

# ORBOST HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.



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## NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER, 2004

### Area with a difference – East Gippsland

(Source: DALGETY NEWS – Volume 14, No. 54, Summer 1975-76).

**Bairnsdale - gateway to the Gippsland Lakes - last unspoiled frontier. So the recent brochure of the Victorian Eastern Development Association describes East Gippsland, where increasing tourist activity maintains a constant enquiry to our real estate salesmen.**

This most active section of Bairnsdale's business has developed rapidly during the last two years, backed by two-way radio contact between the salesmen's cars and the office.

The most outstanding effect from the radios is the prompt handling of enquiries as they are made; many dealt with in minutes, obviating later contacts, with consequent greater risk of loss of interest for our agency.

Last year nearly 400 enquiries were handled by radio, according to logged messages; 55 houses and 38 blocks of land were sold for a total value of \$1.5 million.

The Company business is carried on in a unique area of Southern Australia just inland of the apex of the windswept coastline behind the Ninety Mile Beach near such historical navigation points on the coast as Point Hicks (formerly Cape Everard), Mallacoota, Gabo Island and Cape Howe - all well known lighthouse points.

Inland behind the great Sand Barriers the Lakes - Wellington, Victoria and King - lead back further inland along the Mitchell River Silt Jetties to Bairnsdale.

These silt jetties in the Mitchell Estuary are second only to similar features on the Mississippi River in the Gulf of Mexico. The strips of land extending into the Lakes were built up over many years by the depositing of silt brought from the mountains along the line of flow as it entered Lake King.

For those who visit on holiday, three rivers - the Mitchell, Tambo and Nicholson - and the Lakes and ocean coastline, together with the scenic countryside and hush make a delightful recreation area.

The lakes and rivers are renowned for their fishing, particularly bream, luderick, flathead and mullet. Bream of 1.5-2 lbs. are not uncommon and bags of 20 or more fish from the lakes or rivers are often obtained.

Prawns also have a run during the summer and flounder spearing with good results can be enjoyed. Particularly in the lakes there is excellent boating along miles of secluded shoreline, with sheltered hays for overnight sleeping on board.

Water skiing and other activities flourish during the day. Hotels and motels on the water's edge where boats can be moored, and owners partake refreshments are also very popular.

In the Lake Tyers area, where the State Forest reaches right down to the water's edge, peace and seclusion can be found together with all the activities enjoyed by a family.

There are many places on the lakes where a short walk through the sand dunes of 2-300 yards finds you on the Ninety Mile surf beaches with fishing for salmon, gummy shark and flathead, and good surf for the board rider enthusiast.



**Bairnsdale Branch premises, Main Street, Bairnsdale. Adventurers setting out on a Les Lind safari ride.**



**Bairnsdale machinery yard, with the results of two good sales ready for delivery.**

For those who like the bush, there are many scenic places to visit providing abundant wild life and the opportunity to hike and explore, and in season a day drive can reach the snowfields of Mt. Hotham.

The Gippsland Lakes system covering 150 square miles is Australia's largest recreational area for water sports. Once the lakes were an essential transport link. In the 1840's there were no roads or railways across East Gippsland, and the early settlers fanned out from Port Albert, establishing farms and sheep runs. The lakes were landlocked for most of the time, except after heavy rains when the imprisoned water spilled over the barrier.

Daring skippers of small boats scraped into the calm waters of the lakes bringing in supplies, and taking out wool. There was even a pilot appointed in 1867. During occasional droughts the communities were completely isolated.

So it was decided to create the manmade entrance, and a contract was let in 1872. Two long piers were built through the sand dunes and many thousand tons of sand had to be removed. Work stopped in 1872 when the railway to Gippsland was completed.

Shifting sands made it a difficult engineering feat in those days, and the job had not been completed on the night of June 14, 1889, when a tremendous storm scoured out the sand and created the new entrance, which has been in use since that time.

Of recent years a sand bar has developed across the seaward end, so creating an extremely hazardous crossing, and has resulted in loss of boats.

The highland district, including Omeo (2100 ft.) Benambra and the Tambo Valley, has a renowned ability to produce outstanding quality mountain cattle, mainly calves which are sold at the age of 8-9 months.

Some 8-10,000 calves are produced and marketed in March-April period. These well-bred cattle for the last 40 years have been purchased by Victorian, South Australian and NSW restockers, and are always keenly sought after.

The district in the foothills of the Victorian snow country has the added ability to produce tine wool, which often tops the Geelong and Melbourne wool sales.

Cobruna Station in this district contains an area of 16,500 acres freehold, and 84,000 acres leasehold, and is the largest Hereford breeding cattle station in Victoria, running 3,200 cattle of which 2,200 are breeders; 200 bulls are bred on the property for stud and commercial herd breeding, with some bred 50 bulls being sold annually.

Between December and April all cattle are in the leases, returning to the home property to winter.

Cobruna Station, until five years ago, was shearing 13,000 sheep annually; no sheep are now on the run. The station properties are operated at an altitude of 2,500-3,000' in the Mt. Hotham area.

The new Dartmouth Dam, which is now under construction, will have beneficial influence on the Omeo - Benambra area and all of East Gippsland.

There is much pressure from all sides to establish an all-weather low level highway link, routed through Dartmouth, and this is a distinct possibility as the dam nears completion.

Naturally this will open the vast recreational areas of East Gippsland to the booming Albury-Wodonga growth centre.

Omeo Shire Council recently had its centenary year, and the shire now has official backing for its historic museum and early mining display.



**Visitors at the Forest Commission's Buchan Caves Park.**

The Company operation is covered by an active office at Omeo where saleyards are owned in joint interest.

The Tambo Valley area of Ensay and Swifts Creek has for many years produced quality wool and cattle. Over recent time changes to fat lambs, due to improved pastures, have become prominent.

In particular, the Ensay district settled many solid settlers after the two World Wars. The settlers farmed in the area under the Closer Settlement Schemes and have proved to be most successful, with many now being leading graziers.

This area also contains numerous sites of underground caverns in its limestone formations to the south, near Bairnsdale. Those of note are the caves at Buchan which are visited by some thousands of tourists annually.



**Boats in port at the town wharves, Lakes Entrance. Picture taken from the Princes Highway, which runs through the town.**



**Surfers on Ninety Mile Beach.**

Orbost is the terminus of the East Gippsland railway line, and is surrounded by the rich river flats of the Snowy River. Our agent at Orbost, Ross Walcott, reports on local industry as chairman of the V.F.U. Bean Section.

Ross predicts profitable expansion of vegetable cropping along the Snowy River, where bean growing is already well established.

Some nine years ago several hundred acres of a stringless variety of beans were sown on the rich versatile Snowy River Flats with a view to supplying the frozen bean market in Victoria.

The beans were grown under contract to a Melbourne processing company and proved successful. Varieties have improved over the years and yields are now some of the best in Australia.

The semi-tropical conditions at Orbost suited this crop and, with improved irrigation procedures, saw approximately 2,300 acres sown and harvested in Orbost. Crops yielded from 7,000 to 13,000 lbs. per acre. The price, nearly 4 cents per lb., realised back to farmers between \$350 and \$480 per acre. With beans only a ten-week crop this return is worthwhile.

Ross Walcott estimates last season's crop as the highest yielding in Gippsland. After cropping, the land is sown to Italian ryegrass and used for winter grazing.

Over several years past this industry has been interrupted by processing stoppages. No-one has yet found a way to stop perishable crops over-maturing while disputes are being settled.

Imported processed beans are also a worry to this industry in its unique area. Due to oversupply, to the detriment of local growers, acreages have had to be greatly reduced for the next season's planting.

The industry in the Orbost district is estimated to be worth three quarters of a million dollars.

A cleaning plant operates at Orbost, for washing and grading, where the beans are also pre-cooled before loading on to semi-trailers for Melbourne.

There are also 300-400 acres of dry beans grown in the area. These are commonly known as "Borlotti", or culinary beans, taking four months to mature and be dried. They are then cleaned and sorted and bagged for transport.

Two other complementary industries are being developed at Orbost; 600-700 acres of sweet corn has been grown over the last two years, and the most recent addition to the food crops are vegetables, mainly cabbage, cauliflower and broccoli. A marked expansion of this industry is expected.

**We gratefully acknowledge photographic material provided by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of Victoria, and James Yeates and Son Pty. Ltd., Bairnsdale.**



**Aerial view of the town of Lakes Entrance. Right foreground is the entrance out over the bar into Bass Strait. Left foreground - Fish factory on Bullock Island. Left top - North Arm. Middle top - Town Arm. Right top - Ocean along Ninety Mile Beach.**

Source: DALGETY NEWS – Volume 19, No. 69, November 1980.



*Greg Dwyer, Stock Department, Bairnsdale; **Ross Walcott, Orbost Agent;** and John Ross, Benambra Agent.*

'SNOWY RIVER MAIL' Wednesday, August 18, 2004

## Local identity dies

**Well-known and respected local identity, Ross Walcott, passed away this week.**

Mr. Walcott originally farmed at Delegate before marrying wife Judy. He later moved to Orbost where he purchased farmland (originally dairy) from Frank Nixon on the Jarrahmond flats.

Mr. Walcott also held a position with stock and station agents Dalgety's. Most people throughout the district would have attended one of his auctions at some point in time.

Following the closure of the Orbost agency of Dalgety's, he commenced Ross Walcott Agencies.