homestead block of a squatting run (maximum size 640 acres) could be cultivated and then only to grow food for consumption on the station. Outside that relatively small area the squatting run could only be used for bush grazing; no digging of the soil or clearing of vegetation was permitted.

heralded the end of squatting tenure, guaranteeing it only till 1880, by which time most lowland tenures had been largely obliterated by land selection.

Settlement of the Alpine Periphery

The first step towards regular grazing of the mountain tops and high plains was the formation of pastoral stations on adjacent lowlands – that is, a virtual encirclement of the mountain region by squatting operations. This placed European pastoralists within sight of the alpine peaks and ranges. The second step was the spread of pastoral occupation further and further up the narrow highland river valleys to the very base of Victoria's highest mountains. These two steps constitute what I like to consider the 'placement' phase – the positioning of pastoralists within reach of alpine and sub-alpine meadows and grassy woodlands. However, it would be some time before they made use of this rangeland. Why? Because access to the snow country was steep and difficult; because the harsh climate limited its potential use to only 4 or 5 months in a year; because there was plenty of spare grazing capacity on the lowlands; and for all the above reasons there were more productive locations to target via the squatting process.

European livestock began to arrive in Victoria's snow country by 1835, at the latest. In that year an exploring party of Messrs McKillop and Livingstone attempted, unsuccessfully, to overland from Monaro to Port Phillip Bay via the Omeo plains,⁷ which had evidently been visited by European explorers sometime earlier. Using outlying squatting stations for information and supplies, the expedition passed through Currawong Station, a cattle station set in rough hill country in the Monaro district of NSW, and were joined by its owner, James McFarlane.⁸ McFarlane already knew part of the route. He had established an outstation further south from Currawong in sub-alpine woodlands now known as McFarlane's Flat,⁹ and was interested to explore further. He was greatly impressed with the grazing potential of the virtually treeless Omeo Plains¹⁰, which they subsequently encountered, and returned with cattle in the following spring of 1835 after the winter snows had melted from the intervening dividing range. McFarlane was soon joined, in 1837, by two other Monaro graziers, John Pendergast and John Hyland, who also established stations on the plains.¹¹ Others followed and took up the remaining surrounding woodlands as far south as Ensay on the Tambo River. But pastoral activity at Omeo remained on a small scale as the scope for expansion was limited, the plains being surrounded by rugged mountains and only accessible by the track from Monaro.

These early explorations and occupations were part of a southerly extension of the Monaro pastoral district, but more than this, with the drawing of political boundaries they represent one of the

7 Pendergast, J V, 1968, *Pioneers of the Omeo District*; Grieg, A W, 1912, 'The Beginnings of Gippsland', *Victorian Historical Magazine*, 2

8 Pendergast (1968), Grieg (1912), op cit

9 Pendergast (1968), op cit

¹⁰ The Omeo Plains are not snow plains but are part of an elevated basin some 600 metres above sea level which is surrounded by mountains. Their treeless nature has traditionally been thought to be due to soil and drainage characteristics, but Bill Gammage's work suggests that regular burning by the Omeo aboriginal tribe probably also had a lot to do with it. The Omeo plains are important in this study because of their strategic location within Victoria's mountain region, and in the process of reaching them explorers discovered and stocked some tracts of snow country. In later years the build-up of settlement at Omeo provided impetus for regular use of the surrounding snow country.

11 Pendergast (1968) op cit

earliest pastoral incursions into Victoria occurring at approximately the same time as the settlement of Portland and the occupation of grazing land near Wodonga.¹² Moreover, they pre-dated the great wave of pastoral expansion from Sydney and its outlying districts, which swept through north, central and west Victoria from 1837-38.

Pastoral activity at Omeo remained at relatively low ebb until Gippsland was opened for livestock; then Omeo became a stepping stone for graziers *en route* to this more extensive new country rather than a destination in itself. With pastures available further south, the demand for grazing lands at Omeo was not sufficient to force pastoralists to use the rough adjoining mountains for some time to come. Those in need of grass just moved south. Omeo was considerably less attractive than Gippsland for it was many difficult miles from both the Sydney market and a shipping port. In fact, it was this need for a shipping outlet for livestock which motivated the search for a route between Omeo and Bass Strait. To this end James McFarlane teamed up with Lachlan Macalister to sponsor a search for a practical route, engaging a certain Angus McMillan.¹³ Their aim was to establish a chain of stations from Monaro to Port Albert from where cattle could be shipped to Tasmania and New Zealand and through which supplies could be obtained.¹⁴ McMillan managed to get through to the Gippsland plains in 1839, but it required a second attempt to reach Port Albert, in 1841. In the interim McMillan busied himself setting up his own cattle station at Ensay.

After receiving news of McMillan's eventual success McFarlane dispatched his nephew Malcolm by ship to Port Albert to further investigate the discoveries. The party of three inspected land on the Thomson and Macalister rivers near what is now the town of Heyfield, and then overlanded to New South Wales via Melbourne with favourable reports. Malcolm McFarlane was immediately sent back with 500 cows to stock the new land and act as manager.¹⁵ Meanwhile, McMillan was again busy securing runs for himself and Macalister on the Avon River.

The country acquired by these pioneers was open grassy Red Gum woodland, on the southern fringe of the mountains. Other squatters followed close on their heels and occupied land nearby. They either overlanded from Monaro via Omeo or landed with stock at Port Albert from Sydney, Port Phillip or Tasmania.

12 Billis, R V, and Kenyon, A (1932), *Pastures New*, Melbourne, Macmillan & Co; Bonwick J (1883), *Port Phillip Settlement*, London, p.120.

13 Cox, K, 1973, *Angus McMillan: Pathfinder*, Olinda

14 Cox (1973), p.69

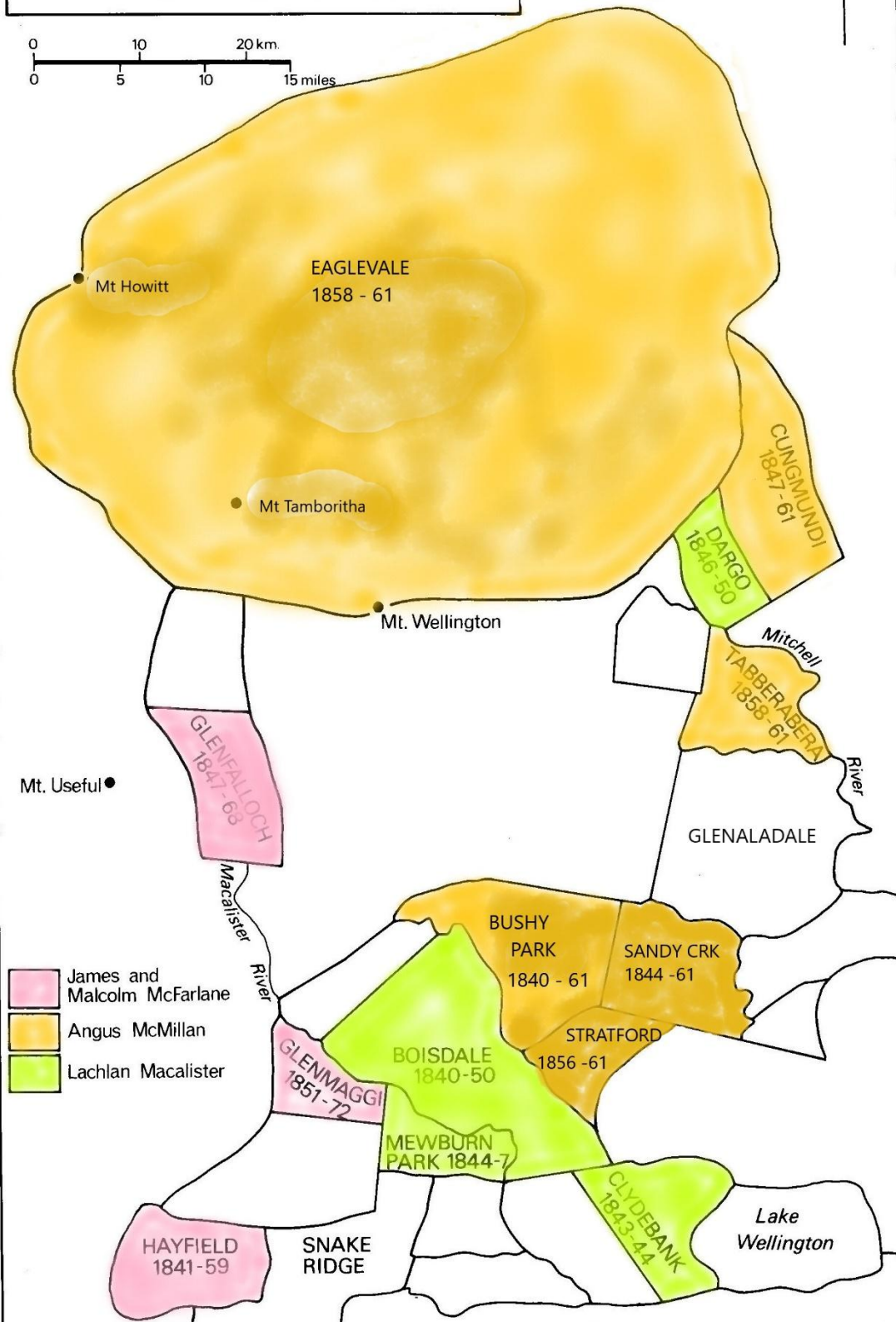
15 Maffra Spectator, 23 November 1928.

SQUATTING RUNS OF McFARLANE, MACALISTER AND McMILLAN IN NORTH GIPPSLAND

● Mt. Feathertop



0 10 20 km.
0 5 10 15 miles



Source: Boundaries of runs from Lands Department, *Map of Runs, Victoria, 1863*; occupancies from Billis and Kenyon (1972).

By the mid-1840s squatting runs extended from Monaro to Gippsland, via Omeo; stations were also established at Buchan by Monaro graziers concurrently with the Gippsland occupations of McMillan and McFarlane.¹⁶ These stations bounded the eastern and southern edges of Victoria's mountain region and provided the bases from which some of the earliest exploratory trips into the heart of the alpine country were made.

At the same time McFarlane was getting started at Omeo, graziers from the Goulburn district of New South Wales were establishing stations between Wodonga and the Kiewa River.¹⁷ However, the real pastoral onslaught began in 1837 when news of Major Mitchell's expedition from Sydney to the basalt plains of western Victoria became known, and with the onset of drought which lasted until the mid-1840s.¹⁸ The push effect of drought and the attractive pull of new lands combined to encourage a flood of graziers to overland towards Port Phillip. The flat open country north and north-west of the mountain region was taken first, and only with the passing of time, when much of the land along Mitchell's route had been occupied, did squatters advance up the valleys leading towards the snow country.¹⁹ In this way north-eastern squatters eventually located themselves at the very foot of the snow country, including at the bases of the Buffalo Plateau, Mt Bogong and Mt Feathertop.

Exploring the Snow country

By the early 1850s Victoria's mountain region was largely encircled by pastoral runs and graziers had begun to penetrate the mountains by following the main water courses and stocking the adjoining grassy river flats. However, because very few personal records remain, it is difficult to say with surety just when and by whom various tracts of snow country were first explored. It is also difficult to determine how thoroughly the mountain region was searched for grass, but what evidence there is suggests that most of the early alpine exploration was conducted by large graziers who held multiple runs in North Gippsland, the Mansfield district, and Omeo.²⁰

Squatters made it their business to know the country surrounding their runs. Angus McMillan was familiar with the mountains of the Avon watershed; he was a very early visitor to Mt. Wellington²¹

16 Wakefield, N A, (1969), "Aspects of Exploration and Settlement of East Gippsland". Proceedings, Royal Society of Victoria, Vol. 82, Part 1.

17 Lands Department, Register of Runs No. 1

18 Roberts, Sir Stephen H., 1968. History of Land Settlement, 1788-1920, McMillan, Australia.

. 1964.— The Squatting Age in Australia, 1835—1847, Melbourne University Press.

19 Robertson, K, 1973, Myrtleford: Gateway to the Alps, Rigby Ltd., Australia.

20 I could find no clear evidence of major exploratory activity into the Victorian Alps from the North East, excepting the Hunter brothers' expeditions, in local tradition, surviving manuscripts or place names. Nor could I find any confirmable basis for the claim in Dick Johnson's popular 1974 publication 'The Alps at the Crossroads' that the Bogong High Plains were visited in 1843 by a John Mitchell. This story is oft repeated, e.g. "The first recorded journey to the Bogong High Plains by a white man was by John Mitchell in 1843, who crossed the Murray River near Thurgoona and made his approach up the valley of the Kiewa River in the company of friendly aborigines." <http://www.bogonghorse.com.au/about-us/the-high-country.html>. It may well be true but I was never able to locate an authoritative source that confirmed it.

21 Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1854-55, Paper No. 18.

and it is likely that he had a similar knowledge of the mountains surrounding his and Macalister's runs on the Dargo River. Similarly, Malcolm McFarlane had a good knowledge of the upper Macalister River country.²² Snow country in the far east, at the heads of the Indi and Buchan Rivers, was known from the earliest days and was traversed by the main track connecting Monaro and Omeo.



Employer, benefactor and persecutor: Angus McMillan had a complex relationship with Aboriginal people. (SLV)

Mountain Tracks and Crossings

Apart from the track between Monaro and Omeo, no useful cross-mountain paths were known to squatters until they were shown the Mitta to Omeo and Omeo to Ovens Valley routes in the early 1850s.

The fires of Black Thursday, 6th February 1851 were indirectly responsible for the first verifiable visit by graziers to the Bogong and Cobungra high plains and the pioneering of the Omeo to Beechworth tracks. George Gray senior's Pelican Lagoon run, near Wangaratta, was burnt out at this time and his family's subsequent search for pasture led them to the Omeo district via Mitta Mitta station. At Mitta Mitta they met an aboriginal man who showed the Gray's over the Gibbo Ranges to Cobungra, where good grass was found. The Gray's were apparently some of the first graziers to travel the route from Mitta to Omeo, which was later used by miners and stockmen on the way to or from Beechworth. The Gray's left two stockmen, James Brown and John Wells, at Cobungra to mind the cattle and these two stockmen are said to have stumbled upon the Bogong and Cobungra high plains while searching for a more direct routes to Beechworth. It is recorded that their finds were made before they had been at Cobungra for three years, that is, prior to March 1854.²³ The routes they identified were from Cobungra to the Bogong High Plains and over Mt. Fainter to the Kiewa Valley, and from Cobungra to Mt. Hotham and across the Razorback, to the Ovens Valley. The latter became the most popular and practical path. Both these routes appear to have been used by indigenous people for thousands of years previously.

²² Local tradition conveyed during interviews

²³ Carr, Stella G. M., 1962. "The Discovery of the Bogong Plains ". Proceedings; Royal Society of Victoria, Vol. 75, pp. 285-289.

In 1841 a successful attempt to reach Gippsland was made by the Hunter brothers who held open Red Gum country in the Mansfield district under the name of Watson and Hunter.²⁴ The Hunters were interested in exploring the new country McMillan had 'discovered' and to this end Alick Hunter took a party overland while John Hunter went by sea to Port Albert.²⁵ Edward Bell described the overland venture in the following terms:

*During 1841 I formed one of a party consisting of Mr Alick Hunter, Mr Archibald Jamieson, an overseer, and a black fellow named Pigeon that started to find a road into Gippsland for stock, ... [the discovery of which] ... had just opened up a field for Port Phillip enterprise. We ascended what we took for a leading range to the south-west of Mt. Buller but found ourselves in a most difficult succession of gullies in which we struggled for 18 days, and eventually camped on the headwaters of the Latrobe. My horse had met with an accident in falling down a steep bank and I remained with Pigeon at our camp on the river, while my companions went on to see what they could of the new country. In three days they returned, having reached a rich plain and fine herbage, I concluded, part of the run afterwards occupied by Mr Reece. On our return we got upon a leading range in right good earnest which in two days took us back to the head of the Goulburn; but the descent was considered too steep for stock and the idea of bringing a herd by that route was abandoned.*²⁶

The idea of finding a more practical route to Gippsland smouldered in the Hunters' minds for some times, the reason being made clear in 1842:

*The only thing that has to be done now is to form a heifer station either in Gippsland or at Port Fairy as this country [around Mansfield] does not fatten cattle nearly so well although it is a capital breeding run.*²⁷

An abortive attempt to reach Gippsland from Mansfield by Crown Lands Commissioner Charles Tyers²⁸ provided the impetus for another attempt by the Hunters in October 1844. In addition to the possibility of finding new pastures and a trafficable cattle route, the Hunters were spurred on by public doubt regarding the authenticity of their previous crossing. This doubt arose from Tyers' dismal failure.²⁹ Their route, similar to that of 1841, took them on to the Howqua-Jamieson divide, south along the Great Dividing Range and down the Macalister River to Malcolm McFarlane's territory.³⁰ A run was subsequently acquired at Tarwin but the mountain route was again written off as unsuitable for cattle.

It is entirely possible that other crossings of the mountain barrier were made in the 1840s and 1850s which are no longer recorded. For example, having established cattle stations towards the

24 Gillison, J., 1974. Colonial Doctor and his Town, Melbourne; The Australasian, 12 September 1923; Hunter Family Papers, 1839-1843 (SLV); Billis & Kenyon, 1932, Pastoral pioneers of Port Phillip.

25 Hunter Family Papers 1839-1843, 10 May 1841; Letter by E. Bell in McBride (1969)

26 McBride, T. F., 1969. Letters from Victorian Pioneers, William Heinemann Ltd., Adelaide.p.288; Daly, (1926), p.157, op cit

27 Hunter Family Papers, 1839-1843, 7 May 1842, Q16, MS 7798, MS 7799 (SLV).

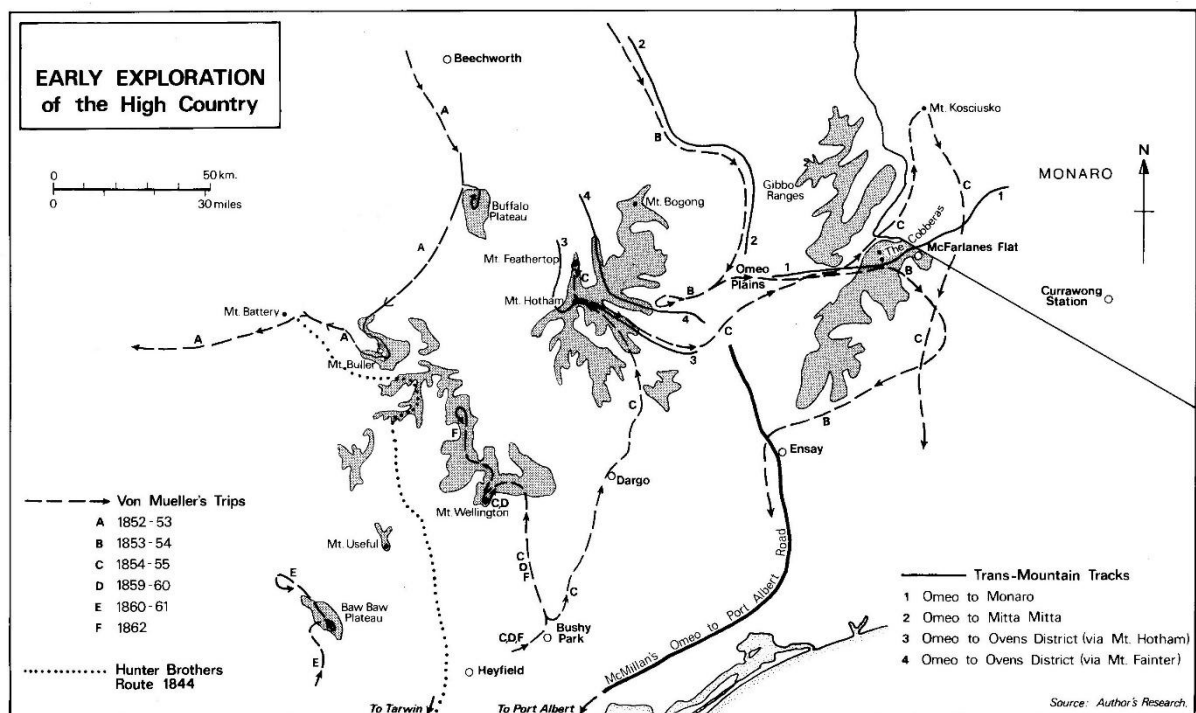
28 Hunter Family Papers, 1839-1843, 26 October 1843, 5 November 1843, Q16, MS 7798, MS 7799 (SLV).

29 Hunter Family Papers, 30 October 1844, quoted in Daly (1926), p.159, op cit

³⁰ Billis & Kenyon, 1932, Pastoral pioneers of Port Phillip, record that Glenfalloch Station was previously known as 'Hunter's country'.

headwaters of the Mitchell River, at Dargo, in the mid-1840's pastoralists would surely have been quick to find connecting routes to Omeo and the North-east.

Early squatting runs sprawled over vast areas and were easy targets for cattle thieves. On occasions it is said that Angus McMillan was forced to pursue thieves into the ranges and exchanged gun shots with them.³¹ While the cattle duffers were reputed to have sold to unsuspecting new settlers within regions, they may also have moved stock across the mountains to other districts, especially after the discovery of gold in the north-east in the early 1850s. The legend of Bogong Jack certainly supports this proposition. Bogong Jack is said to have begun shifting cleanskins and other stock from the upper Dargo River to the Beechworth district between 1857 and 1859.³² The Bogong Jack legend really symbolises an activity that was quite probably widespread; other cattle duffers had their own particular mountain routes between other regions.³³



Records of Ferdinand Mueller, Government Botanist

The journeys of Ferdinand Mueller, Government Botanist, provide a valuable record of the early squatters' penetration of alpine and sub-alpine areas and their knowledge of the snow country.

Mueller was appointed Victoria's Government Botanist by Governor Latrobe in January 1853. He had landed in Australia from Germany five years earlier and spent much of this time familiarizing himself with the flora of South Australia. When he took up his new position, having arrived in Victoria in 1851, his knowledge of the colony was inevitably quite modest, but he sought to rectify this lacuna

31 Cox (1973), p.22; Roberts (1964), op cit

32 Harding, E., 1967. Bogong Jack: The Gentleman Bushranger, South Melbourne, Yandoo

33 For example, there is a story about Richard Bentley and his hide-away on the Nunniong plateau, in Melbourne Walker, Vol.6, 1934.

by embarking on a series of epic journeys of botanical inquiry in the 1850's and early 1860's. During these expeditions Mueller made six sweeps through Victoria's alpine region.³⁴

Mueller's alpine expeditions were only possible in the first instance because he was privy to the very latest geographical knowledge, conveyed to him by staff of the Surveyor General's office – the latest maps of the new colony, and also unconfirmed intelligence constantly being gathered by field surveyors of exciting discoveries by pastoralists who were continually venturing into unknown terrain. Without doubt he was provided with contact details of surveyors posted around the colony who could brief him on local conditions and arrange local guides. The success of his epic journeys was thus predicated on the prior footwork of surveyors, and pioneering pastoralists. This is all just common sense. To embark on any of his botanical expeditions he needed to know where to go; and to successfully complete these journeys in an efficient and timely manner it would have been foolish not to draw on the expertise and indulgences of graziers and stockmen who possessed detailed local knowledge of the remote places of potential botanical interest that he wished to visit.



Ferdinand Mueller

In my opinion Mueller travelled almost nowhere in the mountain region that graziers hadn't previously visited, and on most occasions, he was accompanied by local guides engaged at squatting stations. In fact, it would have been very unwise to have ventured into such remote and uncharted regions without having first secured the assistance of stockmen already familiar with the way ahead. This again is simply common sense. But it needs to be clearly stated because there is a longstanding myth, based on the literal word of Mueller's reports, and a liberal dose of uncritical thinking, of Mueller as a heroic lone explorer.³⁵ Common sense

tells us he must have had a lot of assistance. Yet the myth glosses over this, representing Mueller as some kind of superhero, and in the process ignores the role and achievements of many unsung bush heroes.

In reports of his first three alpine expeditions Mueller did not acknowledge help received, choosing instead to speak only of himself. On two occasions he claimed he travelled particular routes alone. This has been enough to spawn the myth of the lone explorer. However, I think what Mueller meant by 'alone' needs to be understood in the context of his era. In my opinion it probably meant that there were no others of his social and professional standing remaining in the party. But there would surely have been other humans serving him, whether they be personal attendants or guides. In contrast to the silence on such matters evident in his first three reports, the reports of his last three

³⁴ The first three expeditions were long epic journeys and are justifiably celebrated by the botany community. The last three were shorter and less glamorous and have been largely overlooked; they are not mentioned at all in Home, R, 2014, 'Ferdinand Mueller's Alpine Itinerary', *Historical Records of Australian Science*, 2014, 25, 1–17, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1071/HR14003>. However, Linden Gillbank, 'Alpine Botanical Expeditions of Ferdinand Mueller', *Muelleria*, 7(4), 1992, lists the other three, and adds another – a visit in 1863 to the lower ranges which happened to touch Mt Useful.

³⁵ For example, Daly, C, 1924, 'Baron Sir Ferdinand von Mueller, Botanist, Explorer and Geographer' *Victorian Historical Magazine*, x,1, p 23; Johnson, 1974, *The Alps at the Crossroads*; *The Argus* (Melbourne), Sat 17 Sep 1904, Page 19, A BOTANICAL EXPLORER.

alpine expeditions are more instructive. Reporting on his fourth and sixth alpine expeditions Mueller acknowledges the valued assistance provided by squatter Angus McMillan who apparently not only accompanied Mueller but also contributed resources that made the ventures possible – stores, horses and probably also aboriginal guides, the latter of which were the key to McMillan's own success as an explorer. In his report on his fifth alpine expedition no-one was thanked for their assistance, but Mueller did note the presence of five unnamed companions - presumably not attendants or guides.

The first of Mueller's alpine expeditions took place in early 1853, taking in the Buffalo Plateau and Mt. Buller.³⁶ Buffalo was a good place to start as it was the most accessible high mountain area, which rises quite precipitously from the Ovens River valley, and at the time government surveyors were working there, building a survey cairn and compiling land survey data.³⁷

On Mt. Buffalo Mueller was accompanied by John Dallachy, Superintendent of the Melbourne Botanic Gardens, and at least two guides. Attendants were never mentioned in Mueller's reports, except *in absentia*. However, being a direct appointee of the Governor, Mueller was virtual royalty, and it is hard to believe he would have embarked on any taxing expedition without being suitably equipped and staffed.

Of the guides, Home (2014) records that one was government surveyor Edward Barnett. According to a letter written by Mueller to his boss William Lonsdale, Colonial Secretary, once up on the plateau he and Dallachy 'encountered' Barnett who then guided them up to The Horn (the plateau's highest peak). A very strange place to 'encounter' someone, unless it was by prior arrangement.³⁸ I think it should be evident from this that if Mueller and Dallachy met Barnett up on the plateau then they would have needed another guide, probably a surveyor's assistant, to get them up there. It was no easy task to find a practical route for horses up onto the plateau. There may very well have been others assisting with the inspection.³⁹

Barnett's team of surveyors were reportedly the first Europeans to ascend the plateau, in late 1852.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, I have no doubt that stockmen from surrounding stations had already been up there to look around. Some may have taken cattle there for relief grazing in the wake of the shocking bushfires of February 1851, and they almost certainly had guided Barnett's party up the northwest

36 Victorian Parliamentary Papers 1853-1854, Paper A26a, First General Report of the Government Botanist on the Vegetation of the Colony, September, 1853.

37 Ovens & Murray Advertiser, 26/6/1886, p. 4

38 R.W. Home, 'Ferdinand Mueller's Alpine Itinerary', Historical Records of Australian Science, 2014, 25, 1–17, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1071/HR14003>

39 In an interview with high country identity Percy Weston at Porepunkah in 1977 I was told that Thomas Buckland, who licensed the nearby Junction squatting run from 1845-1847, accompanied Muller up to Mt Buffalo. According to Weston, Buckland had a hut on the Buckland River in the early 1850's and retained business interests in the locality. I am unaware of what sources confirm this story. There was a Thomas Buckland who, besides following a celebrated career in banking, also held pastoral runs in NSW and Queensland and was an amateur botanist who is known to have corresponded with Mueller – see Pike, D., (ed.), 1969. Australian Dictionary of Biography, 3, 1851-1890, A — C; 4, 1851-1890, D — J; 5, 1851-1890, K - Q, Melbourne University Press (1969), vol 3. But whether these two Thomas Buckland's are in fact the same person I am unable to say.

40 Ovens and Murray Advertiser (Beechworth), Sat 26 Jun 1886, Page 4, "THE BUFFALO HOSPICE."

approach through Faithful's Buffalo Heifer Station the following year.⁴¹ However, Mueller's official report makes no reference to either.

Mueller wrote that his visit to The Horn, was the first time that peak had been climbed. But this is unlikely to be true since Barnett and his team had been on the plateau for some weeks, taking bearings from the highest points, and building a cairn.

Mueller was not satisfied with the small range of alpine flora at Buffalo, which barely reaches 1500 metres in elevation at its highest point, and so he pushed on to Mt Buller where more satisfactory results were obtained.⁴² According to Mueller's report to Parliament, he travelled on to Mt Buller 'quite alone' when Dallachy returned to Melbourne.⁴³ However, such a notion is hard to accept given the untracked mountainous nature of the country he is said to have crossed – the upper reaches of the King Rivers through to Mt Stirling and Mt Buller – and the very primitive state of official geographical knowledge at the time. I doubt that such a journey would have been possible unless he was guided over the roughest terrain by an experienced and accomplished local bushman.

Indeed, there is evidence that Mueller was either shamelessly lying or at the very least using highly self-centric language when alleging that he travelled 'quite alone' from the Buffalo plateau to Mt Buller. A newspaper report in 1889 records that pioneer stockman Bill Bullock was Mueller's local guide up to Mt Buller.⁴⁴ My guess is that, after leaving Mt Buffalo Mueller went station-hopping – traveling from one squatting homestead to the next down the Ovens River to its junction with the King River, then along the latter upstream until he reached Glenmore and Degamaro stations, which had been established by 1846 in the upper reaches of the King River.⁴⁵ At that point he engaged the services of a capable young stockman, Bill Bullock, to guide him up a long sub-alpine ridge that winds its way to Mt Buller, via Tomahawk, Number 3, The Razorback and Mt Stirling.

What this story tells us, when stripped of Mueller's apparent petty deception, is that snow country at the head of the King River was already known to graziers by early 1853. It was probably quite well known and may have been already used for relief grazing after, or even before, the bushfires of February 1851.

In November 1853 Mueller commenced another botanical expedition:

Desirous to devote the summer months to exploration of the Australian Alps, I chose the Mitta Mitta line for further operations, ascended and crossed the Gibbo Ranges at an elevation of 5,000 ft. [1500 metres] and followed thence again the course of the Mitta Mitta into Omeo...From here I attempted in vain to reach the Bogong Ranges, probably the highest point in this island continent, being compelled to retreat by the extensive bushfires then raging in the intermediate mountains. The summit of this range, covered with eternal snow and glaciers,

⁴¹ Ovens and Murray Advertiser (Beechworth), Sat 26 Jun 1886, Page 4, "THE BUFFALO HOSPICE."

⁴² Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1853-54, Paper A26a, First General Report of the Government Botanist on the Vegetation of the Colony, September, 1853.

⁴³ Victorian Parliamentary Papers 1853-54, Paper A26a, op cit; The Banner, Fri 4 Nov 1853, Page 5, REPORT OF THE GOVERNMENT BOTANIST.

⁴⁴ The Australasian, Sat 9 Feb 1889, Page 15, THE TOURIST.

⁴⁵ Home (2014), op cit, believes Mueller first travelled up the Buffalo River, before crossing the dividing range into the King River catchment. That may be true, but I have not seen the evidence, and that route would certainly have been much more difficult, and would have certainly required the services of a local guide.

can hardly be estimated of less an altitude than 7,000 ft. (2150 metres]. In order to accomplish the examination of alpine flora on the eastern frontiers, I started for the Cobboras mountains ... Not only these mountains, but also the greater part of the interjacent plains or plateaux are of truly alpine or of a sub-alpine nature, ranging in elevation from 5,029 to 6,000 feet [1500-1850 metres] above the level of the ocean. ⁴⁶

The Mitta Mitta line was a native cross-mountain route linking north-east Victoria to the Omeo Plains. An aboriginal stockman had guided George Gray's party and his cattle herd along this route not too long after the bushfires of February 1851 had burnt out his squatting run near present day Wangaratta. That Mueller knew of the Mitta route in 1853 highlights his access to the latest geographical intelligence. His intention was clearly to re-trace the Gray's steps from the Mitta valley to Cobungra and beyond. It seems he had received information that the Bogong Ranges were accessible from Cobungra – he wasn't headed there on a whim – and we know that Gray's stockmen had found two new routes over the mountains to Beechworth before they had been at Cobungra for three years⁴⁷ - ie before the winter of 1854. Presumably they had been making steady progress in the preceding few years.

It is unclear whether Mueller got as far as Cobungra before being forced to turn back. Nevertheless, to salvage something from the trip he followed the well-worn Monaro dray track to access the Cobberas alpine area, which had been known to graziers for 20 years.

In his report on this expedition Mueller gives a clue, if we needed it, that 'alone' didn't technically mean all alone, by noting the absence of an attendant:

..., in consequence of a partial robbery of my travelling equipment ... I am deprived of my attendant, who has been summoned to the Criminal Session ... at Bendigo... ⁴⁸

This tendency to mention annoying absences rather than helpful presences should be kept in mind when reading Mueller's reports. ⁴⁹ We learned from Mueller's trip to Mt Buller that to be 'quite alone' did not preclude the company of a guide. Now we find that attendants were also standard equipment that didn't warrant comment unless they went missing. So, just because he didn't mention such companions doesn't mean they were not there.

The next trip, under way in November 1854, was a truly epic journey – traveling from Melbourne to Gippsland before visiting Mt Wellington, the headwaters of the Mitchell River, up onto the Great Dividing Range near Mt Phipps, along the high mountain ridges to Mt Hotham; then east to Omeo and beyond to the Cobberas mountains (again), the Kosciusko plateau in NSW, the Snowy River and

46 Victorian Parliamentary Papers 1854-55, Paper No. 18, Second General Report of the Government botanist on the Vegetation of the Colony, October, 1854.

47 Stella Carr, 1962. "The Discovery of the Bogong Plains". Proceedings; Royal Society of Victoria, Vol. 75, pp. 285-289.

48 Victorian Parliamentary Papers 1854-55, Paper No. 18, Second General Report of the Government botanist on the Vegetation of the Colony, October, 1854

49 *ibid*; Victorian Parliamentary Papers 1854-55, 1859-60, Paper No. 37. Annual Report of the Government Botanist and Director of the Botanical and Zoological Gardens; 1861-62, Paper No. 105. Annual Report of the Government Botanist and Director of the Botanical Gardens; Victorian Parliamentary Papers 1860-61, Paper No.19, Annual Report of the Government Botanist and Director of the Botanical Gardens.

the back to Melbourne via Gippsland. It is worth quoting Mueller's official report at length as it is very informative.

[Annual Report from the Government Botanist for the year 1854.]

Botanic Gardens, Melbourne, 25th June, 1855.

Sir (The Honorable the Colonial Secretary), — I do myself the honour of transmitting for communication to his Excellency the Governor, my third General Report.

Having received, in October, 1854 His Excellency's sanction for a more extensive phytologic exploration of the 'Australian Alps, I left for Gipps' Land on the 1st of November, 1854.

... Proceeding along the ranges of the Avon, which are generally barren, scrubby, and in many places densely timbered, I ascended Mount Wellington, the most southern summit of the Australian Alps, on the 22nd November, 1854, from whence I added some highly interesting plants to our botanical collections. At the elevation of about 4000 feet above the sea level, or at a subalpine altitude, a striking change is perceptible in the vegetation, since the valleys and plateaus, stretching from Mount Wellington to the north, and more or less westerly and easterly, are well saturated with moisture, both from the attraction of clouds, and from the dissolving snow, which, lying there for many months in the year, has given to these localities the appellation of 'The Snowy Plains.'

The route thus followed is the most practicable for penetrating from this part of Gipps' Land into the central mountains of the Alps, although an easier access yet may be found to them from Omeo, by following the generally grassy ranges to the westward from a few miles above the junction of the Livingstone River with the Mitta Mitta.

*Proceeding on a second journey along the Dargo, which flows through some luxuriantly grassed recesses of the mountains, I advanced through a difficult country to the Bogong Range, the culminating point of the westerly systems of the Snowy Mountains; a dense scrub, and the total absence of water on the crest of the Wentworth Ranges, rendering the progress tedious, until I reached the Dividing Range towards the sources of the Cabongra, where again the feature of the country changes on the northern slopes of the mountains, or along the sources of the Murray tributaries. **Here open valleys give access to the central ranges in almost every direction, and a profusion of grass and water attracts cattle during the summer months far into these mountains.** The low scrubby underwood disappears with stringy bark, and box, eucalypti, and the dwarf forests of mountain gum trees, which replace them, may either be avoided or offer but little obstruction to the progress of a traveller.*

According to a special report, which I had the honour of transmitting to the Government, dated Omeo, 16th December, 1854, I succeeded in reaching not only two of the main sources of the Mitta Mitta, but also the two most elevated heights of the Bogong Range; these perhaps not even previously trodden by the aborigines, since game and brushwood cease far below the summits. The two highest mountains, which I had the honor, by his Excellency's sanction, to distinguish as Mount Hotham and Mount La Trobe, are along the terminal ravines covered with eternal snow. It will be unnecessary to repeat here the respective bearings which I took from these all commanding heights, since they are detailed in my special report; but it remains for me to confirm my computation with regard to their altitude. My calculations, based on the boiling water point, proved, after my return, that the summits of the Bogong Range are unsurpassed by any other known of this continent, approaching to the altitude of 10,000 feet above the level of the ocean. A depressed Glacier Flora, imitating in some degree the botanical features of the European and other Alps, covers scantily the icy tops. ...

From Omeo I resumed my journey into the north-easterly systems of our Alps, through a delightful subalpine country, opening into wide valleys at the main sources of the Snowy River, many of these valleys well adapted and partially used for summer pastures. I ascended the most northern alpine hill of the Munyang Mountains on the 1st of January, 1855, and traversed in the weeks subsequent most of the principal elevations of these prodigious mountains, adding also there again not inconsiderably to our herbarium. Here in very many places the waters of the Murray and the Snowy River are rising in the closest proximity.

Descending, in the latter part of January, along the Snowy River to the lower country, I advanced as far easterly through the coastal tract as the boggy nature of the country permitted, and I devoted my attention here again to the Flora of the Palm Tree Country to improve my knowledge of the interesting plants discovered here previously in a more advanced season.

But the full botanical investigation of the south-eastern portion of this colony, which, under the mildest climate, abounds in sub-tropical plants, can only be accomplished from the New South Wales frontier.

*Returning from the Snowy River, I deemed it more promising to prosecute my operations on the coast, along which I proceeded to Lake King. Here I observed, amongst other rare and unknown plants, some fine trees of *Acronychia*, a genus known from Eastern Australia and New Caledonia, remarkable for its splendid wood and the aromatic property by which the species are pervaded.*

A most severe illness frustrated my intention of ascending Mount Baw Baw, a wild, rocky, isolated summit at the south-western slope of the Australian Alps, hitherto unexplored, and perhaps the only locality from which additions may be expected of importance to our knowledge of the Alpine Flora.

Reflecting on the general results of this journey, I trust to be justified in considering them not without some importance, at least for the geography of plants. The expedition was planned more with a view of ascertaining the alliance between the vegetation of the Alps of Australia and plants of other countries than with anticipations of largely enriching thereby the number of plants already under notice. Still, by referring to the enumeration annexed to this document, and to my former annual reports, it will be observed, that the total amount of either truly alpine, or at least subalpine plants of this country, exceeds 100 species, and it is pleasant to perceive that half of these are endemic, or not yet elsewhere discovered; whilst by far the greater part of the other half comprises such as inhabit Tasmania, or are likewise natives of New Zealand. A much smaller proportion is identical with plants found exclusively in New Zealand, or Lord Auckland's Group, or Campbell Island.

*I have the honor to be, Sir, Your most obedient and humble servant,
FERDINAND MUELLER, Government Botanist.⁵⁰*

The first half of this expedition had the metaphorical fingerprints of squatter Angus McMillan all over it. Firstly, the attempt to reach Mt Wellington, which is immediately north of McMillan's homestead at Bushy Park, near present day Stratford, and then the onward journey to Dargo where McMillan also had squatting runs. Mueller's gratitude for McMillan's great assistance, though not revealed in his reports to Parliament or the Colonial Secretary on this expedition, nevertheless can

be deduced from a later report.⁵¹ Mueller visited Bushy Park and Mt Wellington on a further two occasions.

It is probable that McMillan, or one of his stockmen, accompanied Mueller as far as Dargo, where McMillan's Cuagmunji pastoral run was located. There would certainly have been regular movements of staff and livestock between Cuagmunjie and Bushy Park. But from there, for the journey up the ridge separating the Dargo and Wentworth river valleys, onto the Great Dividing Range and then through to Mt Hotham and Mt Feathertop Mueller must have had a local guide. It would have been not only inefficient but dangerous and even suicidal to have attempted a traverse of such rough, remote, poorly known and unmapped country without expert assistance. But all we hear in his official reports is his belief that the ranges in the vicinity of Mt Hotham and Mt Feathertop had 'never before have been traversed by civilised men'; and that he was '*the first man who ever reached these commanding summits of the Australian highlands*'.⁵² How he could have known that is beyond me. Stockmen based at Dargo and Omeo had been probing the mountain region for at least a decade. But no doubt he was the first amongst the governing elite to have visited this remote region.

Of particular interest for our purposes is Mueller's observation of cattle in the snow country near the Great Dividing Range west of Cobungra – see first red highlighted text in above quote. We know that Cobungra was licensed as a pastoral run in the name of George Gray snr in September 1851. However, Cobungra was a large run, and the Gray's brought with them only a few hundred head of cattle⁵³ and I doubt that their herd would have had the time or opportunity to have habituated themselves to the snow country at the very western end of the run by late 1854 when Mueller passed through. So Mueller's observation leads me to suspect that the Cobungra area was already stocked with cattle before Gray's arrival, in the 1840's, and probably cattle were finding their way into the subalpine zone by the late 1840's. Cobungra is so close to the Omeo plains that it seems unlikely that graziers from Omeo would have missed the opportunity to use such excellent cattle country.⁵⁴

Mueller also noted that the 'delightful' sub-alpine plains towards the sources of the Snowy River were partially used for summer grazing. Presumably he was talking here of the Cobberas locality and the southern end of the Kosciusko plateau which had been well known to graziers since the late 1830's. In contrast, his unfulfilled desire to visit the Baw Baw plateau reflected, in my opinion, his inability to find anyone to take him up there⁵⁵ – as far as I am aware graziers did not penetrate this locality till the early 1860's.

Mueller's final three alpine expeditions were much shorter and less glamorous than his first three, and apparently not well funded by his employer. In the summer of 1858-59 he ventured to Mt Wellington again, relying heavily on resourcing from Angus McMillan. McMillan had just secured the

⁵¹ In his report on his sixth and final alpine expedition Mueller acknowledges McMillan's assistance 'on this and previous occasions' (plural) – the other times being trip 4, and evidently trip 3.

⁵² Victorian Parliamentary Papers 1854-55, Paper No. 45, Government Botanist: Report of his Journey to Omeo. The Argus, Sat 3 Feb 1855, Page 6, COUNCIL PAPER

⁵³ John R Grenville, "Cobungra Station" in Voice of the Mountains, No. 9, 1986, pp 3 - 31

⁵⁴ The answer will lie somewhere in the NSW state archives, as squatting tenancies in the Port Phillip district were administered from Sydney till the early 1850's

⁵⁵ Mueller cites illness as the reason for not visiting Baw Baw. That might be true, but given his practice of not mentioning guides I suspect 'illness' was code for 'no guide'.

license for his gigantic Eaglevale pastoral run, which included most of the Snowy Range north of Mt Wellington.

A few weeks of the previous summer were devoted by the Government botanist to researches into the vegetation of the mountains along the McAllister river. The tributaries of the latter stream were found on that occasion to traverse a country of rather extensive fertility and, to judge by its physical aspect, of auriferous formation. Some botanical novelties, enumerated in the appendix, were discovered and secured for the herbarium. In this journey, the main range of the South Western Alps was ascertained to extend in an almost semi-elliptical line from Mount Wellington to mount Useful, at an elevation varying from 4000 to 5000 feet, only the northern part of this mountain tract, encircling the sources of the McAllister, being more depressed and somewhat broken. From several high mountains, then ascended for the first time, bearings were secured to elevations included in the trigonometrical survey. From the more elevated western portion of these mountains, now designated on the chart as the Barkly Ranges, a leading spur will in all probability be found to extend to the hitherto unapproached alpine elevations of Mount Baw Baw. This question which I left during my first visit unsolved I am anxious to set at rest during the next season.

Mt. Wellington, inasmuch as it can be reached by a path accessible to horses from the Avon Ranges, may be regarded as the southern key of the Australian Alps, from where along the crest of the main range ... a journey with horses seems possible in most directions.

Otherwise, the dense underwood of the less lofty ranges, stretching between the alpine tract and the low land, frustrates any attempt to traverse the country between the Yarra sources and Gipps Land without cutting previously tracts through the jungle, whereas the main range, at elevations exceeding 4000 feet, is usually destitute of these impediments. It is my duty to bear, on this occasion, public acknowledgment to the generous aid which in performing this journey I experienced from Angus McMillan, 'Esq, M.L.A., the discoverer of Gipps Land, who not only provided six horses and almost all other requisites for this excursion, but also facilitated it, whilst sharing in it, by his intimate knowledge of the surrounding country.

The botanical examination of Victoria, although now for the greater part completed, has yet to be extended to the country towards Lake Hindmarsh, to Mount Baw Baw, and to the most eastern part of the colony about Cape Howe.⁵⁶

This trip doesn't contribute much to our knowledge of grazing history, but is further evidence of Mueller's reliance on pastoralists, and is significant in that it is the first time he acknowledges McMillan's support. When the paths of Mueller's expeditions are re-examined, the Avon country where McMillan's home was located acquires special significance. Of his six alpine trips, three involved visits to the above area and attempts to reach Mt. Wellington.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Victorian Parliamentary Papers 1859-60, Paper No. 37, Annual Report of the Government Botanist and Director of the Botanical and Zoological Gardens.

⁵⁷ In fact, I suspect that part of the reason Mueller so frequently visited Angus McMillan at Bushy Park station in North Gippsland, was the availability of aboriginal guides who had expert knowledge of the mountains. McMillan himself rarely if ever went on exploratory journeys without them, and with government support he was providing welfare services for displaced aboriginals on his station. Looking at the route taken on his third alpine expedition it is almost inconceivable that Mueller could have undertaken such a journey without one or more guides.

Mueller finally achieved his longstanding goal of visiting the Baw Baw plateau in the summer of 1859-60. His account of the visit is particularly revealing of his *modus operandi*. After consulting gold miners at Good Hope Creek and unsuccessfully soliciting their company, he proceeded with five unnamed companions to examine the plateau and the sources of the Yarra River.⁵⁸

In our progress over the ranges between the lowlands to the south and the plateau which are chiefly timbered with stringybark trees and a species of White Gum tree, we encountered much impediment by the density of scrub, the tough branched Corraea ferruginea being particularly destructive to our march, until in gradual advance to the higher regions the underwood of the lower mountains recedes before the colder temperature, it being universally observed in our Alps that at elevations above 4,000 feet [1200 metres] the dense scrub chiefly on the sea side slopes of our ranges vanish or greatly diminish.

*After having descended into the main valley of the Upper Tangil, a beautiful mountain torrent, which rolls its waters with impetuosity over the granite boulders of its bed, a total change in the physiognomy of the vegetation was observed; whilst ascending the main range of Mt. Baw Baw, the stringybark trees were found replaced by delightful beech forests which surround the main mountains on all sides and are interspersed with highland White Gum trees and Cider trees (*E. gunnii*) under the shade of which certain ferns ... predominate. Nothing can surpass the contrast in the landscape when we emerge from the dreary scrub to the shady forest of the evergreen beeches ... which in dwarfish form ascend even to the alpine summits of this range.*

*We established our camp on the summit of the eastern highest mountain of the Baw Baw range on 25th December and whilst reconnoitring the country around during the subsequent days, found this alpine range to extend about nine miles westerly rising to three principal summits ... Granite was the rock everywhere observable. Wild cattle, to be found in many parts of the Alps have as yet not found their way to these valleys.*⁵⁹

In my view this is the only area of snow country that Mueller visited probably without the assistance of graziers. However, we can't be sure unless and until we identify all his companions – but my guess is he wouldn't have found the need to invite local miners to join the party if he had already engaged the services of a stockman who was familiar with the terrain. John Russell from Walhalla was one member of the party.⁶⁰ He had a mining background but had not previously ventured onto the plateau. Other members of the party remain unknown.

The observed absence of wild cattle on the plateau, supports the view that graziers may not yet have been active in the area.

Mueller's final alpine expedition entailed a further investigation of the Snowy Range north from Mt. Wellington

58 Victorian Parliamentary Papers 1860-61, Paper No.19, Annual Report of the Government Botanist and Director of the Botanical Gardens; Daly (1924), op cit.

59 Victorian Parliamentary Papers 1860-61, Paper No.19, Annual Report of the Government Botanist and Director of the Botanical Gardens.

⁶⁰ The Argus (Melbourne), Wed 25 Nov 1903, Page 7, PERSONAL

*During a journey into the south-western chains of the Australian Alps which was undertaken in March last, I have had an opportunity of examining more closely the autumn vegetation of those tracts of our snowy mountains stretching from Mt. Wellington to the sources of the Macalister River, and in the direction of Mt Buller. Although suffering much from the inclemency of the weather, I was enabled to fix approximately the position of several of the most prominent mountains interjacent to the Barkly and Buller ranges and found also from the beautiful and fertile alpine tableland at the north-east sources of the Macalister a gentle descent into the valley of that river, along which again an easy path is open into the plains of Gippsland. In the performance of this journey I experienced, as on former occasions, the most generous support from Angus McMillan, Esq., of Bushy Park, Gippsland.*⁶¹

This report again contributes little to our understanding of grazing history, but a local newspaper adds some texture not usually evident in Mueller's reports (1), and a cheeky memoir (2) published after his death in 1896 portrays a more relatable image of the man which contrasts sharply the persona of the superhero:

- (1) *Mount Wellington. — Dr Mueller has lately paid a visit to this district, and made researches in the neighbourhood of Mount Wellington. The doctor informs us that though not so successful as he expected to be, in finding botanical specimens, he has succeeded in determining the height and position of the various mountains in the locality in question, and ascertaining exactly various other geographical features of the country, which will be of great value to the colony. Dr Mueller speaks in terms of great eulogy of the generous interest and support which Mr Angus McMillan has always accorded to scientific men who have visited this district. In this instance, the Doctor declares that he would have been unable to proceed, had it not been for Mr. McMillan's kindness. We hope soon to be in a position to give the detailed results of Dr Mueller's labours.*⁶²
- (2) *There is not a portion of the colony that [Mueller] has not been over, and many a rocky fastness in the mountain regions has been sought out by this adventurer in search of scientific knowledge. A good story is told of one of his visits to the Gippsland Mount Wellington. He accompanied a survey party to that locality in order to inspect the flora. One day the others all went away from camp and left the old botanist in charge, with strict injunctions to have dinner cooked when they returned. Everything was placed to hand and the cooking was proceeded with. Presently, however, his botanical instincts rose above the level of culinary art, and he unconsciously wandered away from the camp. Sometime afterwards the other members of the party returned in a half-famished condition, ready to do justice to the meal which they believed was ready, but what was their disgust on seeing the food shrivelled to a cinder, and finding the water in the "billy" had boiled away. A search was made for the erring cook, and he was discovered in a quiet nook carefully examining some plant which had come under his notice. He was absolved thenceforth from doing any more cooking during the trip.*⁶³

⁶¹ Victorian Parliamentary Papers 1861-62, Paper No. 105, Annual Report of the Government Botanist and Director of the Botanical Gardens.

⁶² The Herald (Melbourne), Mon 8 Apr 1861, Page 6, THE CAVALRY CORPS

⁶³ The Maffra Spectator, Thu 22 Oct 1896, Page 3, SCRAPS AND GLEANINGS. It is unclear which visit to Mt Wellington this article is referencing. Was it one of the three visits he made with McMillan (my guess is that it was his third visit)? Or perhaps a later otherwise unrecorded visit, sometime after McMillan's death?

Ferdinand Mueller was a man of unusual talent, drive and ambition. His journeys of botanical discovery are legendary, and his body of work quite remarkable. The records of his six alpine expeditions – annual reports to Parliament, letters to the Colonial Secretary (his boss), and newspaper reports – when interpreted with a good dose of common sense and an understanding of his highly self-centric writing style, enable us to track the penetration of the alpine region by graziers at the time of the expeditions.

In planning his expeditions, Mueller had access to the latest geographical knowledge being compiled at the Surveyor Generals office – the most recent maps of the colony, and the latest intelligence regarding areas recently explored by graziers and gold miners. In the field he made the most of his contacts in the pastoral and mining communities who provided directions, expert local guides and even supplies, and wherever possible he joined government surveyors journeying to areas of mutual interest.

What we have learned is that, with the possible exception of the Baw Baw plateau, everywhere he went had already been explored by graziers. Moreover, many alpine and subalpine areas he visited in the ten years from 1853 already showed signs of cattle grazing, particularly the headwaters of the Murray and Snowy rivers adjacent to the Omeo – Monaro dray track and the eastern slopes of the Great Dividing Range adjoining Cobungra Station; probably the upper reaches of the King River; possibly Mt Wellington; but probably not the northern end of the Snowy Range or the Baw Baw plateau.

Mueller's alpine expeditions tell us nothing about the Bogong High Plains, the Dargo High Plains, or the

Nunniong plateau as he did not visit these places.



**Surveyors
cairn at Mt
Wellington,
pictured in
1915.⁶⁴**

Mueller
made three
visits to Mt
Wellington.

⁶⁴ Melbourne Museum, Photographic Negative MM 7817, of Ministerial visit to Snowy Range, 1915

The Beginning of Regular Grazing in the Snow Country

Though squatters were apparently quick to explore the snow country for grazing opportunities, they were not so keen to use it on a regular basis while good low country was still available. The harsh alpine climate, particularly ever-present dangers of snowstorms, and the strict seasonality of grazing were sufficient deterrents. An example, while not drawn from Victorian experience, serves well to illustrate this point. It concerns the first grazing of the Kiandra Plain, Snowy Mountains, New South Wales.

*About the year 1839 Dr Gibson of Goulburn, N.S.W. visited the country and being struck with the extreme beauty of the plain and extent of pasture, sent men up to erect a stockyard, taking with them a quantity of cattle. By the time they had finished the stockyard the winter set in and many of the cattle perished. In consequence the station was abandoned.*⁶⁵

Until the mid-1850's grazing in the snow country was restricted to areas adjacent to the Omeo – Monaro track; areas that were easily accessible to wandering stock (the Great Dividing Range on the western margins of Cobungra station); and possibly the Buffalo plateau and King River headwaters immediately after the 1851 bushfires. This is what we have gleaned from analysing Ferdinand Mueller's alpine expeditions.

In the following fifteen years, from the mid 1850's, this somewhat casual and incidental pattern of use gave way to a far more purposeful and intensive regimen. The earliest pastoralists believed to regularly graze livestock in the snow country included a small band of bona fide locals, well experienced in reading the moods of the mountains. The numbers of livestock put into the snow country in this early period by these locals were very small, if the annual stock assessment declarations are any guide at all.⁶⁶ The declarations don't tell us how many animals were grazed in the snow country as such – but rather the number of livestock held on licensed pastoral stations, some of which encompassed snow country and others which didn't but their proprietors are believed to have stocked nearby mountain ranges.

Table 1.1 - Stocking Numbers for Selected Runs as Shown in the Annual Stock Assessment

Pastoral run	1854	1856	1857	1858	1859	1860	1861	1862
Suggan Buggan	700			103	97	150	40	72
Cobungra		500	540	153	783	200	150	150
Bundaramungie					58 17 horses	150 30 h	150	0
Darbalary								0

⁶⁵ Gippsland Guardian, 9 March 1860; Wilson (1968) indicates that this date is more likely to be 1834-35

⁶⁶ The Stock Assessment was an annual report of the maximum number of livestock grazing on each pastoral run in January / February every year in the 1850's and early 1860's. It was prepared by station owners, submitted to the colonial government and published in the Government Gazette magazine. The data was used to calculate a tax payable by each run holder. Being prepared for tax purposes we can expect that the numbers reported might be routinely understated, but as the returns were published and thus open to public scrutiny, massive systemic fraud seems unlikely and I think the Stock Assessment is a reasonable indicator of the scale and stability of each pastoral operation.

Mt Wellington						0	1200 shp	
Glenfalloch	6000 sheep	6420 sheep	5490 sheep	4676 shp 59	4845 shp 104	1770 shp 300	2530 shp 270	2500 shp 430
Tawonga			309 110 h	330 125 h	293 127 h	360 175 h	440 202 h	460 219 h
Tom Groggin					45	250	588	580
Eaglevale					0	0	0	?

“ “ = cattle; h = horses; shp = sheep

From these figures we can conclude the maximum numbers that could potentially be put into the snow country by the local operators were very small. However, their pioneering efforts quickly paved the way for a handful of very large non-local pastoral enterprises which routinely moved large numbers of sheep and cattle over long distances. Refer to the following table. Local operations are colour-coded green, the large operators from outside the region are coloured red, and the grey indicates persons believed to have secured licenses on behalf of the controversial squatting colossus Hugh Glass. Absence of shading indicates no further information.

Table 1.2
Snow Country Graziers - Pre-1870

Snow country Grazed	Snow Country Run	Name	District of Residence	Period of Occupation
Great Dividing Range	Cobungra	George Gray snr & jnr	Cobungra	1851-1859
		James Parslow & John Meigan	Cobungra	1859 -1868
	Cobungra West	James Parslow	Cobungra	1868 - 1884
Cobungra High Plains	Darbalary	William Degraives	Melbourne	1858
		John Meighan & Geo Gray jnr	Cobungra	1859 - 1861
		John Henry Clough & Co	Melbourne	1861 – 1867.12
		Melbourne Banking Corp #		1868 - 1870
Bogong High Plains	Tawonga	Charles Ibbotson	Geelong	1854 – 1882
	Bundaramungie	Fredrk John Cobb Wildash	Wangaratta	1857.03 – 1857.10
		Edward Gray	Cobungra	1857.10 -1862
		Fred Dallimore	Melbourne	1862
		J H Clough & Co	Melbourne	1862 – 1867.12
		Melbourne Banking Corp #		1868 - 1870
		John Higgins	Omeo	1870 -1879

Mt Bogong	Bogong High Plain	Pierce Jones Williams	Melbourne	1866 - 1867
		Malcolm McKenzie	Ensay station	1875 - 1878
	Highlands or Bogong	Thomas Hamilton & John R Horn	?	1859
Mt Feathertop	Gould's Run	Robert Gould	Bright	1864 - 1870
Dargo High Plains	Eaglevale 1	Angus McMillan	Stratford	1858 - 1861
		William Kaye & James Butchart	Melbourne	1861-1865
	Dargo High Plain	Pierce Jones Williams	Ballarat	1866 - 1867
		John Ettershank	Ballarat	1867 - 1868
		William Gray Baillie	Melbourne	1869
		William Plummer	Warrnambool	1869 - 1870
		W & H Sweetapple & W F Gibb	Gippsland	1870 - 1872
	Beechers Hill	Simon Fraser		1866 - 1867
		Constantine Shiras Holme	Eaglevale	1869 - 1872
Snowy Range:				
-Bennison Plains	Mt Wellington	Richard Bennison	Gippsland	1861-1869
	Eaglevale 1	William Kaye & James Butchart	Melbourne	1861-1865
	Eaglevale 2	James Butchart	Melbourne	1865 - 1869
- Mt Wellington		C S Holme	Eaglevale	1869 - 1885
	Mt. Wellington	Malcolm McFarlane	Glenfalloch station, near Licola	1855?-1868
- Bryce & Howitt Plains	Wonnangatta	Walter Nelson Duke	?	1866 - 1867
		Hugh Nixon	Beechworth	1869 - 1869
		William Bryce	Wonnangatta	1870 - 1885
Baw Baw Plateau	Mt Baw Baw	Thomas Hamilton	?	1862 - 1864
Snowy-Indi Divide	Suggan Buggan	Edward O'Rourke snr	Suggan Buggan	1858- onwards
	Ingeegoodbee	Desailly brothers	NSW Riverina	1866.01 - 1869
	Nunniong Plateau	Richard Simpson	Omeo /Bindi	Early 1860's
	Limestone Creek	David Jones	?	1858 - 1860
		James Pendergast	Omeo	1862 - 1887

Tom Groggin / Davies Plain	James McFarlane	Omeo	1858 - 1859
	William Glen Walker & Co	Sydney	1860 - 1872

probably Cloughs financier

Source: Government Gazettes, Pastoral run files, local tradition via interviews

It is no surprise at all that the largest and best expanses of snow country were secured by some of the richest men in the colony. Charles Ibbotson managed the famous Dalgety stock and station agency in Geelong; his Tawonga station encompassed about one quarter of the Bogong High Plains. John Henry Clough & Co. were a well-known firm of wool brokers;⁶⁷ they not only secured another quarter of the Bogong High Plains via the Bundaramungie pastoral license, but also acquired the entire Cobungra High Plains by licensing the Darbalary run. In 1865 J H Clough & Co were the licensees of nine other squatting runs, mostly situated in western Victoria. The firm of Kaye & Butchart were also prominent stock and station agents. In 1862 they held 22 pastoral runs in their name across Victoria, including the enormous Eaglevale run which is of most interest to us as it encompassed the whole of the Dargo High Plains and most of the Snowy Range.

The business of stock & station agents was to assist pastoral stations with buying and selling of property, livestock and produce. That could include advancing credit for working capital. In particular, wool brokers commonly advanced money to finance shearing and transport of wool clips to their warehouses. However, on occasions where clients were unable to repay these loans, agents and brokers could take possession of their client's assets, and this is usually how they accumulated properties and livestock in their name. Although running stations wasn't really their core business they would inevitably have to own and manage some properties that were in default at least until they could be sold, which might take some years. That is how Kaye & Butchart accumulated their large portfolio of pastoral stations; six of these stations were acquired in 1861 when one client, Angus McMillan, failed to meet his repayment obligations.

Of the other wealthy commercial operators, William Degraives had diverse business interests including flour milling, and was renowned as a livestock breeder and station owner.⁶⁸ His involvement in the snow country seems to have been fleeting, occupying the Darbalary run for probably only one season (1858/59). In contrast the firm William Walker & Co, also general merchants, with particular interests in shipping and pastoral stations,⁶⁹ purchased James McFarlane's chain of stations in 1860. Amongst those holdings was Tom Groggin station, on the River Murray at the foot of the Snowy Mountains, which they held for 10 years. Part of its hinterland was a long sub-alpine ridge which included Davies high plain and gave relatively easy access to the nearby Omeo plains.

In a much bigger league were the Desailly brothers who in 1865 apparently had forty sheep stations, many in the Riverina and Monaro districts of southern NSW.⁷⁰ In early 1866 they secured, via their younger brother Edwin, the license for the Ingeegoodbee snow country run, along the NSW – Victorian border, and held it throughout the drought years of the mid to late 1860's. At that same

⁶⁷ Geelong Advertiser, Wed 16 Mar 1904, Page 2, PERSONAL.

⁶⁸ <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/degroves-william-3388>

⁶⁹ <https://colonialgivers.com/2016/05/21/thomas-walker-1804-1886-businessman-banker-and-philanthropist/>

⁷⁰ Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volume 4, (MUP), 1972

time, and for much the same reasons Hugh Glass (25 Victorian stations in his name in 1865⁷¹ and goodness knows how many held in the names of other people) is believed to have used intermediaries to gain control of the whole of the Dargo High Plains from 1866 to 1872, and also access the Bogong High Plains in the summer of 1866/67. I will go into the detail of how that was arranged shortly.

These very large operators had the capacity to bring substantial flocks and herds into the snow country, and there were three particular circumstances in which they were likely to do so:

- 1/ where livestock could be purchased cheaply outside the region at spring time and then moved to the snow country for summer, before being sold for a handsome profit in autumn;
- 2/ where livestock needed to be moved away from their home stations for summer or drought relief grazing;
- 3/ where livestock were being moved long distances to market and needed to be spelled over the hot summer months.

Although there is little direct evidence of how the snow country was stocked in this period, it is safe to assume that the presence of the large operators was quite imposing. And some conclusions can be drawn from the circumstances of each operator.

Charles Ibbotson's Tawonga station was a cattle run. Stock Assessment data (Table 1.1) indicate a large and growing herd which had increased to over 700 head by 1862. Archival records show that Tawonga had 200 head on the Bogong High Plains in the summer of 1883/4. That is probably the upper limit of what would have been likely in the 1860's from Tawonga's own herd. However, the Bogong High Plains had the capacity to carry thousands of head of cattle in the summer season, and as a stock and station agent Ibbotson was ideally placed for resting travelling stock, or to bring in large quantities of sheep and cattle from other regions for commercial agistment, or for parking speculative purchases. As a highly successful businessman it's hard to imagine he wasn't alert to this opportunity. All the more so for Clough & Co. The two snow country runs they acquired were only recently established with virtually no standing herd, and in any case had relatively little winter country compared to the vast expanses of snow plains and sub-alpine woodlands encompassed within the runs. So it seems clear that agistment, and speculative buying and selling, and resting travelling stock were their main business objectives, and being wool brokers their field of expertise was obviously sheep.

It seems likely that William Kaye & James Butchart applied the same operational rationale. When they took control of Angus McMillan's pastoral stations in 1861, the gigantic Eaglevale snow country run was not, and apparently had not been stocked. Angus McMillan first licensed Eaglevale in 1858, and although he didn't stock the run with a standing herd it seems unlikely that he sat on his hands paying the annual rent but never using it. What I think happened was that he requested his stock & station agents to rent out the Dargo High Plains to third parties, probably starting in the summer of 1858/59. When McMillan defaulted on his debts Kaye & Butchart simply kept the arrangement going.

Now we come to the interesting story of Hugh Glass and his snow country venture.

⁷¹ Victorian Government Gazette, 1865 pp 1261 - 1268

Hugh Glass was a squatter who accumulated an extraordinarily large number of pastoral stations across northern & western Victoria, and southern NSW – 40 or more at his peak in the early 1860's.⁷² But he had none in his name anywhere near the mountain region of Victoria. Glass was famous not only for his wealth and business acumen, but also for his opposition to government land sale and settlement policies which aimed to take land out of the hands of squatters. To this end he established a covert association to buy influence amongst parliamentarians who were framing the land laws, and he actively gamed the system to gain freehold title to as much land as possible.⁷³ He was certainly no friend of the government, the Lands Department or the common man who wanted land to cultivate.⁷⁴ In 1869 he was sanctioned by a Parliamentary inquiry for corrupt activities and spent a brief time in jail.⁷⁵ The same year his business empire collapsed and was placed into the hands of a trust. He died in 1871.



Hugh Glass

During 1977 and 1978 I was conducting interviews with snow country graziers. One very credible informant told me that at one time Hugh Glass had sheep on the Dargo High Plains.⁷⁶ I could not find any evidence to confirm that story in the Lands Department tenure archives. Instead, what I did find was a strange list of people, registered as licensees of the Dargo High Plains and other nearby snow country runs, who otherwise had no apparent association with the snow country nor indeed the mountain region. These names are indicated by grey shading in Table 1.2.

These names originally had me stumped – I didn't know who they were or why they had such apparently transitory interests in the snow country. At first I thought they may have been agents buying

grazing rights on behalf of someone else, or individuals buying and selling pastoral licenses much like the way shares or other financial instruments are often bought and sold – with the hope of a windfall gain. However, there was a bigger and more complex picture which I finally stumbled upon.

My window into this other world was a Parliamentary Paper⁷⁷ detailing an accidental misrepresentation of a squatting run named Curyo, in the Wimmera region of western Victoria, which was advertised for tender by the Lands Department in 1861, and purchased by Pierce Jones

⁷² Leader (Melbourne), Sat 13 Sep 1862, Page 1, MR HUGH GLASS.

⁷³ <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/glass-hugh-3620>; The Argus (Melbourne), Tue 16 May 1871, Page 7, MR. HUGH GLASS; The Age (Melbourne), Tue 13 Jan 1863, Page 7, MR HUGH GLASS AND THE SURVEYOR-GENERAL.

⁷⁴ Bendigo Advertiser, Thu 5 Feb 1863, Page 1, THE DOINGS OF MR. HUGH GLASS ON THE LODDON.

⁷⁵ Illustrated Australian News for Home Readers (Melbourne), Sat 22 May 1869, Page 107, MR. HUGH GLASS AT THE BAR OF THE ASSEMBLY; <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/glass-hugh-3620>

⁷⁶ Appendix F, Interview with Jim Treasure

⁷⁷ Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1866, (2nd Session), p 689, paper D no. 7, Progress Report from the Select Committee on Compensation to Mr Pierce J Williams

Williams. Williams had for a few years been an agricultural produce merchant in Ballarat, until that business collapsed into insolvency. Shortly after Williams won the tender for Curyo.⁷⁸ One disaster followed another as Williams soon discovered the boundaries of Curyo run were in dispute, and his attempts to take possession were stymied by neighbouring squatters. As a result, his investment was lost – which included a significant premium he paid to win the tender, the annual rent, and costs of stocking the run with sheep and constructing shepherd's huts - and he sought recompense from the government. He unsuccessfully took the matter to the Supreme Court, lobbied Parliament incessantly, succeeding in having a select committee established to review his claims, which it did but no satisfaction was offered. Eventually in 1870 he was refunded £1,369 18s. 7d by the Lands Department's for monies paid to it for Curyo, plus 8% interest⁷⁹ – a paltry return given the enormous time and effort Williams had devoted to achieving some rudimentary justice.

The Parliamentary Select Committee report of 1866 reveals that Williams had very little experience with pastoral runs, aside from the Curyo disaster, so it is a matter of great surprise that the same year he invested heavily in prime snow country runs, doubly so given his apparently tenuous financial circumstances. He successfully bid, and paid a premium, for the rights to graze the newly created 92,000 acre Bogong High Plain run, the even larger 121,000 acre Dargo High Plain run, and Glencairn station located in the upper reaches of the Macalister River. The rights to these and other nearby unoccupied runs, were offered at auction on 17 August 1866. It seems Williams obtained these investments with borrowed money, his brother-in-law, John Hood, putting up the necessary security, a folly which subsequently saw him also driven into insolvency the following year. Hood's insolvency hearing revealed that Williams' runs had remained unstocked.⁸⁰ Williams himself seems to have emerged from the venture relatively in-tact: he later purchased a cotton plantation in Fiji, where in August 1871 his succession of disappointing business ventures finally ended when he succumbed to dysentery.⁸¹

An obvious question is what on earth did Williams have in mind when he acquired the high plains runs? Was he insane? Or did he have a clever plan? From what I can tell it seems more the latter. His various business ventures could be characterized as bold, over-confident or perhaps even slightly naïve, leaps of faith; all appear to have been well funded, though they also unravelled quickly. The Ballarat produce trading enterprise seems to have lasted about two years before it ran into serious financial trouble.⁸² His attempt at squatting, on the Curyo run (in the hot, dry Wimmera region of north-west Victoria), was a total debacle and never really got off the ground; and the cotton growing project in Fiji claimed his life not so long after he got there. As we have seen, in the 1860's big snow country grazing runs were the domain of Melbourne's business elite. I'm sure Williams was aware of this and wanted a piece of the action. But as the other players were stock & station agents who also owned multiple squatting runs, Williams was somewhat out of his league; his best chance was as an opportunistic intermediary who was confident he could on-sell the grazing rights to a bona fide large

⁷⁸ The Argus (Melbourne), Tue 3 Sep 1861, Page 6, LAW REPORT

⁷⁹ The Argus (Melbourne), Thu 24 Nov 1870, Page 7, PARLIAMENT, LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, WEDNESDAY, NOV. 23

⁸⁰ The Herald (Melbourne), Tue 3 Dec 1867, Page 3, NEW INSOLVENTS; The Kyneton Observer (Vic.), Thu 5 Dec 1867, Page 3, NOTES AND NEWS

⁸¹ Geelong Advertiser (Vic), Sat 28 Oct 1871, Page 2, TOWN TALK

⁸² It looks like they commenced business in February 1858 - The Star (Ballarat), Sat 10 Mar 1860, Page 4, MELBOURNE. FOWLER AND OTHERS V HOUSE AND OTHERS. See also The Star (Ballarat), Sat 18 Feb 1860, Page 2, BALLARAT CIRCUIT COURT, and The Star (Ballarat), Sat 5 Oct 1861, Page 1, INSOLVENT COURT GEELONG; The Star (Ballarat), Tue 10 Dec 1861, Page 1, COUNTY COURT.

pastoralist. To do that he would have needed the assistance of a stock & station agent, or direct contact with one or more very large and needy pastoralists. Williams was no doubt highly intelligent and imaginative; one of many who had ambitious ideas, but one of a few who could bring those ideas to life, if only briefly. He could identify an opportunity and sell the idea to his backers; he had tenacity as is evidenced by his 9-year quest for justice and recompense over the Curyo affair. But perhaps he lacked the application to deal with the relentless everyday nuts and bolts practicalities that need to be addressed in order to keep a business afloat. With all this in mind I have concluded, rightly or wrongly, that Williams probably did have a client already locked in before he attended the 1866 auction of grazing rights to unoccupied runs.

Less than a year after Williams obtained the licenses for Glencairn and Dargo High Plain, they passed to John Ettershank, a livestock agent who also was the treasurer of Hugh Glass's covert squatter's association.⁸³ Nearly two years after these runs had passed out of his name (1870), Ettershank still had control of them. It was revealed in reminiscences of pioneer settler William Henry Sweetapple that he had been 'sent' by Ettershank from Melbourne to Dargo high plains to take 3000 sheep to Glencairn;⁸⁴ and at that time the two runs in question had been placed in the names of Sweetapple brothers and Gibb. Seemingly tracks were being carefully concealed.

Of the other mysterious characters, who for fleeting moments were licensees of the Dargo High Plain run:

- * William Gray Baillie was a share broker, resident in Melbourne, and also once a member of parliament representing Castlemaine. He subsequently also moved to Fiji to manage a cotton plantation where, in 1871, he was murdered.⁸⁵

- * William Plummer was another MLA, representing Warrnambool in western Victoria.

At the same 1866 auction that Pierce J Williams made his breath-taking acquisitions, a young contractor named Simon Fraser purchased the Beecher's Hill run (the western half of the Dargo High Plains) and two nearby mountain runs, Birrigun and Pheasant Park. Like Williams, Fraser only held these runs for one season. Significantly, he was an apparent associate of Hugh Glass⁸⁶ and later became an MLA for Rodney electorate 'in the liberal interest'.⁸⁷

Based on the known circumstances of the successful bidders at the 1866 auction, and their synchronized short duration of tenure (one season only), combined with the subsequent tenancy history of the Dargo High Plain run, till 1872, it is my belief that Pierce Jones William's client was Hugh Glass.

⁸³ Ettershank also rented East Loddon pastoral station from Hugh Glass before obtaining the run in his own name, and he was deeply involved in gaming local land sales using third parties who held land certificates on his behalf, as Glass was doing ; see Richard Turner, 'The battle for Bears Lagoon', *Provenance: The Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, issue no. 15, 2016–2017. Also, Ian Itter, *John Ettershank—the Red Brick Woolshed*, Swan Hill, Victoria, 2013.

⁸⁴ *Gippsland Times*, Thursday 23 May 1912, page 3; *Gippsland Times*, Sat 18 Jun 1870, Page 3, MAFFRA POLICE COURT.

⁸⁵ *Mount Alexander Mail (Vic)*, Tue 2 May 1871, Page 3, INQUEST ON MR. BAILLIE; *Weekly Times (Melbourne)*, Sat 29 Apr 1871, Page 10, MURDER OF MR. W. G. BAILLIE; *Illustrated Australian News for Home Readers (Melbourne)*, Sat 15 Jul 1871, Page 140, FUNERAL OF THE LATE W. G. BAILLIE

⁸⁶ *Bendigo Advertiser (Vic.)*, Mon 16 Nov 1874, Page 2, SPECIAL LAND COURT AT ECHUCA

⁸⁷ *Leader (Melbourne)*, Sat 6 Jun 1874, Page 21, THE NEW LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

To summarize the supporting evidence:

- * there was a local legend, evident in the oral history, that Hugh Glass had put sheep on the Dargo High Plains. As Glass died in 1871, it obviously had to be before then
- * The licenses for the Dargo High Plain run and Glencairn station were passed from Pierce Jones Williams to John Ettershank in 1867. Ettershank was deeply connected with Hugh Glass, and was administrator of Glass's covert squatter's association
- * the following two DHP licensees – Baillie and Plummer - were ephemeral, and had no previous or subsequent association with the mountain region, and in fact hailed from central and western Victoria, and had been members of parliament
- * the next licensees of DHP (& Glencairn station), Sweetapple brothers and Gibb, worked for Ettershank
- * the three successful bidders for mountain runs at the 1866 auction (Williams – Bogong High Plain, Dargo High Plain, & Glencairn; Simon Fraser – Beecher's Hill, Birrigun, Pheasant Park; and Walter Nelson – Wonnangatta) held their tenancies for one year only, and had no prior or subsequent association with the mountain region.
- * Williams' brother in law had been a member of parliament, and Fraser became one in later years
- * both Pierce J Williams and William G Baillie relocated to cotton plantations in Fiji (suggestive of other social and business links), and both died there in 1871, the same year that Glass died (a spooky coincidence, but otherwise probably not evidence of anything further).
- * both Pierce J Williams and John Ettershank had businesses in Ballarat in the 1860's

On the basis of these facts and circumstances I have concluded that in all probability John Ettershank orchestrated the successful buy-up of snow country grazing runs at the 1866 auction, on behalf of his star client, Hugh Glass. And Ettershank continued to manage the Dargo High Plain tenancy until Glass's estate was wound up in 1872 – suggesting that his involvement was significantly, though not necessarily totally, associated with Glass.

Of course, evidence of a license or access to land is not proof that the land was actually used, but it is unlikely that such an effort was an exercise in futility. Great trouble and expense were devoted to securing huge areas of summer range land in 1866/67 for the colony's premiere pastoralist who owned dozens of stations carrying hundreds of thousands of sheep. And as the mid to late 1860's was an extended period of very dry weather, I think it can be safely assumed that the Williams / Fraser / Ettershank / Glass alliance was motivated by an urgent need to secure relief grazing for very large flocks of drought stressed sheep.

Whether the summer of 1866/67 was the first, or indeed the last, time Glass had livestock in the snow country is unclear. I suspect he had an earlier experience, probably as a client of Kaye & Butchart, Clough & Co, or Ibbotson / Dalgety, and that gave him the practical insight and confidence to mount, through Ettershank, the successful bidding campaign at the pastoral license auction of 17 August 1866. As we have seen, from that auction control of 50% of the Bogong High Plains, all the Dargo High Plains, half the Great Dividing Range west of Cobungra, and possibly the north end of the Snowy Range (Howitt and Bryce plains), passed to an apparent cabal of three central Victorian businessmen who at that time owned virtually no livestock, along with the low country Glencairn and Pheasant Park sheep runs. After the first year the portfolio was trimmed down to two runs only: Dargo High Plain and Glencairn, and these runs remained in the hands of John Ettershank until

Glass's estate was wound up in 1872.⁸⁸ That Ettershank's exit from the snow country coincided with the winding up of Glass's pastoral empire might suggest that the timing was no coincidence at all. However, 1872 was the year the railway line from Melbourne was extended into north-east Victoria (Seymour 1872; Wodonga 1873), and this may also have had something to do with it.

John Ettershank was a principal of the firm Ettershank, Eaglestone & Co., a livestock agency which was well known for moving sheep and cattle bred in central Queensland and NSW all the way south to Melbourne and the central Victorian goldfields where they were sold for slaughter. The main office of Ettershank, Eaglestone & Co was at Ballarat. E E & Co. were commission agents. They contracted with graziers to deliver livestock to market and conducted the auction, taking a percentage of the sale price as their fee. They hired expert drovers to collect sheep and cattle at the farm gate, planned the droving routes, made all necessary arrangements to get the livestock to market in the best possible condition, and forwarded the proceeds of sale, less commission, to the sellers. As it could take many months to get consignments to market, an important part of the job was to find agistment for the animals along the way; places where they could be rested and fed a lot more than the slim pickings that were often all that was available on the stock routes and road sides. This is where the snow country could be particularly useful. The large expanses – Bogong, Cobungra and Dargo high plains - were a relatively short detour from a major line of livestock traffic that crossed the River Murray at Albury, and sheep and cattle could be spelled there, mid journey, for some weeks or even months. However, that convenience was of much less value once the north east railway was built as livestock could then be trucked directly from Wodonga to Melbourne.

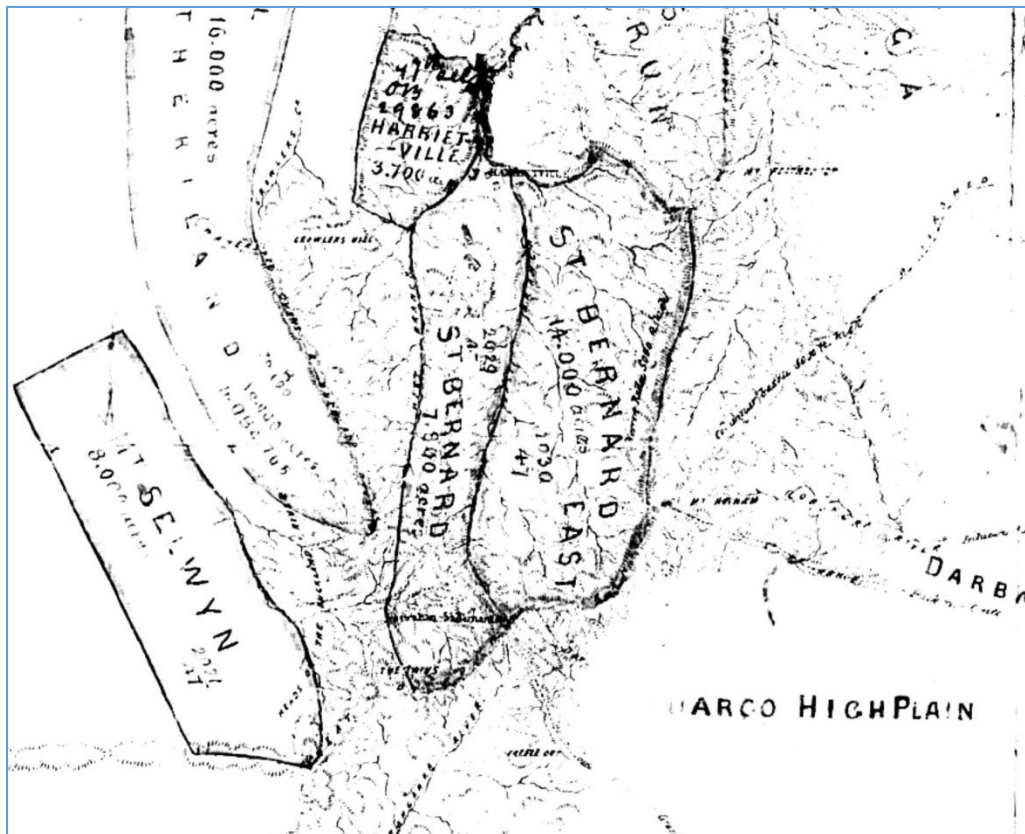
Lands Department Run Plan 265A – Unoccupied Runs Near Omeo, 1866

⁸⁸ William's license for the Bogong High Plains was listed as forfeited for non-payment of rent in February 1868 (Government Gazette, 1868, p 465). Runs licensed to Fraser and Duke were abandoned at the same time. That meant rent had been owing for the previous 6 months, so the runs were effectively abandoned at the end of the 66/67 summer. William's licenses for Dargo High Plains and Glencairn were transferred to Ettershank in April 1867.

been replaced by a much larger community of local graziers there were few vacant snow country runs ripe for the picking.

Gold Discoveries and the Rise of Smaller Scale Pastoralists

Gold discoveries in the 1850s and 1860s were good and bad news for the early lowland squatters. Mining established local markets for supplies. The price of livestock went up and graziers made money not only by selling livestock, but also by subdividing and selling off parts of their runs. With higher prices it was feasible to run smaller herds particularly in areas close to gold fields where populations concentrated. So, for example, Gould's Run (which incorporated Mt Feathertop) was created in 1864 by sub-division of the much larger Little Portland run (Run Plan 153A); and Cobungra run was sub-divided twice, once in 1859 to create Bingomunjie (Run Plan 265A), and again in 1871⁸⁹ to create Cobungra East and Cobungra West, the latter of which contained snow country along the Great Dividing Range. The Lands Department also created some new mountain runs in the vicinity of the goldfields in the 1860's and 1870's – including Mt St. Bernard and Mt St Bernard East runs, south of Harrietteville, Carvillton run at Mt Bogong - and in 1866 broke up the unusually large original Eaglevale into four smaller, more regulation-sized runs.



Run Plan 381 (part) showing Mt St Bernard and Mt St Bernard East runs

Many early gold discoveries were made at the foot of the mountains and later on new prospecting fields were opened within the mountains and even in the winter snow country; for example, Mt Fainter at the edge of the Bogong High Plains, Brandy Creek near Mt Hotham, and the eastern fall of the Dargo High Plains. At each major auriferous site there was an initial short-lived "rush" (invasion

⁸⁹ Lands Department, Run Register, Book 1

of hundreds or thousands) of alluvial diggers (people who used pans to hand-wash fine gravel and soil taken from the bed and banks of streams and their flood plains, the aim being to separate out very fine specs of gold). The popular but ephemeral 'rush' phase was often followed by the formation of more permanent deep lead and quartz reef operations that involved digging tunnels and vertical shafts to extract gold bearing rocks and sediments. For squatters, the immediately unfavourable effects of mining were associated with the alluvial rushes; capital investment in reef and shaft mining brought a contrasting order and stability.

In all districts labour for shepherding, mustering and boundary riding became scarce as stock hands left their jobs for the alluvial diggings.⁹⁰ Where gold was discovered in or close to the mountain region, squatters also had to contend with the digging hordes that not only burned and dug over some good range country, but also plundered livestock.⁹¹ This prompted many to relocate their cattle, and in some cases the snow country provided alternative summer feeding grounds. It is possible that summer grazing of the Buffalo Plateau began when cattle were evacuated from the Buckland Valley after gold was "rushed" there in the early 1850s.

Gold rushes created massive local demand for meat, which had to be slaughtered nearby, because refrigeration and rapid transport hadn't yet been invented. The diet of pioneering white settlers was very limited by today's standards and at isolated mining areas such as Crooked River and Upper Dargo often the only available nutrition was sheep and cattle killed on the spot, supplemented by a small amount of wheat flour and sugar that was laboriously packed in by store keepers. The supply of other perishable foods, particularly fruit and vegetables was very limited, in the early days, as it took quite some years to clear nearby river flats for market gardening, and the time taken to pack in food over such long distances was often much longer than the shelf life. So, until local gardens could be established the main food available to miners in the early mountain goldfields was meat and new graziers were attracted to the mountains by the prospect of selling cattle to rough and ready butchers on the goldfields. These new graziers either bought into existing squatting runs which were sometimes sub-divided⁹² or rented previously unlicensed runs. In this way occupation of the valleys intensified and as it did a growing interest in the surrounding snow country developed.

It was the new small pastoralists who began laying claim to the snow country by the late 1860s, after the alluvial rushes to mountain goldfields had subsided and gold production had settled into a pattern of steady but declining production based on capital investment. The earliest ones normally invested in the larger available runs and were sometimes successful miners, for example, C. S. Holme of Crooked River who bought the truncated second Eaglevale run from stock & station agent James Butchart. They were followed in the mid-1870s by local mixed farmers, storekeepers, builders and other tradesmen who took up cattle runs to supplement their declining incomes, and many came to depend upon the mountain pastures for much of their livelihood. These smaller operators were a dynamic lot; some had had considerable success on the mining field, and many took leading roles in the mountain communities.

90 See for example, Cox (1973), op cit; Robertson (1973), op cit.

91 Harding (1967), op cit.

92 Lands Department, Register of Runs, Book 1

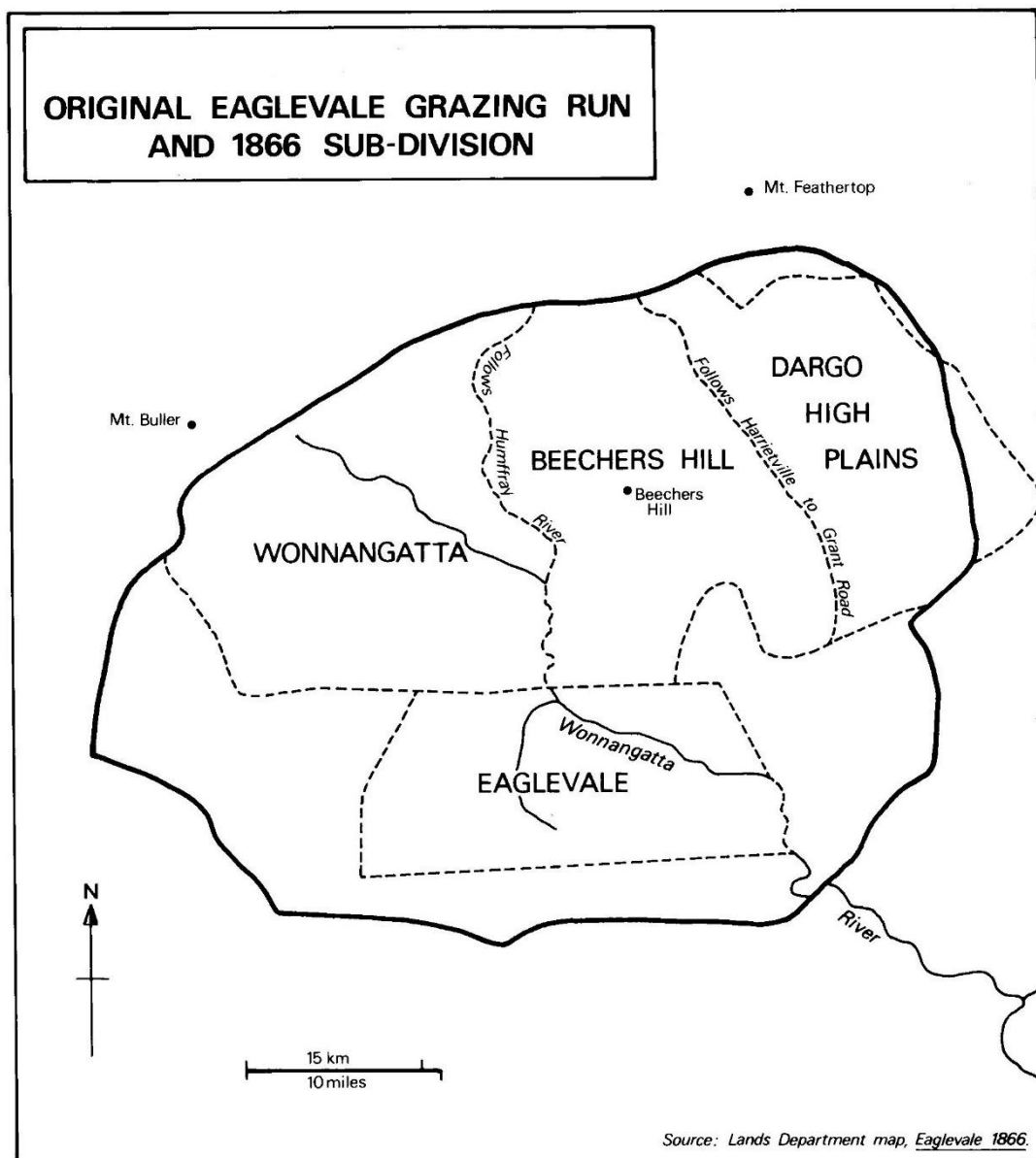
Table 2.3
Snow country Tenants, 1878

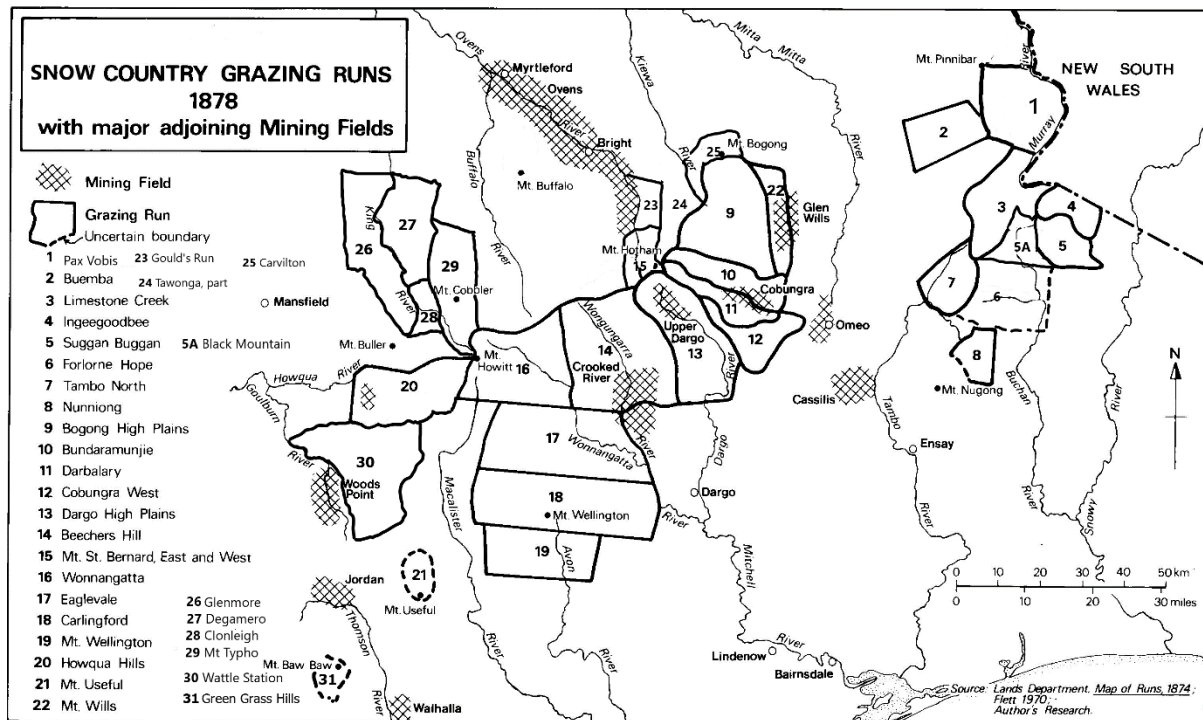
Name	Run	Residence	Class	Occupation
Peter Howman	Gould's Run	Harrierville	NSP	Grazier; ex-miner
Thomas Breen	Mt. St. Bernard (west)	Harrierville	NSP	Grazier, publican
William Bryce	Wonnangatta	Crooked River	NSP	grazier, farmer, packer
Henry Campbell	Bogong High Plain	Ensay #	S.O.	grazier
Charles Gray & Thomas Crouch	Carvillton (Mt. Bogong)	Harrierville	NSP	New chum graziers; ex-miners
John Hemphill & F. Braithwaite	Mt. Wills	Glen Wills #	NSP	miners, graziers
Constantine S Holme	Eaglevale 2	Crooked River	NSP	grazier; Ex-miner; leading member of local Race Club; municipal councillor
Alfred Jones	Dargo High Plain	Dargo	NSP	grazier, carpenter, lay preacher
Richard King	Mt St Bernard East	Upper Dargo	NSP	grazier, miner, store keeper
Horatio & Fred Lowe	Nunniong	Doctor's Flat #	NSP	graziers, hoteliers; ex-miners, storekeepers
Murdoch Mackintosh	Beechers Hill, Mt. Wellington	Dargo	S.O.	Grazier, horse breeder
Frank Dreverman	Pax Vobis	Cobungra	S.O.	grazier
John Murphy	Buemba	Benambra #	NSP	grazier
Chris. O'Rourke	Ingeegoodbee	Black Mountain	S.O.	grazier
Edward O'Rourke	Suggan Buggan, Forlorn Hope, Black Mountain	Black Mountain	S.O.	grazier
James Parslow	Cobungra West	Cobungra #	S.O.	grazier
James Pendergast	Limestone Creek	Benambra #	S.O.	grazier
Neil Pendergast	Tom Groggin	Benambra #	S.O.	grazier
Jens Petersen & Fred Box	Darbalary	Cobungra #, Cobungra #	NSP	grazier, miner grazier, miner, hotel owner
George A. Pillinger	Mt. Useful	?	NSP	?
James Rowe	Howqua Hills	Howqua Hills	S.O.	grazier, storekeeper, miner
William Soutter	Tambo North	Benambra #	NSP	grazier
John Whitbourne	Carlingford	Lindenow	NSP	farmer/grazier, packer, stock dealer; ex-miner

Osborne Young	Bundaramunjie	Benambra #	NSP	grazier, horse breeder, cattle dealer, farmer; Omeo Shire Councillor; President, Racing Club
Charles Ibbotson	Tawonga	Geelong	S.O	Stock & station agent
J Mudie	Green Grass Hills		NSP	

Source: Register of Pastoral Licences, 1875-80; Crown Lands Commission of Inquiry, 1878; Government Gazette, 1877; Miscellaneous sources

Omeo District.





New smaller pastoralists took up the snow country adjoining the major gold centres such as the Dargo High Plains and Snowy Range, while regions distant from these centres remained in the hands of station owners. In the case of the latter, it is worth noting that on the Wulgulmerang plateau there was little or no mining or selection in the 1860s or 1870s. Consequently, the O'Rourke's were able to manage their cattle on a very broad acre basis on both the high and low country for many years after most other station owners had been forced to come to terms with agricultural settlement. The Bogong High Plains provided the apparent exception to the rule, being located close to the Ovens River diggings yet remaining in the hands of station owners rather than new smaller pastoralists. This can be explained by the continuing interest of a large pastoral station (Ensay) and the fact that until the 1880's half of the high plains were contained within one run which was too big and too expensive for small operators to rent. However, as we shall see (Appendix A, Local Histories) smaller operators had access to the Bogong High Plains by arrangement with the licensee.