

ORBOST HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.



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NEWSLETTER

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EARLY HISTORY OF GOONGERAH

(Source: Unknown)

In 1868 Hamilton Reed and John Locke both of Bendoc secured a grazing area of 60,000 acres at Goongerah. A suitable track had to be forced to take cattle in. There were a lot of Aborigines about in those days who were acquainted with the country. They arranged with one named Little Billy to show them the best way in, he took them over the spur which was named after him "Little Bill". They decided on that route the jungle was very dense from the Bonang Mt. along the top of Little Bill. The Bonang River was crossed two miles up stream from where Mr Russell's dairy farm is now. It took four men six weeks to cut a track in, so that the cattle could be driven to Goongerah. Young cattle were bought in Bega district and taken to the Run where they done wonderfully well, at that time the hill country about Goongerah was fairly open forest with a good cover of grass. Bracken fern and scrub were dense along the river flats.



Hamilton Reed's Home - Goongerah

Native bears, opossum and wallabies were numerous, kangaroos were not so plentiful. Probably the dingoes, which were in droves, no doubt kept the kangaroos down. They also killed the calves. On one occasion John Locke came upon eight dogs attacking a calf, the mother trying to fight them off. Locke beat them off with the stockwhip, the calf was so badly injured it was unable to get up, so was killed and poisoned. Next day there were eight dead dogs. About the year 1872 horses were being impounded at Bombala in big numbers. Reed and Locke bought good brood mares for 1/- and 2/6 per head and took them to Goongerah for breeding purposes. Later yards were built in several places on the Run to yard them for branding. There became a demand for Indian remounts, the horses were mustered and those suitable were taken to Bendoc and sold to a Victorian buyer. They were taken over the Snowy River via Black Mountain to Stratford.

In the same year gold was discovered at B.A. Creek, six miles from Goongerah there were a lot of men including Chinese. The creek had been worked for about 4 miles.

In 1876 John Locke went to Goongerah to muster cattle single handed, a bull charged and forced his horse against a tree and Locke's leg was broken just about 300 yards north from where W. H. Reed's residence is now. About the year 1878 Hamilton Reed and C. W. Nicholson decided to, if possible, to go from Bendoc to Orbost via Goongerah, they accomplished the task in 4 days from Goongerah. Scrub was very dense in places, making it difficult for pack horses to get through. Selection of land had commenced at Orbost, Hamilton Reed selected land with the intention of settling there, later he went to build a residence on the selection at the highest position he had previously chosen, and found flood waters had been seven feet deep at that particular spot, so decided to abandon the selection and selected at Goongerah. Much pioneering work had to be done, fencing, clearing land for cultivation, buildings, etc., farm implements had to be brought in on pack horses, hay was grown for working horses, also maize for fattening pigs, which were killed and cured on the property and taken to Delegate by pack horse and sold. Flour and sugar being brought back on the return journey.



Goongerah State School – Bonang Highway – 1950s

In 1882 Mrs. Reed and family moved from Bendoc to Goongerah. It was camp life for a few months until a residence of five rooms was built. It was hard work getting suitable timber from the forest but Mr. Reed Senior was equal to any task he undertook. Hay barns and stables had to be built, all from round timber with stringy bark sides and roof. John Locke's interest terminated in the grazing area.

There was no mail service, had to go to Bonang once a week for mail. Wheat was grown and thrashed with a flail and crushed with a steel mill by hand, a water race and wheel was established, two steel mills were put into service which was a success, only attention required was to fill the hoppers, with a fine seive a good quality flour was obtained.

In 1887 Reed and Sons and W. Clancy Senior took the first mob of cattle from Goongerah to Orbost on the blazed trails which Reed and Nicholson put in. Cattle were sold in the Station yards and owners had to guarantee to cross them over the Snowy River before they were

sold. The late James Cowell, head stockman at Orbost Station and his men came to the rescue and willingly gave assistance. They were crossed just opposite where the G. & N. yards are now. There was only a punt on the river at that time to convey vehicles etc. across. There were a number of gold mines being opened up in the Bonang and Bendoc districts. Goongerah being the only settlement between Bonang and Orbost, everyone made their stay, was obliged to build more accommodation for travellers. Traffic by horsemen began to increase between Orbost and the above districts. With Government cuttings put in and rough culverts across creeks.

Coote and Herbert of Orbost had a string of pack horses to carry goods to Bonang and Bendoc districts. In 1889 J. J. Pleydell took the first bullock dray through to Orbost. Twice a week mail service by pack horse between Orbost and Delegate was established. The late E. Foley of Swan Reach being the contractor. Gradually the road improved and horse drawn vehicles began to travel through flat land, along the Brodribb was heavily timbered with huge gum trees up to six feet in diameter at the butt.

Huge logs were buried in trenches, deep enough for the plough to pass over. The timber in a half green state made it hard to grub and burn. Clearing was expensive £15 per acre. The procedure was to clear and crop a few acres each year, the ploughs in those days were not suitable for breaking up new ground. In 1919 Hamilton Reed passed away at Goongerah and was buried by his wish under a large tree where he first camped on coming to Goongerah on the allotment where he resided and later his wife was buried there also.