

Financing Ridgecrest

This is the story behind the thousands of dollars that paid for the early development of “Ridgecrest Youth Camp” on Burrendong.

It is unique in that it is a working Bee that lasted for about 27 years!

If you feel that you are being bogged down with facts and figures in the prologue, please keep reading. You may even get a laugh on the last page and the figures virtually cease on page 2 as the real story unfolds.

Enjoy the experience!
I did.

THE CAMP CATTLE PROJECT

BURRENDONG FORESHORES

Prologue: an area of 56,000 acres [22,000 hectares] was resumed around Burrendong Dam. The area was to form a “green belt” around the dam. It was to be managed to prevent erosion and siltation from the immediate foreshores all of the dam into the main basin. These areas became known as Burrendong foreshores and was placed under the control of the soil conservation service.

The service started with the resumption of 12,000 acres in 1950 and gradually increased over the years until in 1968 than last resumption was made.

The whole area had been over grazed by sheep and rabbits for years and was scolded, bare and erosion was evident on practically the whole area. Much of the area was covered in stink wort and wild tobacco bush plus every weed known to mankind.

As the areas where taken over sheep were removed and efforts made to control the rabbit plague as they were there in the millions. On one area of about 2, -- acres we poisoned 130,00 rabbits in 1951 and at a rough guess the 2,000,000 rabbits left. Today it is hard to conceive the rabbit population prior to the introduction of myxomatosis in 1952.

Myxomatosis absolutely decimated the rabbit population and it never really recovered although it would be years before we could say that we got them under control in the late 1969's and 1970's with carrots, airplanes and it was 1980 until you could drive around the foreshores all day and not see a rabbit.

With the partial control of the rabbits and no sheep, the country gradually responded. The stink wort and tobacco bush where replaced by grasses until quite a fire risk developed. To control this, cattle were taken in on adjustment; it was no security of tenure just a weekly agistment that could be terminated at any time. The best control seemed to be a policy of permanently under stocking with cattle and some agisties have been there for 27 years.

Areas were taken over, were fenced, rabbit control instigated and after several years, cattle was introduced. Priority was given to farmers who had land resumed from them. Then adjoining landholders, soldier settlers and others in that order.

The area was in the 1950's a sheep area with very few cattle in the district. I almost had to beg farmers to put cattle on agistment. It later became very sought after, and from about 1955 onwards, to avoid problems I always left the final decision as to who were to be agisties to the District Soil Conservationist in Wellington. He was the officer in charge of conservation in the Central West.

The number of agisties slowly grew until there are about 30 of them.

When the dam started to fill with water in 1965 problems started to be experienced by the agisties on the eastern foreshores. The only way out was to drive that cattle over the Weir Trig range through heavily timbered country or devise some other method of crossing the water. The agisties in the Oakey creek area decided to leave as the problems were too many. The agistment was offered to those who had land resumed and adjoining landholders. Their reaction was that the Oakey creek area had always been a rabbit infested area and with the difficult access it wouldn't be worthwhile.

Herb Thomas who had been given a small area earlier had decided to remain so his area was increased and the remaining agistment given to Alf Bennett a returned soldier and his sons, then when a larger even more isolated area the south of Oakey creek became available, Allan and John split off from their father and together with Les Johns formed a partnership.

For a while the cattle were floated across the dam on a raft made out of the tray of a lorry and 44 gallon drums. It was hard work with the up and down level of the dam. Portable yards had to be erected to load the cattle onto the pontoon, on reaching the other side they had to be prodded up a long steep portable ramp onto motor Lorries. After about 12 or 18 months of this it was clear that some other system had to be devised.

Herb Thomas, Joh and Allan Bennett and Les Johns clubbed together and for \$1,00, purchased a surplus Army D.U.K, a 6 cylinder GMC lorry engine drove it, it had a cargo space of about 7ft by 12ft. It was 6-wheel drive while on land and propeller driven in the water. It was driven into the dam then the propeller was switched on. It used 1 gallon of petrol to the mile on water.

After leaving the water we drove up to the cattle yards, loaded the cattle then back across and then taken to the sale yards in Dubbo. The D.U. K had a special cattle float built to fit it and it would carry 4 adult stock or 7 vealers. It was a much better system than the pontoon.

In 1967 the dam filled with water for the first time and remained full for the next 10 years. A series of good years with no rabbits and no sheep gradually increased the bush fire problem. With the dense cover of pasture more cattle were required and this set the scene for the introduction of the Cattle Project.

The Camp Project

In 1968 because of the huge build-up of the Foreshores, the Soil Conservation Service called for more cattle. They weren't in favour of bringing in more agisties and mixing more than one owner in a paddock as this led to arguments and disputation that even Solomon couldn't solve. It had been tried before so the existing agisties were asked to increase their numbers.

John and Allan Bennet had as much as they could handle with their own agistment so their father Alf Bennet who had retired offered his agistment to Ridgecrest. Ridgecrest purchased 35 head of breeders with calves at foot. Over a period of years, further purchases of heifers kept increasing the breeding herd to around 100 head. They were run on an area of about 4,000 acres in the Spring Creek, Oakey Creek area (Northern Bank). The area ran from water frontage to the dam to the top of Weir Trig range at the head of Spring Creek and Weir Trig.

The lower slope and undulating Foreshores presented no problems but the Weir Trig and Spring Creek paddocks were very rough and rugged and almost mountainous in nature with deep ravine like creeks with narrow creek flats and quite a lot of timber. It was very difficult country to muster and hard on both man and horse. Nevertheless, they carried a good body of feed and the cattle did well in them especially at the very light stocking rate of one beast to 30 – 40 acres.

At this rate a good cover of grass was always there for erosion control. The prolific spring and autumn growth was largely controlled by the cattle and this largely took care of the fire hazard.

A working bee was organized and with timber cut nearby a set of yards capable of holding 200 head of cattle were built. The large yards were made from silo mesh with a top rail; and smaller working yards of post and rail with a drafting and marking race fitted with a bail head. The cattle were held by the neck in the bail for ear marking and dehorning etc. No branding was ever done. The yards were built about 1 km from the water and a large high loading ramp was built enabling the Army D.U.K to be loaded.

The cattle remained in Alf Bennett's name on the soil Conservation books. The rotary club ran a similar project for a few years in the name of one of its members in the Muckerawa area.

A small holding yard with an adjustable loading ramp was built on the western bank near the soil conservation services main depot. There was a good access road out to Wellington from here. Cattle to be sold were loaded onto the D.U.K on the eastern bank yards and driven down to and across about 1 mile of water and out up to the holding yard. The trip took about one-hour return.

At about sundown they would be loaded on the Bennett's truck or a hired semi-trailer and driven to Dubbo sale yards, it being a much better market than Wellington with scale weighing and three sales a week. Cattle prices were very good in the late 60's and early 70's. In the mid 70's the bottom dropped right out of the market and returns barely covered the agistment and handling fees. They recovered again somewhat in the late 70's and early 80's but never to the high of the late 60's and early 70s.

The Bennett brothers had 6 to 8 horses running in the area to handle their cattle, they were only grass fed and could only be ridden one day and sometimes were knocked up by dinner time when mustering the rough steep country. These horses were also used to handle the camp cattle.

You could say from the this that you had a fairly comprehensive outline of how the project was run; but how wrong you would be, only the mechanics of it has been described. What about the bond of fellowship that develops between people working together and dependent on one another for the own safety working as a team and acknowledging silently each other's skills, giving and taking with no bosses but with every one realizing that there is a job to be done and more than willingly hoping in and doing it.

The early morning start from home as some would have to travel about 50 miles to be there at 7:00 AM required a 5 o'clock rise. Morning, afternoon tea and lunch, everyone had enough for two men as the work was hard after the 'mob' was in the yards and you needed to "re-stoke your boiler" to be able to keep going.

We would all meet around the D.U.K, check the oil, fuel up and check that the drain plugs we in. The D.U.K leaked enough water without any extra through missing plugs. It did however, have two bilge pumps that was supposed to be able to take the equivalent of water rushing in a 4-inch hole. The Army had

disposed of the D.U.K because rust was starting to eat away at the body and it needed constant patching. Someone once predicted it would sink in the middle of the dam and the only remaining evidence would be a few flakes of rust floating on top.

There were several occasions when this would have been a possibility however it wasn't until about 1980 that it had to be decommissioned forever after 12 years or more of sterling service.

Back to 7 am when we would load up all the esky's, saddles, whips, bridles and a bucket of oats to catch Trixie or Ruby when we reached the horse paddock on the other side. With Allan or John Bennett at the controls down into the water we would go. It took a long time to get used to driving off land into the water. You needed to have a fairly good mechanical knowledge to drive the D.U.K in case it coughed and spluttered in the middle of the crossing caused by a petrol stoppage or some other ailment. It was fatal to not have a few tools on board. There were only a couple of times in her history when it had to be towed to shore. More about one of these occasions later.

The water could be sparkling like diamonds with millions of facets lit by the sunlight, or dead calm like a mill pond with oil poured on it was in sharp contrast to the white capped waves that would break over the front of the D.U.K when a good Westerly with a 5 mile blow across the dam or an Easterly down Oakey creek was like blue ocean water with waves 2 to 3 feet high and the call would come "Put up the splash board" and then we would head directly into the waves.

None of us were white water sailors but somehow we always managed to make it and if it stopped midstream, Allan or John would be head down, tail up tinkering among the bits and pieces under the bonnet. With the cattle crate taking up all of the cargo space, everyone sat around the driving compartment on the foredeck (the bonnet of the engine that was quite roomy).

Two of our most faithful helpers were Des and Bev Wykes (Twin brothers) from Yeoval. The D.U.K would no sooner be in the water then out would come, their lunch bags, according to them it was time for a snack at 7.30am! They would then produce a fishing line and a tin of worms and bait their hooks. As soon as we reached the eastern bank, one of them would fly off over the side and throw in a set line for a possible catfish and rarely did they go home without one.

On reaching the other side the six wheels would be engaged and the D.U.K waddled out of the eater, then a stop to disengage the propeller and on our way

across the horse paddock until the horses were sighted. Three or four of us would jump down with bridles and oats. The idea was to catch at least one of the horses and then drive the rest of them to the yard and mostly it worked with the oats, without too much trouble.

We'd saddle up Trixie, Peggy and Tarzan (a big black stallion that Allan owned), he was very quiet and the only jet propelled horse I've ever known. I think he must've had a spare windpipe that went straight back to his rear end with subsequent loud explosions. He was a good stayer was the old Tarzan. Then there was Dandy, a chestnut gelding who hated water in a small creek; wire was another hate. To get over a creek he would take a mighty leap almost unseating an unwary rider. He would also jump a mile at the sound or sight of fencing wire. He was also a good stayer and somehow I often found myself on his back. The horses learn to chase and wheel and prop and turn when after a break away from the mob, you had to be on your toes. I guess I was a bit lucky having grown up with horses like Allan and John. I think that I could ride before I could walk. Before joining the army, I spent 12 months jackerooing on a cattle station in Central Queensland at Springsure. I would estimate that I rode 13,000 miles for that year. I lived in the saddle. Some of the younger farm boys who helped on the foreshores grew up with Honda, Suzuki and Yamaha motorcycles (Which had sadly replaced horses on the farms these days) but motorcycles were of very little use on Burrendong Foreshores.

There was Blue Boy and Blaze who was sired by Tarzan but who I rechristened "lead legs" as she had no get-up and go at all. Rose was a smaller type of Grey, a good stock horse and a sucker for oats; she always played the "Judas" when we were trying to catch the horses. Allan had a grey gelding called Peter one of the best stock horses. One day Allan and John were mustering some of their own cattle on the southern side of Oakey Creek. The country is very steep and the cattle wanted to go anyway but up and over the range. Pete had a heart attack and breathed his last on the top of the range; it was probably from over exertion we think. We were about one mile away from the yards with the mob when it happened. John was riding toward the front on the left wing. We saw him undo the girth and take the bridle off, shoulder the saddle and continue on foot, as Peggy just wouldn't go any further.

Please don't get the idea that we were rough on the horse, actually they received a fair bit of consideration. These were just two incidents in the 12 years of mustering in some of the roughest country in N.S.W.

There were other horses whose name don't readily come to mind that were shunted back and forth between the Bennett's farm and the Foreshores. There is a certain 'mystique' for want of a better word that grows between men and horses and the tear jerking cowboy songs about "Old Faithful" really do, have a strong basis. You really have missed out on something in life if you haven't known it.

I mentioned Bev and Des Wykes as being involved. Ben's father-in-law is Herb Thomas and when Herb retired to the coast for health reasons, Bev took over his cattle agistment and eventually ran a large proportion of the camp cattle under his name. Alf Bennett retired from the scene and John and Allan ran the balance under their names. The total number had now grown to 150 breeding cows with 4 or 5 bulls. This meant we were handling sometimes over 300 head with calves and yearlings. There was quite a lot of work as well as the mustering for marking and dehorning and treatment for lice.

The bulk of the work fell on the Bennett brothers with the help coming from mainly the Yeoval, Bournewood area and in later years it was good to see the younger chaps like Hugh Morris, Greg and Tony Johnson, Mark Pickford and John's children Jennifer. Gary and Craig and Allan's children Ian and Rae were on the scene and on the horses helping wherever possible. They were others who turned up on odd occasions and their help was always appreciated. Then there were the wives at home, who worried a bit when 7 or 8 and sometimes 9 o'clock arrived and their husbands had not arrived home. We were mostly able to allay their fears with a telephone call. There were times when Allen and John would not get home until midnight or later after taking cattle to the Dubbo sale yards.

I guess I've been side-tracked a few pages back when we arrived at the yards and caught the horses we would have a bite to eat and a cuppa as we may not be back with the mob until 2 o'clock or later.

With a little trepidation we climb into the saddles knowing that at the end of the day, there is going to be sore backsides and rubbed knees and legs; it will be a case of stand up for tea tonight. We even tried wearing panty hose, and it works but they are too hot in summertime. The hairs on your legs knot and roll up into little balls before being painfully rubbed off by chafing. The panty hose prevents that. Jon and Allan scorned them but others aren't as tough as they are or as saddle hardened.

We all head across the paddock to be mustered as we ride we talk country talk of the wheat crops, stock prices and we also solve most of the world's problems!

Everyone is fresh and there's a feeling of freedom and back to nature as we made our way through the bush, up the side of the ridges and on to the top where we split into pairs and eventually into singles as we pass cattle in to the centre where the mob slowly grows. With whips cracking to frighten the stragglers out of the timber and steep gullies and off the mountain top and down the side where it would have been prudent to get off the horses and walk but we seldom did.

Occasionally a family of wild pigs would trot off up a watercourse and kangaroos and wallabies were always bounding around. The views from the top of some of the ranges was superb and ever changing from bright sunlight with fluffy white clouds reflected in the water of the dam to the misty rain and thunderclouds and the drenching downpour. Often the track led past the remains of long forgotten mine shafts with a few wheels and cogs, shafts and tins and bits and pieces all that remain of the gold sluice that once separated the precious metal from the dross. Spring Creek had been a very rich mining area and had been mined for almost its full length.

In my early days on Burrendong an old ex-peddler Charlie the Turk who had travelled the country in a wagonette selling just about everything had retired to Spring Creek gold field. He lived under two sheets of corrugated iron with a bit of sacking around it located in the middle of a clump of Tree of Heaven and Blackberries. He always had a patch of "bumpkins" as he called them growing on the creek. He fossicked for gold on the creek and regularly sent money home to Turkey. He was eventually found dead by one of the locals. There was a lot of talk about "Charlie's hoard", but with the bank account he had and the money going to Turkey one had to put a big question mark near it.

One of the rabbiters who had spent most of his life in the area had a pickle bottle full of gold dust, and a woman fossicking on a mullock heap had picked up a 5-ounce nugget fastened to a rock. The Burrendong nugget, one of the largest found was discovered on the top of this ridge between Spring Creek and the Potato patch, so named because of gold found there was at shovel depth in the grass roots. There was also Battle Flat in the Spring Creek area where 2 miners were reputed to have fought for a week with time off for sleep and meals. Then there was Bulls Pound and Flour Bag creek and Sore Arse Creek where you could sit and wash dirt all day and that is all that you got. The Burrendong goldfields must have had a picturesque history it's a shame that someone didn't put it all down on paper before all of the old timers passed on. Here I am on a major side-track again.

The mob would move slowly down the middle of Spring Creek Valley with various riders coming in with small mobs to join the main one. You really rode over history in this area. Many were the remaining stone chimneys all that were left of some miner's hut. Who knows what joy and sorrows, what plans that often I guess came to naught took place around the old fireplaces of the bark or bag humpy's long since rotted away. Down through a narrow gorge where the Tree of Heaven (The sacred tree of the Chinese and brought out from China to be planted on their graves) now listed as noxious weeds made passage almost impossible. Some of the cattle head for the ridge. He who has the least tired horse would follow them up and turn them back to the creek bottom.

It was impossible to get a clean muster under such conditions and often was the jump into the yard fence to avoid the 9 – 12 month old "Mickey" bull that had avoided previous musters. Finally, the mob streams out onto the lower open country and its round onto the left and right wings to keep them headed in the right direction and to keep an eye on the leaders or they will be off and up a blind hill and back to the creeks and mountains they seem to love. Young calves don't seem to be able to follow the mob through the gate and run along the fence on the wrong side so it's after them and turn them back then on to the yards. The outriders slow the leaders and the rest push the slow ones into the mob with whips cracking and riders going in all directions because this is the time that the cunning ones want to break away. Everyone pushes towards the yards, not too fast or they will go over the fence then give them time to squeeze through the ten foot gate and once they are in, the gate shuts.

Now it's time to unsaddle the horses and have dinner and a rest for 5 minutes. Not likely it's already 2 or 3 o'clock and the yard over there has to be full of vealers for the semi-trailer that is arriving at sundown, so we rush a mob into the drafting yards and sort out a load for the D.U.K and get it on its way.

The 2 fellows who go with it usually Allan Bennett and a mate can eat on the way across the water and the rest of us grab a bit of lunch, solve a few more of the world's problems or relate some incidents of the day muster and then back to the grind of drafting out sellers, marking calves, and that one needs a horn taken off and cull that old cow, tag that young heifer to keep as a breeder, and don't mark that young bull calf because he's out of that stud cow that the Orr family in Parkes gave us and will probably make a good bull for a different mob. And so it went on fill up the forcing yards and get kicked and squashed and covered in manure but keep going. The vealers and bulls are all sorted out the calves have

been marked and returned to the mob. The sun is setting very low on the horizon but there's still the job to do, so saddle up the weary horses then with 2 people on the gate one to get the total count and the other the number for agistment. The old cows know what's on and don't need any second bidding as the gate is opened and they stream through and if they are being returned to the same paddock as they came from will probably beat the horses there. They have a real homing instinct. There are the slow ones and some calves feeling a bit sore and sorry but they amble along and we let them take their time. With the last one through, the gate is shut and we turn the horses for the ride back to the yards.

Strange? Leaving the yards half an hour ago they could hardly lift one leg after the other but now sensing that the day's work is over their heads start to nod as they chafe at the bit and the pace quickens, they would race one another if we let them have their head but we are stiff and sore but maybe a bit of a canter when we get down on to the flat. We wonder if the D.U.K. is back yet for the last load.

Back at the yards we unsaddle the horses and let them go in the horse paddock, several hundred acres fenced off from the cattle and always well grassed – they earned it.

We collect up all of our bits and pieces, the boys have got the last vealers on board. Esky's, saddles etc. go up on the foredeck and we are on our way across that paddock to the edge of the water. Bev and Des reel in their fishing lines and we slide into the water. Out come the esky's and on the trip across we eat what is left of our lunches often sharing it around. It doesn't pay to take anything home as our wives will conclude that we don't want as much next time. Well not really, most of us probably packed our own and kissed our wives a very sleepy goodbye as they cuddled back into the blankets early this morning. To any that were up bright eyed my apologies.

The sun is now a huge golden ball shimmering on the horizon and the surface of the water has turned to gold, now fading to all the colours of the rainbow and to a steely grey in the nooks and the bays hidden from the sun's rays.

It is good to be alive, and thank God there have been no serious accidents. We're on our way to the holding yards where Russell Hough is waiting with his semi-trailer. We unload the D.U.K into the yard then Russell backs his semi in and it's a yahoo and don't bruise the beef as the trailer is loaded. The tail tags have been put on the cattle tails on the way across the water. Some of the fellows have taken the D.U.K up the rise near the Soil Conservation Depot where it is left

parked. They unload the cattle crate with a winch and a rope over a tall leaning tree, there is three or four inches of sloppy manure and urine in the bottom so the crate is tipped on its side to drain. The six plugs are taken out of the D.U. K to drain the surplus water out.

We say our goodbyes and get going before Russell with the semi as the first five miles are fairly steep and hilly and it will take him a lot longer than us to grind his way up hill and down dale to the public road. Home now, to a lovely hot bath to soak away the aches and pains and then a good satisfying hot meal before bed. Bed seems extra soft and welcoming tonight.

In the mid-seventies a reasonable road was constructed over Weir Trig Range, it is very steep in places but negotiable by motor lorries so that when the D.U.K finally gave up the ghost in 1980 the cattle could be moved out by road from the Eastern Foreshores, it is a long slow trip even when the shire roads were reached.

In July 1980 I retired from The Soil Conservation Service and at no time during the 30 years that I was at the Foreshores did I ever have to ask any of the agisties to completely remove their cattle. Sometimes there had to be cut backs in numbers that had grown excessive. The control of the Foreshores after my retirement was taken over by the “academics” and they had no knowledge of the area whatsoever. It got a bit dry in the winter of 1981 and they ordered all cattle completely off.

The following wet spring and wet summer resulted in an enormous body of feed and everyone went through that and later months with fear and trembling expecting bushfires. During this period the cattle were first agisted in the Coonamble area and subsequently around the Baptist farmers in the Bournewood, Yeoval, Wellington and Gollan areas then as the drought of 1982 began to be felt the numbers were reduced and calves sold etc. Later The Soil Conservation Service decided to take cattle back on agistment. Allan and John Bennet had sold all of their cattle and didn't intend going back.

The profitability was so reduced that the committee decided to wind up the Project altogether and invest the proceeds. The sale of the cattle is now waiting for a break in the drought when prices could be much better, meantime the cattle are doing very well on the large body of dry feed that was carried over the spring and summer of 1981, 1982. So we are coming to the close of an era, one we will all look back on nostalgically. This will provide many a good tale to be told when we are all on walking sticks.

Ridgecrest in 1982 was now free of debt. Much development had been accomplished and it all owed a great deal to the Camp Project, Allan and John Bennett and their families and other helpers who responded to the call when needed like in the building of Ridgecrest. We also give praise to GOD for what was accomplished and for the fact that no one was seriously injured despite the busters from the horses at full gallop, charging, kicking, pushing, poking, horning, bulls and cows and some fairly hairy situations while afloat in the old army D.U.K.

Thank you Lord

E.V.GRAHAM

Christmas 1982

An Epilogue to the Camp Cattle Project June 1997

Finally, the “Goose that laid the Golden Eggs’ has died. Admittedly it lingered on for about 15 years longer than expected with the eggs not quite so large or as frequent but nevertheless providing the money to pay for continuing maintenance and development at Ridgecrest. Despite the racking of brains and the great perceived need of the future no one came up with a replacement “Gosling” or even a Duck.

What am I rambling on about? All of the cattle agistment on Burrendong Foreshores had been terminated and this includes the agistment allocated to John and Allan Bennett, the proceeds of which over the years were the mainstay of the maintenance of Ridgecrest.

Alf Bennett and sons John and Allan took up the agistment of a very difficult area of the foreshores that was isolated by the rising waters of Burrendong dam and which had been vacated by other agisties in about 1965. The only acceptable road access was on the Western(Mumbil) side of the dam. The Oakey Creek area on the Eastern Foreshores had no road access except for a 4-wheel drive track over a very steep mountain range. Certainly cattle could not be transported or driven that way.

The local farmers surrounding the dam when offered the Oakey Creek agistment said they knew the area as the home of a huge rabbit population that no one had been able to control since rabbits had arrived in Australia in the early 1900’s so

they declined the offer. The Bennett's threw in their lot with Herb Thomas who had a small area of agistment in the Oakey Creek area, and was floating his cattle across on a pontoon. From there on, refer to the early chapters of this story that was about 1965. It wasn't until around 1970 that Alf Bennett retired and offered to continue to run cattle in his name with the proceeds going to Ridgecrest, this idea was accepted by the Camp Committee, however the bulk of the work and running of the project fell on the shoulders of Allan and John Bennett and without their tireless, unselfish effort the project would not have survived the first few years of the 27 years of its existence, with the last 10 or more years left solely to them. A fantastic effort of commitment, most people aren't prepared to commit themselves to even the most simple task on a one off occasion, but 27 years! Just to say thank you seems inadequate. After 1980 the condition of the agistable country around the dam slowly deteriorated. The management was poor and left in the hands of people with no expertise in Range management. The Foreshores had been redeemed from a rabbit infested area covered in tobacco Bush and Stink Wort to one where there was an excellent cover of native grasses and almost completely free from rabbits.

You could drive a 4-wheel drive vehicle around the Foreshores in the late 70's and very early 80's and not sight even one rabbit.

Kangaroo numbers had been kept under control by yearly culling; wild pig numbers had been similarly treated to an eradication program. The Foreshores control program state-wide became a back number in the mid 70's with decreasing allocations of funds and interest by the hierarchy. Things go out of fashion in Government departments similar to women's clothes, and the flavour of the time changed to "Mine Restoration" and control of erosion in urban developments and similar projects.

Without any real interest from the hierarchy at Head Office in Sydney the management of the Foreshores fell more and more under local control and many decisions left anyone interested in the environment and the good of the Foreshores asking WHY?

A major blunder in my opinion was the introduction of sheep on agistment in early 1980. Just what this move was supposed to achieve and who or what benefited from it we decline to say, but it certainly wasn't Burrendong Foreshores. Overstocking with sheep and rabbits had led originally to the

degraded state of the whole Foreshore area, and it had taken 30 years and the expenditure of in excess of \$2,000,000 to reclaim it.

All attempts to maintain a rabbit control program had been abandoned in 1981 and the work force had been reduced to 2 men. Two men on 56, 000 acres someone has to be joking.

The sheep quickly started denuding the area of its erosion control grass cover. Sheep are very selective feeders and all the better type of grasses disappear. First everything is chewed down to ground level and you couldn't devise a better system of distributing St. Johns Wort seed, sheep with their 4-stomach set up. Seed will carry for weeks in the stomach. The whole environment is further degraded by kangaroos, not in their 10's or in their 100's but in their thousands. It is not uncommon to see mobs of 200 or 300 on open grazing areas around sundown.

By the 1990' the agistment of cattle had become a very uncertain proposition. Grazing was now so poor that it was no longer possible to turn off fat vealers and yearlings. Agistment rates had risen over the years and most agisties were reappraising their position. Huge areas had now reverted to pine and eucalyptus scrub.

They have now been offered the country previously agisted and in some type of lease arrangement where they will be required to maintain fences and noxious weed control, also jointly with other agisties restore to a trafficable condition and maintain all access roads, many of which due to neglect over the last 17 years have become un-trafficable. One agisties has estimated it would take \$30,000 to restore the access road from Cudgegong Park to the agistment area at the head of Oakey Creek to trafficable condition.

It will be interesting to see if they get any takers. Allan and John Bennett won't be among their numbers.

The winding up of the Cattle Project was inevitable and I'm sure I speak on behalf of all our Western District Churches, a Mighty Big Thank You to all involved.

Well Done, Thou Good and Faithful Servants

A couple of incidents that made life interesting back in those days

A couple of weeks ago the navy testing out a new sonic torpedo like gadget, that was towed through the water located a plane that had crashed into the dam 13 years ago. That must have been in 1969. The pilot and one woman passenger were thrown out and drowned before being rescued, however, their bodies were recovered. The other two women who were in the rear seats went down with the plane. When the plane was recovered the body of one of the women minus a head was still in the wreckage preserved as if she had been in a morgue freezer. By the cold (2 Celsius) temperature of the water at the bottom of the lake.

What has this to do with the Cattle Project. It's an interesting sidelight in which the D.U.K. became very involved. The search started immediately in 1969 for the plane and we spent a couple of days dragging grappling irons behind the D.U.K. then the navy arrived with half a dozen men with several divers and a sonar device that was taken to the bottom of the dam by a diver and would search an area about the size of a tennis court, so we were told.

They decide that the D.U.K. would make an ideal diving platform. For several days the owners volunteered their services and the D.U.K. free of charge, however, the search seemed hopeless. The search now became very organised and official under the control of a Department Civil Aviation Officer from Sydney. A real X-pert (and you all know the definition), he did some hypothesizing about where the plane would have crashed if he had been the pilot and flying it up over the spillway from the North. Despite protestations he moved the search area away from where all locals knew it had gone in)The crash had been observed from the spillway and the park.) Boats had picked up the two bodies and there had been oil on the water but it made no difference to our friend from the D.C.A he moved the search about half a mile away.

The Navy decide to hire the D.U.K and pay an hourly rate with a driver and a deck hand provided by the owners. I had several days on it. The navy captain or whatever he ran it like it was HMAS D.U.K Burrendong. When the waves started lapping over fore and aft deck in which there were a few holes he had his sailors plugging holes with hemp rope.

The search proved unsuccessful however, the money paid by the navy more than covered the purchase price of the D.U.K plus the running expenses during the search.

I had one quite harrowing and in some ways amusing episode with the D.U.L. A farmer who had some leased some property on the eastern Foreshores wanted to bring a Ferguson (small wheeled) tractor across the dam to his property in the Stuart Town area. As the Bennett boys couldn't get out to do it I volunteered to take the D.U.K over one day after work and bring him and the tractor across. Everything went well until we were about one third of the way across the mile stretch of water, when "bang". We found out later that a piston had broken into pieces.

There we were Barry and I floating around about 200 yards from the nearest land, an island of about 10 acres We could hear the eater trickling in and realised that if something wasn't done we would eventually sink. Barry reckoned that he wasn't going to swim but he would have had to before morning. The sun had gone down, so I stripped off to my underpants, grabbed a Mae West life jacket and headed out for the island. The underpants filled with water and were a bit loose so the first thing I discarded was them. You may float around forever with a Mae West life jacket on however it's impossible to make any progress swimming in one so it was the next thing to go. Now there were only my false teeth between me and complete nudity and they were giving me trouble. I've got a very flat palate and they don't stay stuck very well at the best of times and with all the water flowing in and out of my mouths as I free-styled toward the island and I was in danger of losing them. Fairly puffed and blowing hard I made the island. It's all rocks and my feet are tender, so I hopped across like a cat on hot bricks to the other side, considerably closer to the shore but there's still a fair swim to a second island and then a third one before shore. Thank heavens there are tree tops poking out of the water in between so I can have a bit of a spell if need be. I deposit my teeth on a small cairn of stones and now naked as the day I came into the world (well not quite as I still have a few bottom teeth and quite a head of hair) I plunge in. Once more a spell in the middle hanging on to tree branches then on to the second island then a very small third one a few yards to the shore. I do a streak up to the Soil Conservation Depot about one mile away, find some old overalls as the dark comes.

I always keep a key hidden so I could unlock the shed and get the 17-foot half cabin launch hooked on to a Land Rover, a tow rope and down to the water and out to where the D.U.K had been. In the murk and darkness, it was nowhere to be seen. Which way would it have drifted? Downwind so off I go and eventually located it about a mile away with a very anxious Barry on board.

It's taken in a lot of water with no pumps going and it's too far back to the main shore in the dark so we decided to tow it to the nearest land, a large island and beach it. We chose the flattest looking place we could find and ran the D.U.K in until the front wheels ground in the mud, and tied it up to a convenient tree. That's the best we can do, so off home for the night picking up my teeth on the way.

Allan and John Bennett came out next morning with chains and pulley blocks. The front of the D.U.K was visible but the back half was submerged, so with much grunting and pulling (The D.U.K weighs six tons, had a tractor on it and was full of water) we slowly pulled it onto land. (We couldn't get a vehicle there because it was an island).

When the top of the rear deck appeared above water, we started a fire fighting pump to pump the water out and all went well until "Muggins" decided to refill the firefighting engine with petrol without stopping it, he knew that he shouldn't and suddenly there were flames everywhere. I threw the 4-gallon jerry can onto the shore leaving a trail of fire burning across the water. Allan Moorby the S.C.S. foreman who was moored alongside in a barge took off like a bat out of hell. I threw some old bags over the fire-fighting engine and it went out with no damage done. Meanwhile, Allan Bennett had dived overboard and is splashing water on one of the D.U.K tyres that has caught alight. With that, things returned to normal, well almost. A lucky escape the jerry can burnt out harmlessly on the bank. I was a bit singed but not burnt, a very graphic lesson and that I shouldn't have needed to be taught, that you don't fill a petrol engine while it's running.

We got the D.U.K afloat and towed it around to the Depot and towed it out with a five-ton lorry. Eventually the motor was replaced. Barry headed off home on his tractor very thankful that both it and himself weren't at the bottom of the dam.

The Lion

He was about 2 years old when we first noticed him. Fleet of foot he could out-run any of our horses; fences meant nothing to him, you could see daylight between him and the top barb as he took to the air. He is as cunning as a fox and his neck would arch displaying rippling muscle along the full length. He was rather streamlined around the loins. I think it was Allan Bennett who named him "The Lion" he was evidently missed for a couple of years in the muster and then he became almost impossible to yard. He was a Hereford bull and he taunted us

for the next 2 or 3 years before he was finally trapped and shipped out. His home was at the junction of Little Oakey and Black Wattle Creek and he knew it like the back of his “hoof”. He would follow along on the edge of the mob until we got within a kilometre of the yards. You could see him getting nervous and then he would take off. The only thing that would have stopped him was a bullet and it was threatened often enough.

On one occasion he got preoccupied in the middle of the mob, probably with his current lady love and we had him in the yards at the head of Oakey Creek. Unfortunately, we weren't shipping cattle out that day. We decided the only thing to do was castrate him, this would probably take some of the rush out of him and then we would ship out next time. We pushed him into the long drafting race that held about 3 cows and he was in the middle.

The operation was to be carried out just where he stood in the middle of the race. He had different ideas. One stroke of the knife and he rose in the air on his hind legs, clambered over the cow in front of him, over the crush gate and then down over the outer fence and to freedom in his beloved Oakey Creek area. That was the last I ever saw of him. Several years later after I had retired John Bennett told me they had yarded him again and shipped him out on a lorry from the yards. He deserves to be remembered. “**The Lion**”. Remember all you fellows, his downfall on both occasions was his Lady Love.

A Yarn from a Master Yarn-Spinner

BILL FRAPELL

An old identity of the Burrendong area.

Bill had the country leased from Water Resources Commission in the Cudgegong area. He lived in Mumbil at this time but spent the weekdays camped in an old woolshed on his lease on the Cudgegong River. He never had the time to stop and talk to you he was always too busy, but if you had the time to stop and listen you could be there from midday to sundown.

Two teenagers were camped on the river doing some fishing & enjoying the great outdoors. They came to visit Bill one afternoon and the conversation went like this –

Bill: “How’s the fishing boys, have you caught any>”

Boys: “Yes, we caught a 2lb catfish and a big beautiful 20lb cod”

Bill: “I had a little experience I’d like to share with you. One dark wet night not long ago, it was raining buckets and the river was starting to rise. I thought I had better go and check some sheep I had across the river (a small boulder and tree strewn stream) so I lit my old kerosene lantern and headed down where a log crossed the stream. I got nearly across and I half stumbled and dropped the lantern in the water that was now running fairly deep under the log. I did my job without it. However, a week ago I had reason to again go across that log, and what do you know boys? There at the bottom of a pool now not so deep was my lantern. I reached down and pulled it out and blow me down if it wasn’t still alight and burning brightly”.

Boys:” Aw gee Mr. Frappell that couldn’t be true would it?”

Bill:” I tell you what, you cut the weight of your codfish in half and I’ll blow out the lantern”.