

Unfolding Bushfold

'Unfolding Bushfold' was the name of one of the Heritage Week walks organised by the NPA and the Kosciusko Huts Association during April. The walk was designed to give people an introduction to sites of European occupation in this small valley behind Mt Tennent and to also allow walkers to experience some of the natural beauty that is Namadgi National Park. Well before Heritage Week began the walk was fully booked, as was the other NPA-KHA heritage walk which looked at selected forestry sites in the northern Brindabellas.

The Bushfold area is a recent addition to the park. In 1991 the northern part was added to Namadgi when Mt Tennent was incorporated into the park, but the southern end remained an isolated island of grazing until only last year, when the sheep were evicted.

Two standing huts remain today at Bushfold and the first is found as soon as you enter the valley on the fire trail leading up from the Honeysuckle Creek Road. Sections of Bushfold were part of the large Booroomba Station for many years from last century, but in the early 1950s, after John Hyles bought Booroomba, outlying portions like Bushfold were sold off. George Read (originally of Naas and the founder of the Tharwa Store) and his son Russ bought Bushfold in 1953. In 1954 George, with Russ's help, built the first hut that walkers see. Like the other stockmen's huts in Namadgi, this simple corrugated iron structure was used by the Reads for periodic shelter while doing stockwork on the property—they did not live there full time. Then in the mid 1960s Dr Hugh Pearson and his wife Peg acquired the block and the hut, and subsequently it was purchased by the McCormack (or Cormack) family.

The hut has a skillion roof and features much round timber taken from the bush (as do many of Namadgi's huts), and as built had a

rammed earth floor. Last year when I first saw the hut it was still locked and it was not possible to go inside, thus the concrete floor laid by the McCormacks in 1991 was not visible and did not figure in my *Namadgi sites* report being written at the time. Adjoining the enclosed part of the hut is an open section which dates from after the Reads' time. Last year the chimney flue was lying on the ground but our Heritage Week visit discovered that it has now disappeared. It was an unusual piece of bush architecture, consisting of a series of welded 20-litre drums! South from the hut are old sheep yards, while to the north-east is the vestigial remains of what was either a covered sheep pen or more likely a small hay shed.

At the northern end of Bushfold stands Russ's own hut. Built in 1957 it replaced an earlier hut built two years earlier but which was blown down in a windstorm. The chimney stones of the earlier hut remain a short distance down in front of the present hut. The present hut too has a skillion roof and bush timber in the frame, and one of the walls is weatherboard while the others are iron. The most distinctive feature is the enormous height of the building, for it has a very high roof indeed for this sort of building. Inside there are a couple of old fridges and a Bega wood stove in the fireplace. Around the hut there is a range of objects, one of the most interesting being an aged crosscut saw jammed in a tree trunk. Russ built the hut with help from mate Cav Lalor. Russ and his wife Muriel (both of whom, incidentally, now live in Ainslie) used the hut while doing periodic stockwork.

Both huts are fairly straightforward structures which do not really have very high aesthetic values. Yet they play a

part in telling the pastoral story of this part of Namadgi and, in company with the park's other stockmen's huts, are of value in helping park visitors to understand this significant story.

A short distance to the south-east of Russ's hut is the ruin of the single-stand shearing shed built by Russ in 1964. It consists of a range of forms of timber and is of quite some interest, not least for the way that it, in common with other ruins, is a trigger to the visitor's imagination. This site too reflects a key aspect of pastoral use of Bushfold.

Three earlier hut sites were visited during the walk. The first, consisting of scattered hearth stones, was on a block surveyed in 1884 for Duncan McKeahnie; at the time the hut was valued at £35, which was a fairly substantial amount for a hut then. Charles McKeahnie (the McKeahnies were the owners of Booroomba) later acquired these blocks and had a scrub lease across George's Creek, which in 1906 had a slab hut. While this site was visible in the 1970s, Russ, Muriel, Namadgi ranger Vivien Raffaele and I could not locate it amongst the regenerating ti-tree last year and no attempt was made to find it on the Heritage Week walk.

Not all early huts were frequently occupied, for some were built not so much to shelter a stockman but simply to satisfy land regulations which required the landholder to occupy the selected block.

The second hut site that was seen during the Heritage Week walk was one belonging to the McMahan family. Brothers Martin and Tom McMahan selected several blocks in northern Bushfold early this century and a slab hut was built on a block surveyed for Martin in 1902. Today, fallen corner posts, collapsed chimney stones, bottles and other pieces of timber mark the site. Evidence survives of where the slabs were attached to the corner posts. The survival of timber from the hut makes this site a particularly interesting one in the context of Namadgi hut ruins



Russel's shearing shed and yards at Bushfold Flat. Photo by Fiona MacDonald Brand

generally. A salt trough made from a hollowed log formerly lay nearby, according to Russ Read, but it has now entirely rotted away. NPA and KHA member Babette Scougall is researching aspects of the McMahon's family history and I look forward to the results of this important work.

The third hut site visited during the walk (which made a very pleasant lunch stop on what was a perfect autumn day) was the Dunns'. At the turn of the century, brothers Jack and Bob Dunn, with their sister Annie, owned Tennent

Homestead at the northern foot of Mt Tennent. Just beyond the northern end of Bushfold, at a spot which became known as Dunns Flat, they also had a small hut which they used while working on this part of their property, which was at some distance from their homestead. According to Roger Hobbs' recent conservation plan on Tennent Homestead, the hut was built some time after 1903 but before 1918; Dunns were resumed in 1920. It was slab and had a shingle roof, although there was some iron in the structure too.

Dunns' Hut either collapsed or was burnt. Today the site is marked by the usual funereal mound of chimney stones. Nearby there are two dams excavated by the brothers; whether they did the job by hand or with horse-scoops is not definitely known, though I suspect the latter, at least in the case of the lower dam which would have been pretty heavy work with pick and shovel. Laurie Tong (whose family had Tennent for some years up to the 1980s) has told me that Dunns actually used to take a horse and cart from the homestead up to the hut—they must have skilfully picked their route around the rough face of the mountain.

These ruin sites, subtle though they are, are significant for indicating the pattern of settlement, and also for the insight they give into earlier lifestyles. They are also very evocative of a sense of the past. One could be excused, if judging only by surviving huts, for thinking that our mountain hinterland was almost wholly unoccupied, but once you start to observe the numbers of these hut sites you soon see that there was a real community of people among the big hills that we now collectively call Namadgi.

The walk allowed time to savour some of the natural delights of the park—views toward the Booroomba Rocks area, the extensive forests that extend out from the Bushfold clearings, the rounded granite boulders and slabs, the migrating honeyeaters winging their way out before winter, and the perfect peace of the bush on a windless day. And then there was the utter delight of Blue Gum Creek which, despite the drought, still ran with crystal, cool mountain water. Its river stones and ribbon gums combined to make a really lovely spot.

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