

AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING COMMISSIONSCIENCE UNIT"THE HIGH COUNTRY"

A Documentary Feature

Broadcast: 15th August, 1970.
9.00 pm
2nd Network

THEME: "Song of the Mountains" - Settlers

WOMAN:

Jean Findlay

People find themselves in the mountains when they can't in any other environment. Some people use it as a form of escapism, some people use it as a form of relaxation, but to many people the starkness and loneliness of the mountains has a tremendous sort of personal magnetism.

THEME: "Song of the Mountains"

NARRATOR:

The personal magnetism of "The High Country" - it's like a disease really, I'm sure most of the summer visitors and some of the skiers never catch it, but there is magnetism in the mountains. Once you've seen the changing moods of the mountains from a warm sunny day to falling snow in a few hours; once you've seen the people who opened up the mountains, from the dour cattlemen to the wild men of the Snowy Scheme, suddenly or slowly you become aware that here is an area of Australia which is different and the difference is so great that when you wind your way up the road from Jindabyne, you feel like you're passing into another land, into "The High Country".

But what causes the difference? Is it the land, or the people, or both? In 1797, survivors of the Sydney Cove which was wrecked in Bass Strait, crossed the mouth of the Snowy River on their way to Sydney but the story of white settlement began about the middle of the 19th century. The squatters from the plains around Yass and Canberra needed more pasture so they steadily moved south through the Monaro country around Cooma and Dalgety. In 1840, Strezelecki climbed the Australian Alps from the western side and named Mount Kosciusko and from then on the rush into The High Country was on.

First the cattlemen, then goldminers and other fossickers, timber-getters, sportsmen and tourists. With all these people interested in such a small area of land, could it possibly survive in its native condition? If so, would it stay that way?

It was the men droving the cattle who really explored The High Country.

SOUNDS OF CATTLE

1ST MAN:

Leo Barry

The old Pendergast who'd be my great grandfather, was the first settler in this Jindabyne district somewhere about the 1830's and from there they went on to Omeo and a great number of the Pendergasts went and stayed at Omeo and developed big

cattle runs. My grandmother on the Pendergast side came back from Omeo and settled in the area that I'm in and the Barrys have been there ever since. You wonder why we stay so long, well, some of us probably haven't got enough brains to get away - or enough finance. But I think once you get into a climate like this, although it's severe in winter, it's nice in the summer and it's got a lot of things about it that's better than some of the other areas and also a lot of things that are not as good. But it's pretty good cattle country, and grows fine wool and I think you get acclimatised to the cold.

But I think after a hundred years of grazing by the old graziers, uncontrolled, they did anything they wanted to do, they've left the mountains in good shape, and without any doubt, in a satisfactory condition.

CATTLE DROVERS ETC. CATTLE NOISES

NARRATOR: And, as the cattle came into the country, so the drovers of the area developed fame for their horsemanship. It was no mean feat to chase a mob of cattle or horses through the steep timbered gullies of The High Country. And the legends grew.

"MAN FROM SNOWY RIVER" MUSIC

2ND MAN: *Berry McCaffie* I've caught the bucks, I've done every other job that could be done even got the privilege of being the best, had the best pair of pick-up horses here, me and me second cousin, that ever went to Cooma. Well, the worst horse, three blokes had a go at him and they couldn't keep him on his feet, once you beat him, he'd throw himself down. Well, I sit on this horse and I said to me mate, I said "Now look, I tell you what to do with him when he goes down again, I said you get one of them bunches of crackers and light 'em and sit them under his tail", and I'm still sitting on him. And he said, oh he said "You'll probably get hurt". And I said "No." I said "He's a real coward, this is a coward, once you beat him he'd had it." Anyway, I said "You try - all risk's mine". I said "If I can't ride him, I'm not going to worry about being dumped." But anyhow he put these crackers under him - two went off and he looked round and he put his head down like that to me leg and he give me a nip that way. And next time up he jumps and another cracker went off under him - two or three bloody good farts and he was finished, he wouldn't bloody . . .

"MAN FROM SNOWY RIVER" MUSIC

2ND MAN: *Berry McCaffie* We'd ride from Kosciusko pub down here and we'd give old Jack Shannon a scorching at the old pub at Kosci., we'd come down and we'd ride in and out the old pub what's under the water now. Anyhow, we'd ride in and out and jump down three flights of stairs with these horses and out and in and back in the other side and old Leo Hall was in the pub and he said, oh he said, "Boys, you's is going to get hurt here." And he said "No more drink for ya, no more drink". Well I said "If there's no more drink, there's no more ridin' the horse here". So I said "You're doin' all right" I said "You was quite happy" but he said "Them horses . . ." look, the sparks was flyin' out of the concrete like that.

"MAN FROM SNOWY RIVER" MUSIC

NARRATOR: But the country is still hard and the climate is harder for

those used to the heat of Australia.

3RD MAN:

Jack Shannon

As far as I'm concerned, I was only here for a couple of weeks and oh, when I got here I decided, it was snowing like . . . a fellow named Peterson was the licensee of the Kosciusko Hotel and chaps named Billy Dunn, Brian Williams and John Abbot-Smith, they were driving the snowmobiles and anyhow after about five hours in one of these machines, arrived at the Chalet and my mate came out, a chap called Len Gardner and he said "How are you?" I said "I'm frozen; when does this thing go back?" He said "Tomorrow morning" I said "Well, book me a seat on it." So anyhow he said "No, you're not fair dinkum are ya?" I said "My word, I'm frozen - back to Sydney for me". He said "Where?". "Balmain, that'll do me mate. I'll go back and watch the Tigers win the next competition" - which they done in that year by the way. Well, anyhow, my mate said "We're in a bit of trouble up here, there's a chap called Watney - I think he was the Manager of the Chalet at that particular time, and a bloke named Wynn - I think he's one of the Directors of K. G. Murrays. Anyway, he talked me into staying for a couple or more days and I finished up in the kitchen peeling spuds and "my golly, this is the wrong result" and they said, what did they say? "How would you like to go on the boilers?" and I said "That'll do me, it'll be a bit warmer down there mate." So I stayed there for a couple of more days and Watney come down, he said "Now you've done a very good job and I'm goin' to let you work on your day off", which amounted to about twenty-four quid a fortnight clear in those days. I said "This is good money, this'll do me". Then I happened to sight a little - she was only little then, by the way - girl walking down, I said "That's for me." She was a housekeeper. Well, I met her and that's it boy, I've been here for 20 years.

MUSIC "SONG OF THE MOUNTAINS"

NARRATOR:

I suppose part of the magnetism of the mountains is their uniqueness in our flat continent. But they're more than just a large area of elevated land, for the geologists still have not been able to completely unravel their mysteries.

4TH MAN:

Joe Jennings

For more than 17 years - ever since I came to Canberra - I've been going up into The High Country for scientific work, for sport and for the sheer pleasure of being there. Before the war, I'd be studying what glaciers were doing at the present time in the Arctic and so the Snowies attracted me because only there on the mainland of Australia do we find the effects of recent glaciers. From Kosciusko to Twynam, about 15 to 30 thousand years ago, there were glaciers on the range. Right on the Kosciusko summit, one small glacier dumped rock and soil at its snout to build the curving ridge or moraine which dams up Lake Cootapatamba. Another glacier coming down from Twynam eroded a great armchair hollow in the mountainside and gouged out a basin about 90 feet deep in the rock. This holds Blue Lake, that jewel of a Lake.

Now many people have studied what these glaciers did, the most famous of them was Professor Edgeworth David of Sydney University - a glacial moraine below the Chalet in Spencer's Creek Valley is called "David Moraine" after him. But I've been chiefly concerned with other things, related things, but different things. Now one of them is what the snow patches, the snow banks, are doing now.

Some snow banks last a long time into the summer, occasionally lasting right through the year - one on Twynam can be as much as 120 feet thick. A few years ago we found some of these seasonal snow patches are doing something which only permanent glaciers are supposed to do. They move down the hillside in a mass, dragging stones along with them and scratching and grinding the bedrock with these stones. This rather unusual thing may happen here because in this rather warm sunny climate for snow, it turns into dense ice very quickly. To learn more about this business, we have to camp up at about 6,800 feet in a marvellous site amongst the daisies by a tinkling stream, sometimes it's warm, sometimes it's wet, sometimes it's freezing, sometimes it's wet and freezing. On a summer storm, I've had my bare legs nearly skinned by driving hail, but I wouldn't miss it for the worlds.

NARRATOR: While the Snowy Mountains are thought of as being cold and bleak, the summers are warm and the wildflowers that follow the snows provide a patchwork of brilliant colours that attracts the tourist and the botanist.

Trust the Speed
2ND WOMAN: I first visited the Snowy Mountains in the early 20's as a student and I was interested, just beginning to be interested, in native plants at that time, I knew something about the coastal flora and nothing at all about either inland or mountain flora and found this tremendously interesting.

In the mid 1940's I visited the area again, but this time it was at the invitation of the Snowy Mountains Authority because the conservationists had been concerned about the destruction caused by the engineering works up there and it was at this stage that I became tremendously interested in the Alpine plants. As a botanist, I was particularly impressed with the difference between this flora and the floras of other parts of Australia which by this time, I was beginning to know fairly well. I realised after several years of study in the summer time in this area, the tremendous impact that the climate has on these particular plants, you find there for instance, in high moors, which is perhaps the most interesting part of the area, large numbers of very small plants which are extremely beautiful, not only in flower, but in the compactness and neatness of the plants themselves growing this way in, well, because of the climatic conditions - the tremendous winds, the enormous changes in soil temperature, sudden snowstorms, sudden winds - so that they have to be compact, neat, very often with small leaves, ephemeral in their flowering. They have to take advantage of the very short summer, so that you get a tremendous variety of plants all flowering at the one time, beautiful colour, beautiful form, extraordinary adaptations - plants that clamber over rocks, plants that grow in the lee of rocks and are able to be a little bit more imaginative perhaps you could say, in the way in which they grow - but all extremely different from any other plants in any other part of Australia, comparable only and extraordinarily comparable to the plants that you get in other Alpine areas such as altitudes of say 2,000 - 4,000 feet in Tasmania.

NARRATOR: And to the scientist who looks at the whole of the High Country as one system, an eco-system, there is a special interest.

Alec Costin
5TH MAN: Well, I first became involved in the Australian High Country in the mid 1940's then as an officer of the N.S.W. Soil

Conservation Service and at that stage of the game, the Service was beginning to get worried about the risk of soil erosion in the area but my job specifically was not to investigate soil erosion as such, but to make an inventory of the basic resources of the area, particularly the soils and vegetation as being perhaps the two most important resources from the point of view of water catchment management and soil conservation and so forth.

After that, I spent a time with the Victorian Soil Conservation Authority, again being involved in High Country problems, and I've continued this research interest in high mountain environments in C.S.I.R.O.

Now, I guess we can all ask what is there so special about the Australian High Country? After all, we know high country exists in many other parts of the world and there's plenty of it.

Well, the important thing in the Australian scene of course, is that there's very very little of it in the big chunk of 3 million square miles which is Australia - it's a very very scarce resource and a most unusual environment as far as we're concerned.

Now, when we talk about an unusual environment, what do we mean? I guess the first thing that presents itself to us is that it's the only chunk of really elevated country and this in itself means that the landscape is different from the landscape we find in most other parts of the country, the climate's different, the flora, the vegetation, the soils and so forth, they're all different in their own peculiar way. For example, the climate of course is the only one that gives substantial snowfalls and this has special connotations as far as the use of these areas for winter snow sports and water production is concerned.

Then these special features of the climate which have been more pronounced in the past have meant that several thousand years ago at least locally these mountains were the site of small glaciations and these small glaciations and these have left very characteristic glacial landscape features which we find in few if any other parts of the country. And these glacial features too, include peats and you know, other deposits, tens of thousands of years old, which preserve in them evidences of past soils, vegetation and climatic conditions. In fact, they're an almost unique chronology of past events.

Now, the vegetation and plant species - they do include Australian elements - but above all, they include elements with strong relationships to floras of the old Antarctic continent, New Zealand, South America and even Northern Europe. So also do many of the animal species, and this is what gives this particular part of the world its special interest to the biologist - the fact that here are so many biological relationships evident with groups in other parts of the world.

Now the soil features, too, are rather special. The soils are very rich in organic matter, a very high water-holding capacity, extremely permeable and it's these features with the vegetation and the climate which have resulted in a

special interest being shown in this area for the purposes of water production.

NARRATOR: Water production! After the second world war the cry was for power for industries, factories and houses . . .

MUSIC "PUT A LIGHT IN EVERY COUNTRY WINDOW" - Gary Shearston

NARRATOR: The Snowy Mountains Scheme was the most dramatic upheaval to happen in the mountains since they were formed. In 1886 the Surveyor-General suggested diverting the Snowy River to the Murrumbidgee. From then on schemes to use the rivers of the high country to irrigate the inland and supply power to the cities regularly raised their head.

After sixty years of wild and sensible schemes, of lobbying and politicking, on 7th July, 1949 the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Power Act came into operation. The plan: turn the waters of the Snowy inland and use all the mountain rivers for power production as they fall the 5,000 feet from the high country. This involved one of the world's greatest feats of engineering which is now almost finished. It also involved the flooding of some beautiful valleys and old towns lamented in song and verse like "The Man from Adaminaby" who lost his old town to the great lake of Eucumbene Dam.

READER: "THE MAN FROM ADAMINABY"

A long way back to Kiandra
Over the blue sky's brink
But here's old Adaminaby
Where a man can get a drink.

Cool are the bar and the beer there,
And my old mates gathered round . . .
- "You'll wait a long time for a drink, mate,
The blooming pub's been drowned."

- "Seen a high tide myself there,
The beer right up to our necks" . . .
- "She's sunk like a ship, we tell you,
With all the rest of the wrecks.

Where have you been these years
With your mare and your dogs and your pick?
The whole town's under the water,
Pisé and stone and brick.

While you were sinking your shaft, mate,
Or shearing, was it, or droving,
They shut the old pub right down, mate,
They brought in early closing.

The publican, none too soon,
Has finally lost his licence;
Chimney and shadowy door there
Drink to each other in silence.

Only the shag like a copper
Dives down to the window to peer;
Yabbies crawl over the counter,
Mud-eyes are into the beer.

At the bar door the bunyip
Lies down and scratches his fleas:
And a great wave of the Snowy
Says "Time, gentlemen, please".

There's drink enough still of a kind, mate,
If your taste runs far as water,
It's over the cafe, too, mate,
It's over the tallest poplar.

But the beer she's off for ever
And so is Adaminaby,
It's all under water making
Hydroelectricity."

- "Hydroelectricity
Don't make no sense to me
And there's the whole town still standing
So far as I can see.

It runs right down to the farms there
Under the shining air
And pink the apple-trees bloom there,
Like a white cloud the pear.

She's the old town as ever
And all my mates will remember me
When I go down as always
"O drink in Adaminaby."

- "She's drowned, she's gone, she's flooded!"
- "Ah, tell the marines," he cried,
And called his black dogs to him
And spurred the white mare's side,

And rode on down the hillside
As he had done for years
And straight out under the water
And drank there with his peers.

NARRATOR: The Lake of Eucumbene Dam acts as a central storage reservoir. Water from the winter snows and rain is stored there and in a series of smaller dams. When power is required in Victoria or N.S.W. the water is diverted through the tunnels to the generating stations some of them buried hundreds of feet underground. Almost a hundred miles of tunnels have been excavated and sixteen main dams built. And now that the scheme is almost finished . . .

MUSIC "JINDABYNE FAREWELL" - The Settlers

NARRATOR: But the waters of the Snowy also provide Australia's best inland fishing. Even if it wasn't a primary purpose it is now an important feature of the area and so is the supply of fish stock.

6TH MAN: We have three species of trout here - rainbow, brook and the Atlantic salmon. Atlantic salmon have been stocked in Burrinjuck Dam. The rainbows to date are the main source of our re-stocking and the brook trout as yet haven't been released, they're a very very new fish to the mainland of Australia and we plan to release these this coming winter. We use Lake Eucumbene as our reservoir - there's quite a vast area of water up there holding thousands of rainbow trout and we draw on Lake Eucumbene for our initial eggs, our stocks, for the hatching room. They're brought back here, hatched in troughs and jars, reared to about a year old, then let out in all the streams of New South Wales. We send hundreds of thousands of eggs away of course to the other hatchery and to other fishing clubs and in some years, fry also, in numbers of thousands.

But as yearlings - which is a plan of the hatchery, to release yearling stock. We plan for the same for brook trout and at present the salmon stocks aren't that great but if we can of course, we'll get as many out as possible.

NARRATOR: The trout fishermen, the skiers, the yatchsmen, the bushwalkers and those who just go to look make up the tens of thousands of visitors who, every year, comb the mountains in search of freedom. And this in turn, causes problems.

5TH MAN: When we have an area as restricted as the Australian High Country and so many potential demands and uses that can be made of it, it's not surprising that problems of what land uses should be permitted often arise, and of course, this has happened in the High Country over the last few years.

Now, there's no simple answer to this problem, of course. In the first instance, we must decide which are the important land uses in terms of the basic suitability of the country. Having decided this, and let's assume for the moment we decide that there are three or four important uses, we still haven't solved the problem because the area is still so restricted that it might be difficult to allow all of these three or four important uses over the whole of the area, without you know, imperilling it's ability to satisfy the demand in terms of these uses. Now, I guess there are two ways of approaching this problem: one is that one permits all the so-called legitimate uses to occur more or less equally over the whole area. This sometimes works - this is one way of looking at the problem of multiple use but often it doesn't work and often the result is a sort of reduction in standards and ending up with a sort of mediocre mess that no-one's really satisfied with.

Now, the other approach to this multiple use problem is, of course, to you know, take the area as a whole and endeavour to divide it into zones or into areas for which that particular area is basically most suited and this in fact, is the approach the State authorities have made at Kosciusko during the last few years. They've endeavoured to zone the area in terms of well-defined zones basically suitable for a

particular use and in my opinion, this is the way the competition for use of land in the future should proceed.

MUSIC "SONG OF THE MOUNTAINS"

NARRATOR: Movements to set aside part of the High Country as a park probably began with the formation of bushwalking clubs during the first world war. Various groups over the years up to the second world war, tried to get the government to reserve part of the Snowy Mountains. A school teacher in Cooma outlined a National Park scheme in 1939 and by the early 1940's things were beginning to happen in the Snowies, as Balder Byles, a forester then, recalls:

BALDER BYLES: It all starts back with the origin of the Kosciusko State Park. Now, when McKell became Premier, he was very keen on conservation, and Sam Clayton, then Commissioner for Soil Conservation, interested him in it. As a result of which, the Premier made this Kosciusko State Park and in so doing he included about ten state forests, much to the annoyance of the Forestry Commission. Well, I was District Forester at Wagga at that time, and being District Forester at Wagga, our Commissioner put me up or nominated me as the Commission's representative.

Well, that's how I came to be connected with the Kosciusko State Park Trust. And, we none of us, liked the Kosciusko Park Trust in the first place; the Forestry Commission didn't like it because it liquidated its state forests; the graziers didn't like it because it has cramped their grazing style; the Tourist Bureau didn't like it because it has restricted its original monopoly control over the Kosciusko area. So we got together and we settled down gradually. Well my job was to, well, I conceived it as my job, to try to urge the Trust to look after their conservation responsibilities, particularly fire protection. Well, they didn't rise to the fire protection issue, they always had more urgent work looking after the tourist, the development and so on and so forth, so that the fire protection issue was taken over eventually by the Forestry Commission, or the Department of Conservation.

Vincent, George Vincent, said, oh, he was the Deputy Chairman and Surveyor-General for quite a long time, what did he say? "Yes, if you had your way, nobody would be allowed in the Park except on foot anyhow." And I said "If you had your way, there'd be a pub and a urinal behind every snow-gum."

But then, well, after the war nothing happened immediately, but then we gradually got going and we got our little work force together, we established our headquarters at Waste Point.

Garfield Barwick, as he was in those days, was a tower of strength. I've never known a man with so many useful acquaintances. In those days you couldn't buy a bag of cement except on the black market, but he always had some useful acquaintances who could produce this and produce that. We got those old army huts for our Waste Point Headquarters. Anyway, we gradually got things going.

Well, then the Snowy came on the job. The Snowy Electric Authority came, I think, determined to run the whole show

and take over the whole place lock stock and barrel and I'm afraid the Trust and the Snowy Authority very quickly crossed swords.

I remember making out a list of all the work that the Manager should do, all the things he should do. And that rather impressed the Trust with the magnitude of the job and I think I can take credit for persuading the Trust that they should appoint a professional, a proper professional manager or something; so we advertised throughout the whole of Australia and we did a good deal of private propaganda to try to get people interested and we got a terrific lot of applications. Well, we sorted them out and out of those eventually came Nev. Gare.

NEV. GARE: Yes, well I took over as Park Superintendent at this time. The fortunes of the Park - which was then in the hands of the Kosciusko State Park Trust - were then, I think, at the parting of the ways. We had the choice then as to whether we were going to become just a big tourist development with the boom in snow sports starting and the tremendous extension of access roads with the Snowy Scheme in the course of construction, or whether we were going to become a true National Park and I had very clearly in front of me a challenge to try and establish proper conservation methods associated with the development that was obviously going to come to the Park.

The importance of the Park as a snow fed catchment area is paramount and we must take this into account in our management and so one of the important things that we've got to consider is management of the catchment to ensure that the Snowy Scheme fulfils its purpose. We've also got to provide for probably about half the winter sports requirements in Australia. In most North American National Parks for instance, skiing is not a primary concern, there are plenty of ski areas outside National Parks and so we have highly developed resorts in places like Sun Valley and Stowe. We in New South Wales have to cope with those types of developments, highly commercialised and highly organised within the National Park, which is basically set up for nature conservation and less intensive recreation. So we've got to provide, you might say, for multiple use. We've got to think about water use from the catchment, we've got to think about fairly intensive commercialised recreation for the snow resorts and at the same time, we've got to fulfil our basic function of preserving wildlife resource, of protecting some outstanding scenic and scientific qualities.

BALDAR BYLES: But he was still fighting a very uphill battle. He was really conservation-minded and he was seized with a big ideal of park management, unfortunately a number of the Trust here didn't share that ideal, and he was still fighting a very uphill battle when the Honourable T. L. Lewis came on the scene. And that was the big break.

Mr. Lewis introduced a completely new idea, what I call a really big idea and by sheer force of energy, he put the big idea through with the result that the Park, the Kosciusko Park, has changed from having a staff of about 4, to its present staff of about 28, plus a helicopter.

HON. TOM LEWIS: Well, originally, as many thousands of Australians, I visited the area as a skier and of course, since taking over this job

as Minister for Lands, I've had to be more aware of what the area represents to the people of Australia, indeed the world, as being the unique Alpine region. And so I have to be cognisant all the time that it is a National Park, not just a skier's paradise. And since I've taken a greater interest in Kosciusko in the last 7 or 8 years in any event, I've been going down there quite regularly during the summer too, and I think that Australians will more and more use this as a summer resort as well as a winter resort. But to answer a query which may be put to me about the greatest attraction, I suppose the greatest attraction must be the fact that it is a National Park. I think probably one of the largest in the world - it's a million and a half acres - and of course, I'm dedicated to preserving it in its pristine condition.

MUSIC "SONG OF THE MOUNTAINS"

NARRATOR: The High Country, that strange group of hills and mountains in our flat land, those snow-covered peaks and roaring rivers in our hot dry continent, and those tough men of truth and legend who opened up this area, these things are the source of its fascination.

7TH MAN:
Ron Smith: More than I think words could explain - it's just something about the area - it's a part of Australia that's probably unique to us all and it's just got a calling that does really keep you in the area and a person could possibly do better outside the area but I don't think money could drag me away from it at the present.

NARRATOR: The High Country within the National Park is for the use of Australians. Some people will disagree with the way areas are reserved for special uses but only in this way can all those interested find some enjoyment. The area is safe from over-exploitation, can we say that for any other land system in Australia?

MUSIC "SONG OF THE MOUNTAINS"

NARRATOR: The High Country featured Leo Barry, Berry McGufficke, Jack Shannon, Ron Smith, Jean Findlay, Joe Jennings, Thistle Stead, Alec. Costin, David Lane, Balder Byles, Neville Gare and the Hon. Tom. Lewis.

The poem by Douglas Stewart was read by Cliff Neate and the narrator was Ronald Falk.

The High Country was written and produced by Max Bourke.

MUSIC THEME "SONG OF THE MOUNTAINS"