

## Chapter 3

### LATER LAND SETTLEMENT DREAMS AND SCHEMES

Snow country grazing depended on vast expanses of forested Crown land being available at a pretty cheap price. Under the terms of annual grazing licences - the main form of tenure - major land 'improvements' such as clearing were not permitted and in a sense the licensee was analogous to the early squatter who was an interim tenant, pending agricultural settlement or the reservation of lands for public purposes. General conditions of a squatter's licence restricting improvement were perpetuated and developed in latter day licences which allowed the grazing of uncommitted Crown lands until they were either sold or reserved. In isolated cases small land parcels above the winter snow line were sold off, and during the land settlement era some public reserves were also created (notably forest reserves), but for most of the snow country decisions were not made about its long term future until the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the meantime, a series of settlement schemes and tourist development ideas were floated and ultimately were sunk. While these schemes did not have an impact on the final make-up of the public land estate that we now enjoy, they are a good example of particular economic activities and nation building strategies of one era persisting, because of familiarity, vested interests and lack of opportunities or imagination, well beyond their use-by date. There comes a time when the old ways no longer serve us well, but the transition to new ways of thinking, doing and being can be slow, rocky and painful.

#### Early Land Selections in the Snow country

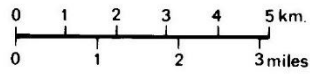
##### Why and How Selections Took Place

Land selection was the process by which European settlers contracted with the government to bring particular plots of Crown land into agricultural production. They applied for licenses and leases to live on these plots, clear the bush, fence the boundaries and cultivate the ground. After some years, if all the government's requirements were met, and all scheduled payments had been settled, the 'selector' could apply to receive freehold title. Freehold title gave the farmer ownership of the land which could then be freely traded.

Not much land in the snow country was selected and even less was converted to freehold title. While high altitude pastures were often critically important to individual graziers, they didn't have much potential for serious agriculture. Their classification as Pastoral under the 1884 Land Act said it all: fit only for grazing; just one rung above useless. Added to that, they were remote from population centres, and were only usable for four or five months a year. Before the onset of winter livestock had to be relocated to lower country, and that was where the homesteads and major capital improvements were situated and where selection efforts were focused. Activities such as branding and weaning were usually carried out on the home property and the snow country was the place cattle were taken for a summer holiday after the important work was done. Not surprisingly, there was little demand for land selections in the snow country, even with the encouragement of the 1884 Land Act. Of course there were some exceptions - some small areas were taken as selection leases and a few of these proceeded to freehold - see Figure below, and Table 3.1.1.

# LAND STATUS

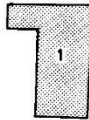
## Crown Allotments in the Snow Country



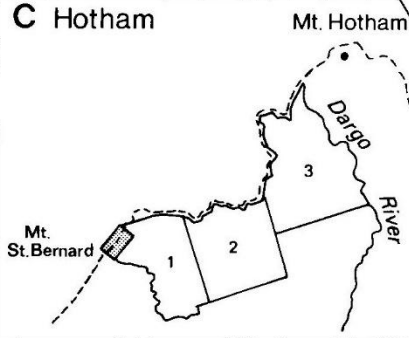
Unalienated  
 Freehold



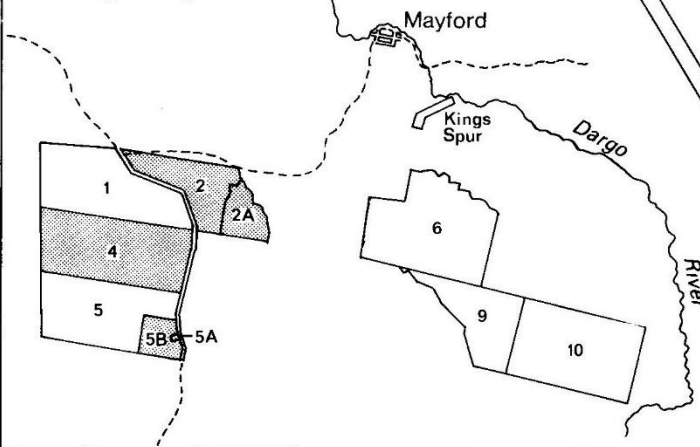
### A Nunniong



### C Hotham



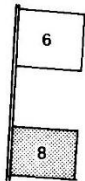
### D Dargo High Plains



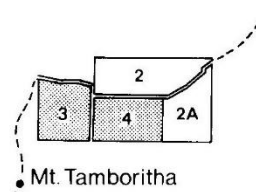
### H Moroka Valley

No details of sub-division.  
No land alienated.

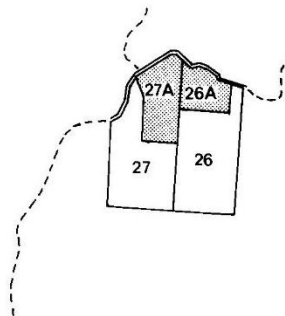
### E Bryces Plain



### F Bennison Plains



### G Spring Hill Plateau



Source : Lands Department plan records

The significance today of these freehold allotments is two-fold:

\* they were sites of more intensive activity, including land clearing, yarding of stock, construction of huts, concentrated human and livestock traffic, and sometimes cultivation – activities which impacted the vegetation cover and broke and compacted the soil.

\* having been removed from the large surrounding public estate which today is valued for its conservation values rather than its capacity for primary production, they became potential targets for intensive tourist development, not because they were ideally suited to such developments but because they provided opportunities to exploit the growing interest in forest recreation. The Dinner Plain snow village, near Mr Hotham, was only possible because land on which it is situated was originally leased, and later sold, to a grazier in the 1890's under provisions of legislation that aimed to encourage the use of land for primary production.

Table 3.1.1  
Allotments Freeholded in the Snow Country

Locality	Allot. No	Acres	Details of Selection		Details of Alienation	
			Year of Selection	Enabling Section of Land Act	Date	Grantee
Bennison Plains	3	300	1903	35	1941	P.Higgins
	4	155	1883	19.20 (1869)	1941	M&J.C Higgins
Cobungra HP's	40	369	1895	32	1936	A.Petersen
	52	571	?	35	1954	T.J McNamara
	53A	238	1903	35	1946	A.Petersen
	51A,B,C	637	1902	35	1930	E,J & W Naughton
	47 & A	877	1902	29	1948	E,J & W Naughton
	43 & A	612	1886	32	1941	E.E Hunt
	44 & B	912	1887	32	1947	C.H Rundell
	36C	28	1888	32	1938	V.J.H Sharpe
Dargo HP's	36	639	1888	32	1940	A.H Sharpe
	Kings Spur	40	1878	19.20 (1869)	1906	G E Treasure (jnr)
	2 & 2A	567	1886	32	1920	G Treasure (jnr)
	4	947	1886	32	1953	S.J Treasure
	5A	1	1913	S.36 Mines Act 1890	1915	C.V Treasure
Nunniong Plateau <sup>1</sup>	5B	149	1908	35	1940	C.V Treasure
	1	640	1905	29 (1901)	1905	T.Doyle
Bryce's Plain, Snowy Range	8	320	1878	19.20 (1869)	1906	A.Bryce

1 Nunnett Paddock was one of the very few cases where freeholding in the snow country occurred in accordance with provisions of the 1884 L.A. concerning Pastoral Allotments.

Spring Hill	27A	300	1906	35	1929	A.Rumpff
	26A	193	1905	35	1939	Exec A. McMichael

Source: Lands Department file and cadastral plan records.

Small allotments on the high plains were just too small to be viable on their own. Those that persisted, and certainly those that proceeded to freehold indicate the presence of very successful larger grazing enterprises.

The first snow country selections were made under the 1869 Land Act in the late 1870's and early 1880's on the Snowy Range, where William Bryce (Wonnangatta) and C. S. Holme (Eaglevale) secured the focal points of their snow country operations.<sup>2</sup> Two of these tenures eventually proceeded to freehold.

On the Dargo High Plains some Grazing Area leases under the 1884 Land Act also eventually proceeded to freehold, including Gow's paddock and Treasure's homestead block - the only full time residence above the snow line in Victoria that is directly associated with snow country grazing. These selections are as close as we come to genuine small holdings, but even here both families acquired large sprawling bush grazing runs which propped up the small holdings.

On the Cobungra High Plains there was an appearance of many independent users, but in fact many nominal tenants were actually puppets of larger operators. The Land Acts of 1884, 1898 and 1901 allowed only one small allotment per person. This was not a problem for the large operators who put forward family members and other hired guns in their place.<sup>3</sup>

Table 3.1.2

Legislative Provisions Used for Selling Land in the Snow Country 1869-1950

Land Act	Section(s) of Act	Explanation
1869	19 & 20	General provisions for agricultural selection
1884	32	Grazing Area lease, with ability to select a portion of the Area
1898	29	Grazing Area lease, with ability to select a portion of the Area
	59 & 61	Grazing Allotment licence and subsequent Perpetual lease
1901	29	Selection of homestead block from Pastoral Allotment
	35	Grazing Area lease
	54 & 56	Grazing Allotment licence and subsequent Perpetual lease
1928	44	Residential lease
	50	Non-residential lease
	81	A special provision concerning mining rights

<sup>2</sup> Lands Department file 1076/19.20 (PRO).

<sup>3</sup> Lands Department file T81234.

Source: Lands Department Plan Records and various Land Acts

Selection of new allotments in remote locations was resisted by the Lands Department as a matter of policy after 1909 when a new Government intent on an aggressive land settlement program came to power and especially after the implementation of the 1911 Land Act. This 'policy' seems not to have crystalized in any formal statement, but was evidently adopted on a number of grounds by surveyors who dealt with snow country selection applications. Firstly, and less significantly, continued selection was opposed on conservation grounds and in this connection it was even suggested that occupied land in sensitive areas such as the Cobungra High Plains should be resumed by the Crown.

*I would point out that in certain parts – more particularly on the ... [Cobungra High Plains] - which cover the gathering grounds of important streams in the river system of the northern watershed of the Great Dividing Range, it is very necessary that the natural vegetation and other conditions of virgin country should be preserved. Resumption here is therefore highly desirable. This is a matter of National interest and the importance of it cannot be too strongly emphasised.*<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, piecemeal selection would interfere with proper subdivision of Crown lands in the future when demand for land was apparently expected to regain momentum, and in the short term it would detract from the value of surrounding grazing blocks and make them less attractive for licensing.<sup>5</sup> Then there was the pragmatic objection that isolated new selections would necessitate expensive and time consuming boundary surveys which the Lands Department was reluctant to undertake.<sup>6</sup> The Department was obligated to deal with selections already taken out but it refused to consider new applications on an individual basis even where they adjoined existing selections.<sup>7</sup> It was only prepared to act if there was significant concentrated interest to justify a comprehensive design of subdivision and to enable a broad area to be dealt with as a whole.<sup>8</sup> The implication of this policy was that further selection in the snow county could not proceed unless it had considerable and demonstrable public support and was deemed by the Department to be appropriate. The philosophical position towards selection in the snow country had therefore changed. In the earliest days under the 1869 Land Act selection of virtually any plot of land was permitted and the onus was on the selector, by fulfilling the covenants of tenure, to convince the Department that freeholding should proceed. In 1884 broad parameters for selection were set by way of land classification and through this medium the scope for future selection and alienation was controlled and rationalised. Now, in the early 1910s, by refusing to process individual applications for marginal lands, the Department was leaving it up to the public to demonstrate why certain lands should be made available.

#### Land Settlement Schemes

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4 Lands Department file T84820. Report from George S. Pinniger, District Surveyor, Bairnsdale, on Grazing Area leaseholds in connection with a resumption proposal.

5 The underlying assumption was that full occupation of Crown lands was desirable.

6 Lands Department file T95250, T104566, Omeo 021/35

7 Lands Department file T79373.

8 For example, Lands Department file T74607

In the years leading up to the 1930s a number of settlement schemes were unsuccessfully proposed for various tracts of the snow country. These schemes, although they were presented as overall concept plans for physiographic units, were not derived from spontaneous grass root desires for land but were propagated from above by Parliamentarians and members of the Lands Department and emerged during political crises - see Table 3.2. They represented attempts by legislators to come to grips with the continued existence of vast areas of unsettled and supposedly potentially productive Crown lands in times of stress when solutions to economic and political problems were anxiously being sought. Their lack of success can be explained by the general impracticality of close settlement of marginal lands, the difficulty of convincing decision makers of the scheme's practicability, and the passing of the crises.

**Table 3.2**  
**Snow Country Settlement Schemes**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Locality</b>	<b>Origin of Idea</b>	<b>Circumstances</b>
1893	Bogong High Plains	Lands Department	Economic depression, unemployment
1909	Bogong High Plains	Parliament	Political crisis – overthrow of Premier
	Nunniong	Parliament	
	Snowy Range	Lands Department	
1920s	Nunniong	Lands Department and Soldier Settlement Board	Resettlement of Soldiers returning from the 1914-1918 War
	Snowy Range	Lands Department	

Source: Newspapers; Lands Department file records

### Unemployment in the Early 1890s

The first specific snow country settlement proposal emerged during depressed economic conditions of the early 1890s when the Government was searching for ways and means of diverting concentrations of urban unemployed on to the land.<sup>9</sup>

*While there are thousands of people looking in vain for employment in the metropolis, thousands, nay millions of acres of magnificent lands in the country districts are lying unimproved and unproductive ... for want of the necessary labour to extract from the soil those elements of wealth that are so necessary to the best interests of the country.*<sup>10</sup>

Reports as to the suitability of various Crown lands for settlement were requested of Government officials and papers were received from James Stirling, now Assistant Government Geologist, and Ferdinand Mueller both of whom discussed the high plains. Their observations and imaginative

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9 There were two legislative attempts to this end: the unsuccessful Village Settlements Bill, Victorian Parliamentary Debates 1892-3, p.567; the succeeding Land Settlement Bill, Victorian Parliamentary Debates 1893, p.362.

10 Victorian Parliamentary Debates 1892-3, p.568.

suggestions were couched in optimistic terms and envisaged agricultural land use along the lines of European mountain settlement.<sup>11</sup>

Stirling stuck to his previous recommendations that the Bogong plains be reserved as a Public Park but also suggested that -

*The Snowy Range and Dargo High Plains comprise good country for carrying esculents; and taken as a whole the soil is fairly well adapted to agricultural purposes, being suitable for the cultivation of oats, barley and other hardy grain ... certain native plants, such as wild parsnip, might, if cultivated, make excellent table esculents, while in their native state they are readily eaten by stock. Then there are the native aromatic pepper, useful for medicinal purposes, and other plants ... while there are several flowering shrubs suitable for arboreal cultivation.*<sup>12</sup>

He recommended that a site be selected above Harrietville at an altitude of about 1200 metres for the experimental cultivation of some of the above products and was apparently supported by the Secretary for Mines who believed there was considerable scope for settlement of alpine districts.<sup>13</sup>

Mueller was similarly imaginative and also directed his remarks towards the Mt Hotham region.

*When nearly 40 years ago I discovered, ascended and named Mt. Hotham and traversed our ... snowy regions ... I became impressed with the importance of our alpine country becoming fully developed. Permanent settlement is possible in our latitudes up to 4,500 ft. [approximately 1400 metres] elevation, and during the summer months pastoral, cultural and mining operations are possible to the summits of our Alps. We can have table fruits and vegetables from one to two months later if grown in our sub-alpine regions and the railway now already extended to Bright affords facilities of bringing such products to the markets of the lowlands, when otherwise out of season there. Hardy grain could also be raised at high elevations, poultry be kept and depasturing of herds and flocks carried on in the high regions from September to March. This would give encouragement to mining prospectors for more perseverance in their searches as re-supplying of provisions could be effected from farms cheaply and locally, instead of packing up on horses, as now, all that is necessary for sustenance from the lowlands ... Highlanders from Scotland, Swiss and Scandinavian people among us would be particularly those fit to be placed for rural purposes in our Alps as they are accustomed to a cold climate. The produce of the farms would in many cases be more tasty than that of the lowlands. Surplus stock, when frosty weather sets in, could be brought to market, or, as in the colder European countries is much done, salted or smoked, and be sold in casks to town customers for family supply as food more cheap and superior than under ordinary circumstances available. Natural irrigation can be obtained for most of the alpine valleys, also the herb culture plants are much less subject to diseases than those in the lowlands of ours.*<sup>14</sup>

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11 See, for example, Carrier, E. H., 1932. *Water and Grass, A Study on the Pastoral Economy of Southern Europe*, London

12 *Alpine Observer Newspaper*, 21 August 1891

13 *Ibid*

14 Memorandum by Baron Mueller to T. R. Wilson, Esq., 25 December 1893, Supplementary Records No. 24 (P.R.O.).

I found no evidence to suggest that these reports were followed up. Such pioneering land settlement projects really required a preliminary pilot scheme, as Stirling indicated, and probably for this reason, because high plains settlement did not provide an immediate solution to the unemployment problem, the recommendations lapsed.

### Political Turbulence, 1909

Fifteen years later the issue of snow country settlement re-surfaced amidst political turbulence when Sir Thomas Bent was overthrown as Premier following internal wrangles within his government.<sup>15</sup> He was replaced in January 1909 by John Murray.

A major philosophical difference existed between Bent and Murray over the settlement of rural lands: Murray and supporters had a very strong belief in the need to encourage more intensive agricultural settlement, partly to avoid immoral 'wastefulness' where potentially productive agricultural lands were lying idle<sup>16</sup> and partly to arrest a perceived drift of prospective settlers, and therefore producers, away from Victoria to other States where land was still available for selection. This latter argument, coupled with widespread discomfort about the urbanisation of Victoria's population, had been propounded for well over a decade.<sup>17</sup> Murray's supporters had been pushing for a vigorous rural settlement policy but did not believe Bent's government was doing enough, so when they came to power they initiated, amongst other things, investigations into the suitability of vacant Crown lands for settlement, and in this regard the Bogong High Plains came into focus.

James Cameron, MLA for Gippsland East, had been pushing for further settlement of the back country in his electorate<sup>18</sup> and in January 1909 he made a hurried trip to the Omeo district for the new regime. After visiting the Bogong high plains he recommended to the Minister for Lands that road access be provided and the plains cut up into 500 to 2,000 acre surveyed blocks, which would be fenced and leased for ten year terms, to enable more intensive and controlled cattle growing.<sup>19</sup> He did not believe the high plains were suitable for agriculture,<sup>20</sup> but as he was informed that parts of the snow country had been proved suitable for cultivation<sup>21</sup> he did not rule out the possibility and favoured enlisting the aid of a certain Rev. Dr. Capra, an Italian who had intimate knowledge of land use in the Italian Alps and who could advise what grasses and cereals were best adapted for culture in the snow country.<sup>22</sup> Other possibilities such as using the high plains for dairy farming and cheese production were also discussed.<sup>23</sup>

In the following year, 12 months after Cameron's recommendations were submitted to the Minister, the Bogong High Plains were inspected by Assistant Surveyor Simon Callanan who disagreed with Cameron and did not favour any change in tenure.

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15 Victorian Parliamentary Debates 1908, pp. 1714-1785.

16 See, for example, Maffra Spectator Newspaper, 1 June 1908.

17 Victorian Parliamentary Debates 1892-3 and 1893, Village Settlement Bill; Argus, 12 November, 1902; A.O. 15 August 1902

18 Maffra Spectator Newspaper, 1 June 1908

19 Lands Department file T2982.

20 Alpine Observer, 26 February 1909.

21 Probably portions of the Cobungra High Plains. See Alfred Howitt's evidence to C.L.C., Ch.3.

22 Alpine Observer, 26 February 1909.

23 Ibid; Omeo Standard newspaper 19 January 1909; Maffra Spectator, 1 June 1908.

*The cost of making a road to the high plains would be very great and would not, in my opinion, be justified by the benefits it would confer as the land is not suitable for other than grazing purposes owing to its high altitude which makes it unfit for occupation during about seven months in the year, and its exceptionally stony nature.*<sup>24</sup>

No further steps were taken, though Cameron did persist with some unsuccessful lobbying.<sup>25</sup>

The Nunniong plateau was also identified by Cameron as a possible site for subdivision into 640 to 1,000 acre blocks and this plan was briefly considered and rejected by the Lands Department.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, the Moroka basin and other portions of the Snowy Range further north were also examined soon after Murray and Co. came to power. The Moroka land had previously been divided into Grazing Areas in 1900 and was looked at again during late 1908 in connection with a proposed tourist track between Mt. Buffalo and Mt. Wellington.<sup>27</sup> It was revisited again in January 1909.<sup>28</sup> The suggestion was posed that a tourist road would assist with settlement in this remote area and as a result a 1.25-metre-wide track was constructed to the area via the Avon valley and Valencia Creek in 1912;<sup>29</sup> this track was to be further upgraded to cater for wheeled vehicles a few year later. And just to prove that old ideas die hard, in February / March 1915 a party of high level government ministers and public servants conducted a five-day inspection of the Snowy Range to further evaluate its potential for settlement, tourism and hosting of drought stricken livestock.<sup>30</sup>

However, it seems that the issue of drought relief was largely overshadowed by the seductive fantasy of opening up another region for agricultural settlement.

*A Ministerial party headed by Mr Hagelthorn arrived at Maffra on Thursday night last en route to the mountains. They started from Maffra in three cars on Friday morning, and travelled up the Moroka Valley road as far as it was possible to take a car. Here horses were awaiting them in charge of Mr Henry Miller, and the journey was continued up the Valley. An inspection of the work done on the Moroka Road, and the facilities for settlement in the locality, together with the opening up of the mountainous region for tourist traffic was the main object of the visit. It was the intention to continue on from Mount Wellington across the tableland, come out in the Mansfield district, and thence, back to Melbourne on Tuesday.*<sup>31</sup>

*The motives which actuated the Minister for Works (Mr. Hagelthorn) and the Minister for Lands (Mr Lawson) to take this adventurous trip was a desire to personally acquaint themselves with the possibilities of developing the country either as a pastoral area or a tourist resort, or both ... There are present, in addition to the Ministers, Mr. Membrey (honorary Minister), Mr. Catani (engineer-in-chief of public works), Mr. Minogue (under*

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<sup>24</sup> Lands Department file T74607.

<sup>25</sup> Omeo Standard newspaper 2 December 1910.

<sup>26</sup> Lands Department files T72982, T95111

<sup>27</sup> Maffra Spectator, 2 July, 1908.

<sup>28</sup> Maffra Spectator, 7 January 1909.

<sup>29</sup> Argus, 16 January 1912.

<sup>30</sup> The Maffra Spectator, Thu 25 Feb 1915, Page 3, MINISTER VISITS MOROKA VALLEY.

<sup>31</sup> The Maffra Spectator, Monday 22 Feb 1915, Page 3, MINISTERIAL VISIT.

treasurer), Mr. Laing (surveyor-general), and Mr. W. Davidson (ex-inspector-general of public works).<sup>32</sup>

Public works engineer Catani talked up the potential of the Moroka lands for settlement.<sup>33</sup> But news reports were sceptical to say the least.<sup>34</sup>

*Two or three days of laboured and occasionally perilous mountaineering must have pretty well convinced them that any effort in these directions, which would make much demand on the public funds, is at the present time premature. ... During the first day's ride one fact was made clear-this section of the country could only be gauged from the tourist standpoint: it was certainly no pastoral or agricultural proposition. A kangaroo would have had difficulty in climbing the almost perpendicular face of the mountains, while the stunted gums had to contest every inch of soil with the bush scrub.*<sup>35</sup>

*The mountain ranges recently traversed by a Ministerial party on a trip from Maffra to Mansfield, in Victoria, were practically terra incognita. They are known only to a few cattle men, and to one or two adventurous mining prospectors, whose enterprise and hardships have so far not been rewarded by any very profitable yields. On the map of Victoria the country is a blank. It remains unsurveyed, and the boundaries which define the pastoral leases are vague and speculative. Two objects prompted the inspection. In the first place the Ministers desired to know definitely what were the actual settlement resources of the ranges, if any, and furthermore, whether the mountains could be developed as a tourist resort. On the first point there is room for but little disagreement. When Victoria's population reaches 15,000,000 or 20,000,000, the restricted and isolated patches of arable land might possibly be profitably brought under the plough, but until the farming land elsewhere in the State is supporting to the extreme limits of its capacity a rural population, it would be inconceivably stupid to enter upon a costly and futile experiment to people the Snowy plains. A certain section of the community, small and uninformed, is continually reprobating the Government for not developing the 26,000,000 acres of its unalienated lands. By far the larger portion of that quantity lies in, or is typified by, the area that was inspected. From the summit of Mount Wellington the party obtained a comprehensive survey of some of Victoria's "unalienated" lands. They looked down upon a sea of mountain peaks, extending from within a few miles of Maffra to the south, to the New South Wales border on the north, and from close to the seaboard on the east, to the Dividing Range on the west. Save for a meagre and sparse population deep down in some of the alluvial beds of the rivers, and for an occasional settler, whose corporeal existence is vouched for by apparently reputable witnesses, this immense section of the State is uninhabited. During their five eventful days on horse-back, the Ministerial party did not encounter a human habitation, and they crossed, from an agricultural standpoint, the best of the country. Moreover, from some of the higher peaks they saw huge stretches of precipice and chasm where it would be impossible to perch a dwelling. This is all part of the area which is said to stand as a reproach to the Government for not having been settled. It will remain a reproach, unless effaced by an earthquake, for centuries to come.*

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<sup>32</sup> Argus, Wednesday 24 February 1915, page 10, MINISTERS' JAUNT. TRIALS OF THE MOUNTAINS. THE UNACCUSTOMED HORSE

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Maffra Spectator, 18 March 1926.

<sup>35</sup> Argus, Wednesday 24 February 1915, page 10

*Upon the scenic charms of the locality the Ministers were enthusiastic. In this respect it may be rivalled but it is not excelled by any other section of the Australian Alps.*<sup>36</sup>

The amending Land Act of 1911 embodied the proactive aims and philosophies of the new regime with regard to settlement. However, it had very little effect in the snow country because of resistance from the Lands Department and because, as Murray's government settled into the job, the fervour of its new lands policy began to wane. It became increasingly apparent that the actual potential of remaining Crown lands for agriculture was not what some vocal people close to the ear of government had imagined it to be. Further, the underlying trend of rural settlement in the mountain region was towards an enlargement of farm sizes, rather than an intensification of farming,<sup>37</sup> driven by a narrowing focus on livestock production which accompanied the decline of mining in the mountain region.

#### Post World War I – Re-settlement of Soldiers

After the 1914-1918 war, re-absorption of returned soldiers into the domestic economy was both an economic and political issue. It was widely believed that returned soldiers should be assisted, as a mark of gratitude, if they wished to take up careers farming the land. To this end soldiers applying for grazing runs were given preferential treatment and a number of new snow country graziers came on to the scene after 1919, (see Table 3.3). Snow country settlement schemes were also proposed in connection with soldier settlement.

**Table 3.3**  
**Returned Soldiers with Snow Country Runs**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Residence</b>	<b>Grazing Block</b>	<b>Period of Licence</b>
J.Bullock	Mansfield	Delatite 13B	1919-1924
G.E.Brown, H.Hill & H.S.Flett	c/o G.Brown, Richmond	Tambo 1 & 2 (Ingeegoodbee)	1920-1924
L.J.Brumley	Myrtleford	Bogong 38	1920-1922
R.L.Colleen, E.Foster, & G.Pearson	Omeo	Bogong 38	1922-1925
J.Conley, W.J.Carthew, & J.H.Davies	Myrtleford	Dargo 1	1920-1923
J.Culhane	Talbotville	Dargo 5B	1921-1924
W.Greenwood	Omeo	Bogong 38	1925+
J.V.Kelly	Glenmaggie	Wonnangatta 48	1920+
Jack Lovick snr	Merrijig	Mt Buller	1919+

<sup>36</sup> Australasian, Saturday 6 March 1915, page 26, GENERAL NEWS. THE SNOWY PLAINS

<sup>37</sup> Lands Department file T84820.

A.A.McMichael	Glenmaggie	Wonnangatta 54	1920-1929
C.H.V.Pendergast	Benambra	Pastoral Allotment Benambra S	1924-1940

Source: Lands Department Grazing Licence Records

In 1919 a Crown Lands Investigation Committee was formed to investigate Crown lands suitable for soldier settlement.<sup>38</sup> Members of the Committee inspected the Nunniong plateau and surrounding country in March 1923<sup>39</sup> as it was proposed to make the most suitable lands available for settlement: nearby portions were to be made available for soldier settlers at Bindi and Ensay and the remainder for other interested people.<sup>40</sup> In their final report to the Director of Land Settlement the investigation party stated that

*... there is an almost compact area of about 12,000 acres of volcanic land and included in it are the well-known plains Quinns , Low[e] and Nunnett, all well-watered. The highest elevation of these plains is 4,000 ft.[approx. 1200 metres] above sea level; stock are bred and wintered on these plains, and the climate is, in our opinion, not too rigorous for general occupation. Probably 2,000 acres of this area is cultivable plain. In former times portions were cropped with good results. If this area of 12,000 acres were divided in such a manner that 80 to 100 acres of the rich cultivable plain were attached to 600 to 1,000 acres of the rougher volcanic and granitic country, there should be no doubt about successful settlement, provided, of course, that a road to connect with Buchan is constructed. It is our well convinced opinion that without proper road access no settlement in any portion of the area can succeed.*<sup>41</sup>

Road works were the essential pre-requisite for the Nunniong scheme, as they were for all areas the Committee investigated.<sup>42</sup> A main road extending from Buchan to Nunniong and possibly further north was proposed as the primary outlet for settlement, with other lateral roads connecting with Bindi, Ensay and Timbarra.<sup>43</sup> However, no action was taken in response to the above recommendations and Government initiatives ended here. But the dream did not die; it was taken up in March, 1927 by six soldier settlers on the Avonmore re-settlement estate at Bindi who were seeking supplementary summer pasture.

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38 Victorian Parliamentary Debates 1921, p.1336.

39 Omeo Standard, 13 March 1923.

40 Lands Department file T82810.

41 Lands Department file T95111

42 Victorian Parliamentary Debates 1921, p.1336.

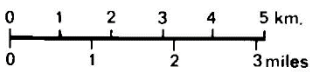
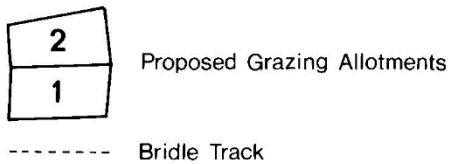
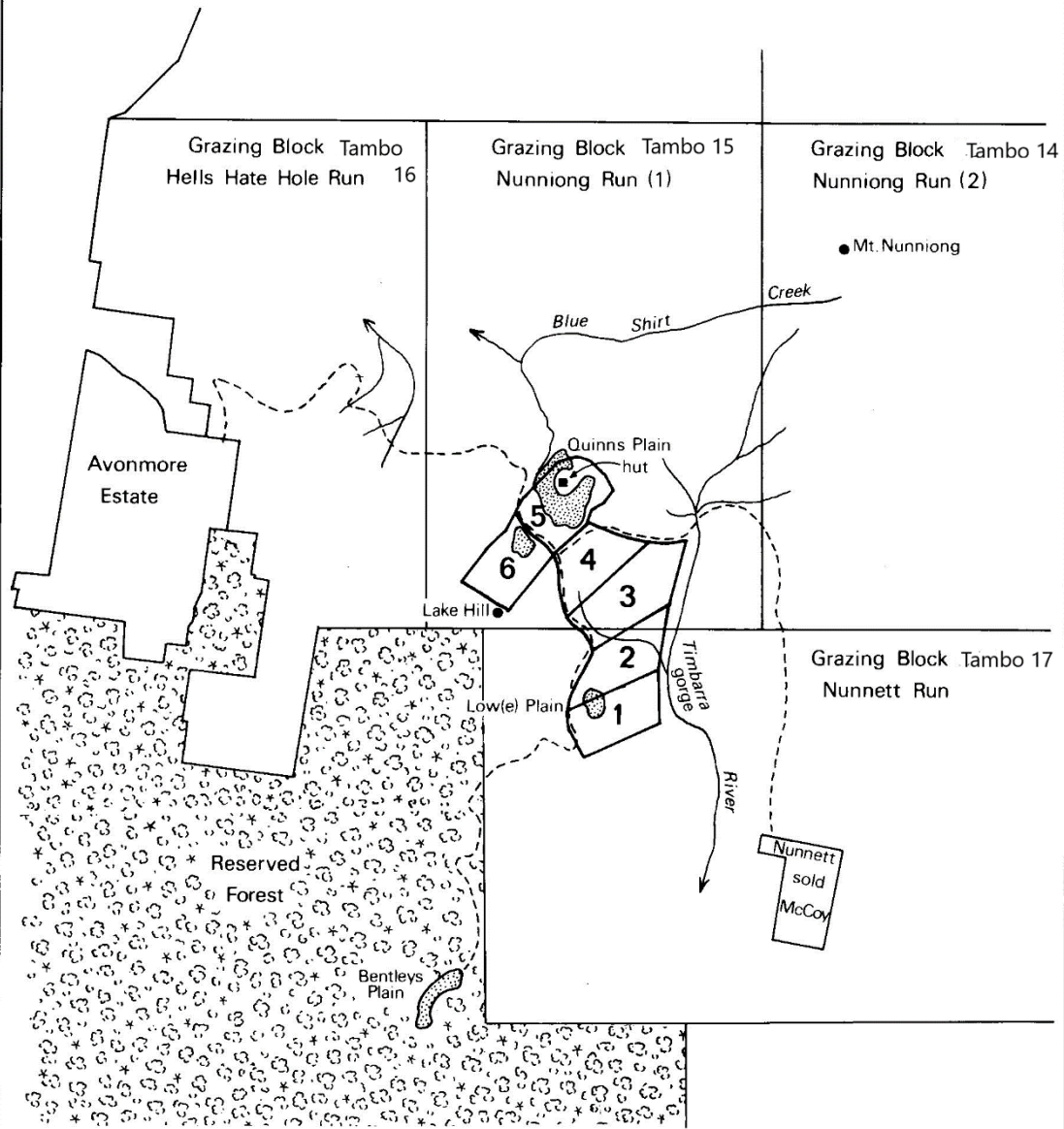
43 Lands Department file T95111



Quinn's Plain, 1977 (Author)

# NUNNIONG PLATEAU SUB-DIVISION PROPOSAL

## Compromise Suggestion, July 1930



The Avonmore Estate was lowland freehold originally held by the Doyle family and traditionally used in conjunction with the adjoining Nunniong plateau. These tablelands were now considered by the soldier settlers as critical to the success of their farms which had been subject to a damaging dry summer during 1926/27 and which were generally running into difficulties because of their small size.<sup>44</sup> The Lands Department was prepared to create six 500 acre grazing allotments which could be offered to the settlers as annually renewable licences, but the proposals ran aground. In the words of the Closer Settlement Board:

*Before the issue of the licences could be finalised the settlers wrote asking that the land be made available for selection and granted to them under Conditional Purchase lease. They also intimated that they would require advances for wire netting to make the blocks rabbit proof and dog proof and also desired that the track leading to the country be improved by side cuttings to give better access ... To meet the cost of the side cuttings the lessees proposed that their holdings be loaded to the extent of 2/- per acre, but they are at present heavily in arrears and the land cannot with wisdom be further encumbered ... Owing to the fact that this is snow country, some of it over 4,000 ft. [1200 metres] above sea level, and that it is only available for portion of the year, the Board feels that the expenditure of the money that would be involved in the settlers' ... suggestions is not justified and is not prepared to make the necessary advances.<sup>45</sup>*

Further representations by the Avonmore settlers led to the creation of a draft subdivision of 500 acre allotments in July 1930, and the compromise suggestion that licensed communal rights be given over the allotments which would only be fenced around the perimeter; such a scheme would save on dividing fences and would allow 'simple' (minimum survey) boundaries to be adopted.<sup>46</sup> However, even this proposal did not proceed<sup>47</sup> and the soldier settlers were forced to make their own private arrangements within the existing tenure system administered by the Lands Department. During deliberations between 1927 and 1930 the grazing licence covering Quinns Plain had been cancelled and the Avonmore settlers were able to graze their sheep there during the summer. But after 1930 they had to fend for themselves. The situation eased in the early 1930s as climatic conditions were more favourable and because three of the settlers failed and their land was redistributed amongst those remaining. But in the post-depression years Nunniong became important again and individual arrangements were made to secure summer grazing on the plateau.

**Table 3.4**

**Avonmore Estate Soldier Settlers**

<b>Settler's Name</b>	<b>Grazed Snow country in 1927/8?</b>	<b>Duration of Tenancy at Bindi</b>	<b>Snow country Used</b>
A.R.Boucher	Yes	Continued	Purchased Nunnett Paddock 1943

44 Victorian Parliamentary Papers 1925, Paper No. 32, Report of Royal Commission on Soldier Settlement; Lands Department file Omeo 99/121.

45 Lands Department file Omeo 99/121

46 Ibid

47 No reason is evident in the records.

F.P.Cleary	Yes	Failed by 1935	
W.D.Cleary	Yes	Continued	Arranged agistment on Nunning Plain with licensee
J.H.Davies	-	Failed by 1935	
C.S.Gallagher	-	Failed by 1935	
J.Harding	Yes	Continued	Possible arrangement with licensee

Source: Author's research, Land's Department records

Another of the 1909 vintage ideas to re-emerge after 1918 concerned the Snowy Range. The proposals were more specific than previously enunciated and envisaged cultivation of alluvial flats along the Wonnangatta and Wongungurra rivers, and grazing of the adjoining high volcanic plains.<sup>48</sup> Here again the requirement for suitable road access was emphasised, and the importance was stressed of any new settlers being experienced enough to cope with the physical hardships and difficulties associated with the locality. The latter requirement implied a gradual piecemeal release of lands as demand was generated within the region by people born and bred in the mountain environment. But this practice was contrary to the prevailing policy of comprehensive subdivision of new lands, and was not entertained by the Lands Department.

#### The Settlement Schemes — an Overview

The settlement schemes discussed above were born in periods of political strife and were offered by parliamentarians and public administrators as possible ameliorative measures; to wit, during the mid-1890s and 1920s the basic problem was to find new sources of employment; in 1909 the problems were on a more philosophical level. In all cases, however, snow country settlement schemes proved to be unsuitable solutions; they often failed to gain acceptance at either the ground level or at the decision-making level from whence they emanated.

The type of settlement generally envisaged embodied the farmer-grazier principle, which was first recognised in the late 1870s. Some proposals also drew heavily upon the European alpine experience and involved cultivation. But normally only an intensification of pastoral occupation and use was proposed by way of finer subdivisions and minor capital improvements such as fencing. Previous experience had indicated that snow country grazing was essentially a broad acre affair: finer subdivisions into small allotments had already been tried under the 1884 Land Act, and although they were persevered with in succeeding decades they were taken in conjunction with much larger runs and were not successful in settling new small graziers into the mountains. There was little or no real demand for single small high plains grazing lots. In the post-1918 period, in the only crisis where any grass roots pressure existed for access to the snow country, demands by returned soldiers were accommodated within the existing design of grazing blocks and allotments. Little change was made in the number, size or design of the grazing blocks offered or the nature of tenure.

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48 Lands Department file T95348.

A major reason why the initiatives failed to get off the ground was that they did not offer cheap or swift solutions to pressing problems. Investigations underlined the need for pilot schemes or preliminary capital investment in roads and land surveys, or finding the right type of settler, and these recommendations were enough to make the decision makers think twice. The length of time over which proposals were processed and investigated by the Lands Department was also a factor working against the adoption of any schemes. Investigations and reports were stretched over such a long period that the initiating crisis had often passed and the pressure for action subsided by the time recommendations were being considered. Additionally, the field officers who conducted the investigations were usually aware of the practical difficulties of the schemes and were able to recommend successfully against inappropriate proposals.

### Tourism

The tourist potential of the snow country had been recognised from the early days of European settlement,<sup>49</sup> scenic grandeur being the main attraction. By giving passing visitors advice and assistance, and just by maintaining a faint human presence in the mountains, graziers provided a minimum of support necessary to facilitate early adventure tourism. Some cattlemen guided riding parties through the mountains; pioneering examples include Richard Riggall, (Mt. Wellington, January 1888)<sup>50</sup> Henry Miller (Mt. Wellington, February 1914)<sup>51</sup> and Albert Weston (Mt. Buffalo, 1880s).<sup>52</sup> In the 1930s many other graziers were employed by the Victorian Railways to lead riding tours.

Besides helping with their knowledge of the terrain, cattlemen were also part of the visitor's mountain experience. They were the users of the snow country, owning the cattle and huts and knowing its history and moods. Not surprisingly, for many years tourism was viewed as being not only compatible with grazing but somewhat dependant on it. It was rarely considered a primary land use in its own right. Even the Buffalo Plateau, which was dedicated as a National Park in 1898 after being known as an outstanding beauty spot for nearly half a century,<sup>53</sup> objections to grazing were not sufficiently strong to put an end to it for many decades. Given the role of graziers in promoting tourism to Buffalo, tourism owed a debt of gratitude to them, and that debt was not easily or quickly paid off.<sup>54</sup>

The nexus between cattlemen and tourists hinged on the cattlemen's maintenance of tracks and huts, and their expertise as guides. The cattlemen's monopoly in this field was broken by the construction of roads through the mountains, and the first and most important of these roads was the Alpine Road which connects Harrietville to Omeo, via Mt Hotham.

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49 Hoy, E., 1965. Historiette of the Manfields who began their Mt. Buffalo Saga when the Buckland was at its heyday in the early '50s. Harrietville Historical Society; Illustrated Australian News, 16 May 1868.

50 Maffra Spectator, 9 January 1888, 19 January 1888, 23 January 1888; Riggall also conducted trips in 1891 and 1895, see Maffra Spectator, 9 February 1891, 12 February 1891, 31 January 1895, Gippsland Mercury, 29 January 1895

51 Argus, 31 January 1914; Maffra Spectator, 12 March 1913.

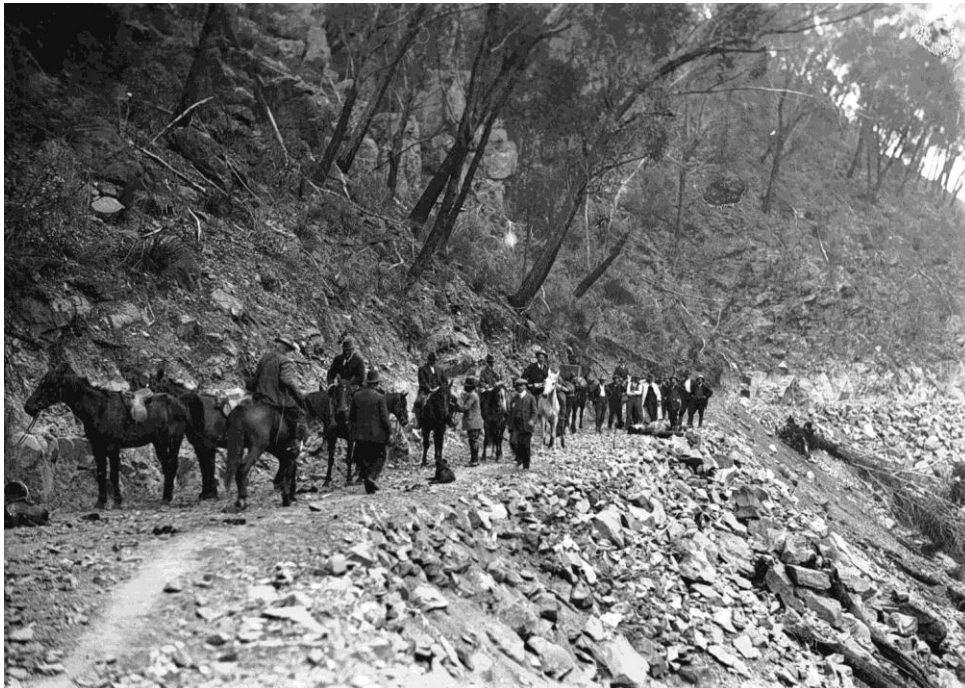
52 P. Weston, Interview; Lands Department file Beechworth W23092 (P.R.O.); Albert Weston made many trips on to the Buffalo Plateau as guide. So did other members of his family.

53 Lands Department file RS121

54 Grazing licences were cancelled in 1909 upon addition of further areas to the Park, but this can be seen as a reflex administrative action, to end all interim occupancies on permanent reservation of the land. The subsequent renewal of licences supports the proposition that no incompatibility between grazing and recreation was perceived at the time. See Lands Department file RS121.

Much of the Alpine Road was originally a native track which was later used by graziers and gold miners, the mountainous region in all directions from Mt Hotham being auriferous. Till the early 1880's the route remained an arduous and often dangerous bridle track. Then the most used section, between Harrietville and Mt Hotham, was upgraded for horse-drawn wheeled vehicles - that is buggies, coaches and drays. The stretch from Hotham to Cobungra was finished in 1885, and until 1914 a stage coach carried mail and passengers along the road from Omeo to Harrietville, making overnight stops at accommodation houses at Cobungra, Flourbag Plain and Mt St. Bernard. The Alpine Road was built to make it easier to get machinery and supplies to the adjoining gold mines, to improve communications between Omeo district and north-east Victoria, and to stimulate land selection. That might explain the classification of much of the Cobungra high plains as agriculture / grazing land – the only significant tract of snow country to receive such a classification (see earlier chapter). There was also a more general expectation in the pre-1915 period that tourism would make settlement in remote areas more attractive and viable;<sup>55</sup> an overlapping land use that could be developed in conjunction with other materially productive industries;<sup>56</sup> there was never any question of these productive industries being displaced by tourism.<sup>57</sup>

Tourism in the snow country began to assume noticeable dimensions in the mid and late 1880s. Visitors to the Mt Hotham region took advantage of the Alpine Road, and its associated accommodation houses – here they owed nothing to cattle grazing. In this area the expert local knowledge was held by miners who scoured the bush for gold. However, it is also a fact that the road gave graziers from the Ovens valley very convenient access to the open tops of Mt Feathertop,



Mt Loch, Mt Hotham & Mt St. Bernard, and made regular grazing of these mountain tops from that end much easier.

**Tourist track from Valencia Creek to Moroka Valley, in 1915.**<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Maffra Spectator, 7 January 1909.

<sup>56</sup> Tourists' Resort Act, 1922. This Act was intended to preserve and exploit scenic resources for tourism by rationalising the associated administrative responsibilities and procedures.

<sup>57</sup> Victorian Parliamentary Debates 1922, pp. 4055-4059.

<sup>58</sup> Melbourne Museum, Photographic Negatives NM7815 of Ministerial visit to Snowy Range, 1915, copied from E R Meyer, J H Meyer, 30 Aug 1990