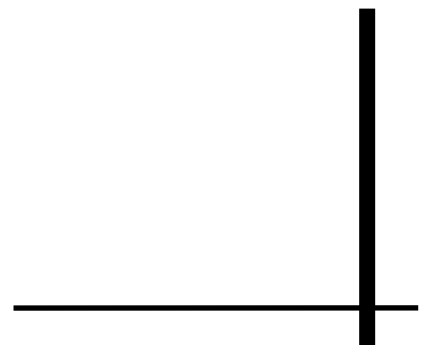


Youdales Hut

Oxley Wild Rivers National Park

Andrew Messner



Youdales Hut, Oxley Wild Rivers National Park

A History Commissioned by the National Parks and Wildlife Service,
New South Wales Department of Environment and Conservation

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Below: Youdales Hut, dam and yards, looking north, 2004. Source: NPWS.



Below: Undated photo of Youdales hut looking south, possibly 1940s. Source: NPWS.



Youdales Hut, Oxley Wild Rivers National Park

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Executive Summary

Youdales Hut is a vernacular slab-sided mustering hut located in the Kunderang gorges in Oxley Wild Rivers National Park. It was built in about 1941 by grazier Alan Youdale and Patrick (Paddy) Hogno. An associated set of post and rail cattle yards, paddocks and a small dam are also situated near the hut, which primarily was used by the Youdale family for domestic accommodation while working the gorge country for pastoral purposes. Although Youdales Hut is now accessed by (restricted) four-wheel-drive trails leading to the south and east, vehicular access was not established to the area until the 1950s.

The Upper Kunderang Brook originally formed the southern extremity of the Kunderang Run and, later, the Kunderang East Pastoral Station. The latter became regionally renowned for its cattle, horses, isolation and imposing topography. Like other large pastoral stations in New South Wales, Kunderang was subject to gradual forms of state-imposed subdivision from the mid-1880s, and Alan Youdale first occupied a 45-year Original Crown Lease of 11,160 acres (4,516 hectares) in 1931. Although he resided at Cedar Creek (near Mooraback) from about 1948, Alan Youdale spent the rest of his life working cattle in the Kunderang Gorges, eventually running up to 1,200 head (predominantly Hereford) on an enlarged property of about 37,000 acres (14,973 hectares) (including land leased by Betty Bridge, Alan Youdale's eldest daughter).

Just prior to Alan Youdale's death in 1986 the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service acquired his leaseholds, the land initially forming part of Werrikimbe National Park, but subsequently being integrated into Oxley Wild Rivers National Park (gazetted in 1986). By the early 1990s Youdales Hut had fallen into considerable disrepair, and it was painstakingly reconstructed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service in 1992. The hut, yards, paddocks and dam are now the cultural heritage focus of a restricted access camping area located adjacent to the Macleay Gorges and Kunderang Wildernesses of Oxley Wild Rivers National Park. Youdales Hut is also on the route of the Bicentennial Trail, although camping is not permitted within the Hut.

At present Youdales Hut has no heritage status pursuant to the New South Wales Heritage Act (1977). However, it deserves to be accorded local heritage significance under the terms of the act and accompanying guidelines, and should also be included on the National Parks and Wildlife Service's statutory Heritage Register. The heritage significance of Youdales Hut derives from its comparative rarity at the local level, its physical isolation, and its close historical associations with Kunderang Brook's twentieth-century grazing history.

Acknowledgments

Piers Thomas, Ranger at the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), Walcha, has been the driving force behind this history. Piers has spent considerable time co-ordinating the project, including the organisation of a number of field trips to Oxley Wild Rivers National Park. Piers also provided me with copies of NPWS files and photos relating to Youdales Hut that have proven very helpful in writing this history. John Dyson, Lindsay Youdale and Jeff O'Keefe kindly made time available to visit the Kunderang Brook area with Piers and myself in late 2004 and mid-2005, and their intimate knowledge of the area has proven a great help. John also provided family photographs and a written memoir of his experiences at Kunderang Brook, which provides the basis of much of the information concerning his family in this report. Dr Nicole McLennan, of the University of New England Archives and Regional Heritage Centre (UNEARHC) also attended a field trip to Youdales Hut in 2004, and subsequently has gone out of her way to help locate relevant archival material (as have other staff members of UNEARHC). Dr Janis Wilton, of the School of Classics, History and Religion, University of New England, read and commented on a draft of the report; Janis also provided much help with administrative aspects of the project. Philip Holberton, Secretary of the Kempsey Speleological Society, also read a draft and pointed out some errors. However, my greatest debt is owed to members of the Youdale family, particularly Joyce Green, Betty Bridge and Lindsay Youdale, who have been most generous with their time, and consented to be interviewed for the project. The information (and photographs) provided by Joyce, Betty and Lindsay inform much of the latter part of this report, which could not have been written without their help.

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Introduction

1.1 Youdales Hut and Environs

Youdales Hut is located in spectacular gorge country surrounding Kunderang Brook in the Oxley Wild Rivers National Park (see map on page eight). The hut was built in about 1941 by grazier Alan Youdale, with the help of Patrick (Paddy) Hogno, a sleeper cutter and yard builder from Walcha.¹ Soon after taking up his first pastoral lease on Kunderang Brook in 1931, Alan Youdale had initially built an A-framed bark hut on the same cleared creek flat.² This original hut was situated about 40 metres south of the present slab-sided hut. No obvious traces of the earlier structure are now apparent, although some photographic evidence has survived. The other main cultural features of the present Youdales Hut site are a small dam just to the north of the hut, a set of cattle yards approximately 50 metres north east of the hut, and a NPWS camping ground to the south of these associated structures.

A tributary of the Macleay River, Kunderang Brook is located in the heart of a rugged gorge formation known locally as 'the Falls country'. Until the late 1950s Youdales Hut could only be reached by foot or horseback, as the Kunderang gorges rapidly fall up to 600 metres from the New England Tablelands.³ Despite the inaccessibility of the area, Kunderang Brook had been utilised for grazing purposes since the mid-to-late nineteenth century. However, in practical terms grazing has been limited to the ringbark-cleared and open forest flats along the watercourse, and the poorer grassed, brush-covered country on surrounding hills and creeks valleys. In terms of other economic activity, some cedar getting was undertaken from the 1950s, when vehicular trails were first built into the gorges. While instances of antimony and manganese prospecting have taken place, very little mining activity has occurred in the vicinity of the upper Kunderang Brook, primarily due to the marginal nature of known mineral deposits in such inaccessible country. Similarly, agricultural pursuits have been limited to small domestic gardens cultivated near scattered mustering accommodation facilities.

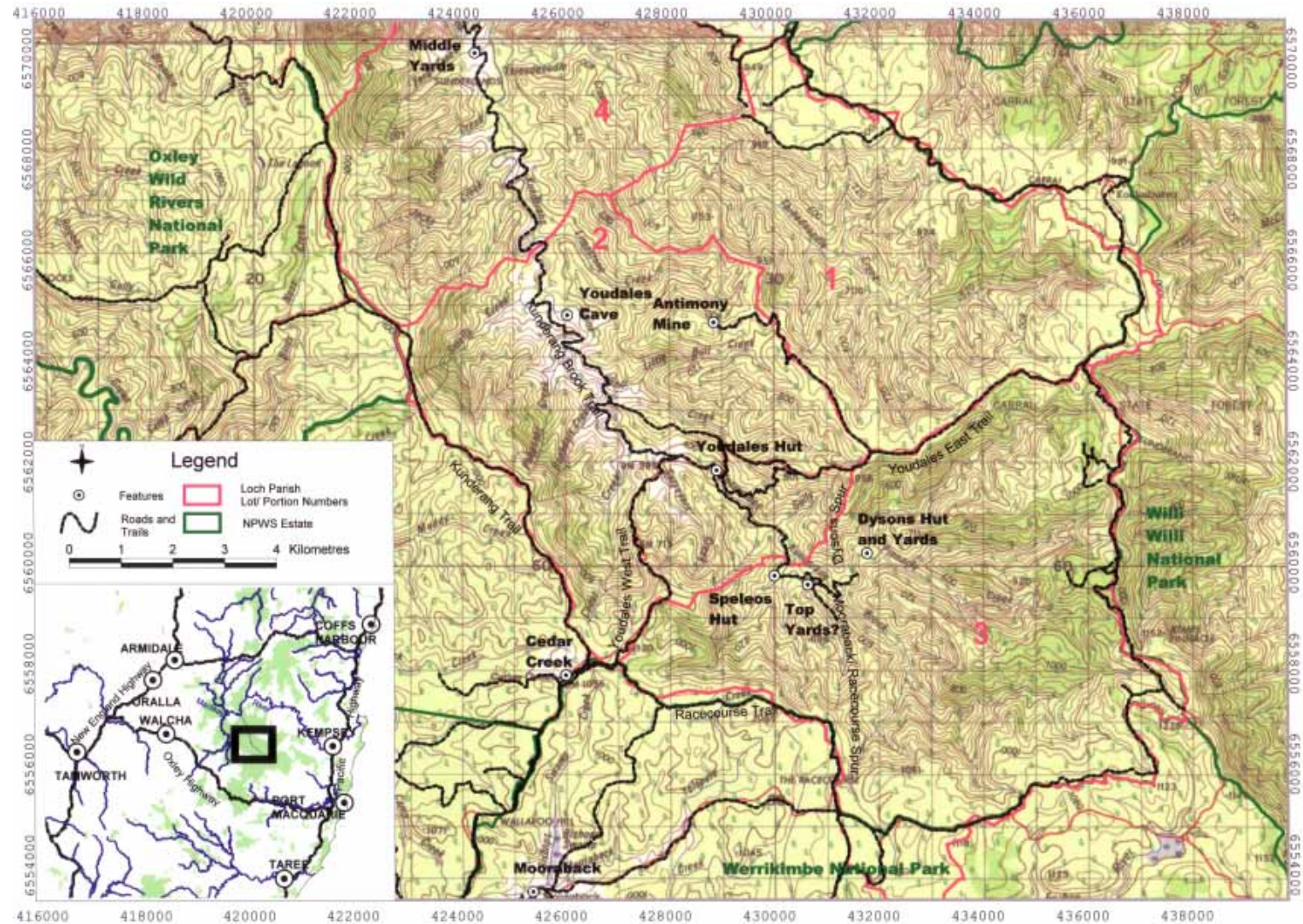
In cadastral terms, this history of Youdales Hut and its environs will be centred on the parish of Loch, Vernon County. Loch is a convenient organisational area as it follows the geography of Kunderang Brook's fall from its headwaters near the Racecourse Swamp on Mooraback, to a northern boundary with Fitzroy parish, close to the intersection of Kunderang Brook and Dourallie Creek. After World War One Loch gradually was divided into four Crown Lease areas such as the one Alan Youdale took up in 1931.⁴ Although he later resided at Cedar Creek (near Mooraback) from about 1948, Alan Youdale spent the

¹ Interview with Alan Youdale conducted by Hugh Legge, Cedar Creek, 1986 (audio copy provided by Joyce Green, 2005).

² *Loc. cit.*

³ Green Gully 1:25,000 Topographic & Orthophoto Map, 9335-4N; Kemps Pinnacle 1:25,000 Topographic & Orthophoto Map, 9335-1N (both third edition, Bathurst: New South Wales Department of Information Technology and Management, Land Information Centre, 1999).

⁴ The original Crown Lease is described in the *New South Wales Government Gazette* (hereafter NSWGG) 27 March 1931, p. 1278. Interview with Alan Youdale, 1986.



rest of his life working cattle in the Falls country, eventually running up to 1200 (predominantly Hereford) cattle on about 37,000 acres of land.⁵

Of course, Alan Youdale was not the first grazier to work this country. From the late nineteenth century the parish of Loch had formed part of the Kunderang East Leasehold/Preferential Occupation License Area (No.585a, Eastern Division). Prior to that, the parish formed the southern extremity of the Kunderang Run, which had been established on the Upper Macleay in the early 1840s.⁶ Despite its long history of pastoral land use, Loch is one of those comparatively rare parishes in eastern New South Wales where no permanent European occupation appears to have taken place, primarily due to the considerable practical difficulties involved in living in the Falls country.

At first sight the heritage of the area appears to relate almost solely to indigenous culture on one hand, and the pastoral industry on the other. But as Rodney Harrison has shown in his recent book *Shared Landscapes*, these themes are interwoven in the history of Kunderang East station, whose managers long relied on a predominantly Aboriginal labour force.⁷ However, there is little evidence that Aboriginal labour was employed on the smaller, family-oriented pastoral operations established on the upper Kunderang Brook from the 1920s. Perhaps the most striking theme associated with graziers such as Alan Youdale was the 'frontier'-style living conditions imposed by the stark geography of the Falls country. And while this report is concerned primarily with the social history associated with Youdales Hut, attention must also be given to similar structures and sites in the immediate area, including mustering huts and associated yards built to the north at Middle Yards, and similar forms of accommodation built upstream (to the south east) by the Dyson family. As we shall see, these sites were inter-related, and cannot be dealt with independently. Some of the mustering sites were also part of the local pastoral landscape well before the arrival of Alan Youdale or Ernest (Mick) Dyson in the early 1930s.⁸ Thus, they need to be understood within the broader context of the histories of Kunderang and Kunderang East pastoral stations, and the social, economic and physical networks built up over 150 years of continuous pastoral land use.

1.2 Background

The NPWS acquired Youdale's lease holdings just prior to his death in 1986, the land initially becoming part of Werrikimbe National Park (established in 1975).⁹ Subsequently the former Youdale land was integrated into the Oxley Wild Rivers National Park following its gazettal in 1986. By this point in time Youdales Hut was in disrepair. A number of hardwood slab and corrugated metal elements were missing from the structure, and the hut had a pronounced lean due to advanced foundation deterioration. Under the supervision of Don Hardman, Ranger (Armidale District), Youdales Hut was

⁵ Interview with Alan Youdale, 1986; Joyce Green, personal communication, 6 April 2005. Alan Youdale acquired an adjacent Crown Lease of 14,425 acres from the Dyson family in the mid-1950s. This lease is described in *NSWGG*, 22 January 1932, p. 383.

⁶ Note that Kunderang was usually spelt 'Cunderang' until the early twentieth century. Alternate spellings noted from the nineteenth century include 'Coonderang' (1840) and 'Cunderay' (1869). Unless indicated otherwise the modern spelling will be used.

⁷ Rodney Harrison, *Shared Landscapes: Archaeologies of Attachment and the Pastoral Industry in New South Wales* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2004). See also B. Cohen, *To My Delight: The Autobiography of Bill Cohen, a Grandson of the Gumbangari* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1987).

⁸ Harrison, *Shared Landscapes*, chap. 6.

⁹ NPWS, *Werrikimbe National Park Draft Plan of Management* (2002) p. iii.

painstakingly and successfully reconstructed by the NPWS in 1992.¹⁰ The hut, yards and dam are now the cultural heritage focus of a restricted access camping area located adjacent to the Macleay Gorges and Kunderang Wildernesses of Oxley Wild Rivers National Park (camping is not permitted inside Youdales Hut).¹¹ The site is also on the Bicentennial Trail, a walking and riding trail that stretches over 5,000 km from north Queensland to Victoria.

1.3 Research Objectives and Methodology

This report was commissioned by the NPWS (Walcha), New South Wales Department of Environment and Conservation. It was written under the auspices of the School of Classics, History and Religion at the University of New England. The primary objective of the project was to collate archival material and oral information relating to Youdales Hut, and present this information in the form of a thematic history that includes an assessment of the historical and social significance of the building. The report will assist the Parks and Wildlife Service meet corporate objectives and statutory obligations (particularly those pursuant to section 170 of the NSW Heritage Act), and the history will be integrated into a conservation management project planned for Youdales Hut and its environs.

As emphasised earlier, the story of Youdales Hut cannot be isolated from the wider history of the pastoral industry on the Kunderang Brook. From a methodological perspective, one of the more interesting ramifications of the research has been the questions it raises about the use of parish maps as sources for land history. Put bluntly, parish maps do not provide an accurate guide to the history of closer settlement unless used in conjunction with various other forms of Lands Department Records. As will be shown in this report, nineteenth-century parish maps contain no reference to some of the earliest attempts at closer settlement in the Falls country, details of which can be found, however, in surviving local Crown Land Agent records.

In sum, this report takes a thematic approach to the history of Youdales Hut and its environmental and social contexts. A number of field trips to the Kunderang Brook area have been undertaken in 2004-05, as have oral interviews with key informants such as Betty Bridge, Lindsay Youdale, Joyce Green and John Dyson. The University of New England's Human Research ethics policies and NPWS guidelines have been adhered to in respect of the collection of evidence from oral informants. A number of archival sources, including the UNEARHC and State Records, Kingswood, have also been utilised in order to gather sufficient primary research materials to complete the history.

¹⁰ Files on Youdales Hut Reconstruction, 1992, NPWS Armidale District, now retained at NPWS, Department of Environment and Conservation, Walcha District Office.

¹¹ NPWS, *Oxley Wild Rivers National Park, Cunnawarra National Park and Georges Creek Nature Reserve, Draft Plan of Management* (2002) (hereafter *DPM*) p. 5.

Section Two: Kunderang and East Kunderang Stations

2.1 The Establishment of Kunderang Run

Unfortunately, virtually no specific information survives in reference to the commencement, extent or nature of early pastoral operations on the upper Kunderang Brook. The history of the Kunderang pastoral station prior to the Fitzgerald family's occupation in the late nineteenth century is also somewhat vague. Although cedar-getting was the first economic activity undertaken on the Macleay River from the late 1820s, no activity of this kind could have occurred on the Kunderang Brook, as navigable watercourses were then usually required to transport (float) timber to processing points and markets. Commercial harvesting of timber from Cedar Creek, a tributary of the Upper Kunderang Brook, does not appear to have occurred until the 1950s, when the first vehicular roads were constructed in the Falls country.

Pastoralists nonetheless quickly followed itinerant cedar getters to the Macleay, occupying land and establishing stations along the River from the mid 1830s (Kempsey was also established at this time).¹² By 1843 the squatters Jobling and Company had occupied Kunderang Run, on the upper Macleay, when this 'heifer station' is first explicitly referred to in government records.¹³ Jobling also operated the Toorookoo Station, downstream on the Macleay, under the same license.¹⁴ According to the Local Crown Land Commissioner Robert Massie, in early 1843 an overseer named Shufflebottom lived on Kunderang with five other residents, in bark sheds that appear to have been in approximately the same location as the present Kunderang East Homestead (built by the Fitzgerald family in the early 1890s).¹⁵ The extent of the Kunderang run in 1843 was described as '16 miles by 5 miles', on which 1325 cattle, 8 horses, 2124 sheep were depastured.¹⁶

Two years later 1355 cattle – but no sheep – were recorded in Massie's official return.¹⁷ This is an important change, as it again suggests that Kunderang was utilised primarily for cattle breeding from a very early period. Interestingly, a comparison of all the Macleay River stations at this time also shows that Kunderang had the highest number of cattle of any station in the surrounding pastoral district.¹⁸ However, it is uncertain whether the Kunderang Run then included the upper reaches of Kunderang Brook, whose deep ravines formed a natural barrier to initial pastoral expansion, and a natural refuge for the displaced Dhan-Gadi people.

¹² J. Weingarh, 'The Discovery and Settlement of the Macleay River', *Journal and Proceedings of the Australian Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 7, Pt. 4 (1921) pp. 175-90; J. Weingarh, 'Early Settlement of the Upper Macleay', *Journal and Proceedings of the Australian Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 8, Pt. 4 (1922) pp. 214-24; Marie H. Neil, *Valley of the Macleay* (Sydney: Wentworth Books, 1972).

¹³ Harrison, *Shared Landscapes*, p. 68.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 69; License No. 644/41 dated 15 March 1842, Registers of License to Depasture Crown Lands beyond the Limits of Location, State Records (NSW) microfilm reel 5071; License No. 230/42, *ibid*, microfilm reel 5073.

¹⁵ Cited in Harrison, *Shared Landscapes*, p. 69.

¹⁶ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁷ Commissioner R. Massie, Return of Stations, Macleay River District dated 1 July 1845, Crown Lands Correspondence, Macleay River District, 1842-48, State Records microfilm reel 2500, Fol. 349.

¹⁸ *Loc. cit.*

2.2 Frontier Violence at Kunderang Brook

Since the early-to-mid 1830s the Dhan-Gadi, whose traditional lands encompassed the upper Macleay valley, had been faced with the rapid expansion of pastoral runs in the coastal hinterland and on the New England Tablelands.¹⁹ The contact phase between British and indigenous culture in Northern New South Wales had resulted in the widespread transmission to Aboriginal people of smallpox, a disease to which they had no acquired immunity.²⁰ Those who survived the viral assault of 1829 were faced with the equally destructive loss of traditional lands and food sources. Harrison points out that the 'Macleay Gorges were the locale of some of the most violent and sustained periods of Aboriginal-settler conflict in New South Wales'.²¹ 'Using guerrilla-style tactics, Aboriginal people formed relatively large groups that attacked shepherds, homesteads, cattle and sheep before retreating into the gorges'.²² Summary and indiscriminate retribution invariably followed such acts of defiance, and evidence points to a number of violent episodes involving Dhan-Gadi groups and Europeans in the vicinity of Kunderang Brook in the 1840s.

The extent of Aboriginal resistance to encroachment of traditional lands and the nature of British retaliation has been the subject of considerable academic (and political) debate, particularly since Keith Windschuttle's controversial claims regarding the supposed 'fabrication' of elements of Aboriginal history in Tasmania.²³ Frontier violence on the Macleay River was quite protracted and has been documented in both contemporary and secondary sources, as well as local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal oral traditions. Geoffrey Blomfield suggests that by mid 1840 the Falls Country may have been supporting up to three to four times its usual population of Aboriginal people, their survival almost necessitating attacks on sheep depastured along the upper Macleay valley.²⁴ However, events surrounding the 1840 massacre near Kunderang Brook seem somewhat confused, a situation exacerbated by the apparent failure of recent writers to consult original primary sources.

Most recent accounts of frontier violence on Kunderang Station and the upper Macleay rely in part on a short history of the Kunderang Gorges published in 1933 by J.F. Campbell, previously a District Surveyor based at Walcha.²⁵ Campbell's article, published in the Royal Australian Historical Society's *Journal and Proceedings*, contains a number of valuable excerpts from the *Sydney (Morning) Herald* on local pastoral expansion and frontier violence. However, Campbell's reproduction of a *Herald* account of an 1840 massacre in the Falls country leaves out considerable relevant detail, and changes the spelling of names to modern conventions (without indicating this form of editing).

¹⁹ See generally Barry Morris, *Domesticating Resistance: The Dhan-Gadi Aborigines and the Australian State* (Oxford: Berg, 1989).

²⁰ Noel Butlin, *Our Original Aggression: Aboriginal Populations of Southeastern Australia, 1788-1850* (Sydney: Allen Unwin, 1983).

²¹ Harrison, *Shared Landscapes*, p. 104.

²² *Loc. cit.*

²³ Keith Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History* (Sydney: Macleay Press, 2002). See also the collection of essays edited by Robert Manne that oppose Windschuttle's arguments, *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History* (Melbourne: BlackInc, 2003).

²⁴ Geoffrey Blomfield, *Baal Belbora: The End of the Dancing* (Chippendale: Alternative Publishing Co-operative Ltd., 1986) p. 33.

²⁵ J.F. Campbell, 'The Kunderang Ravines of New England', *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Vol. 18, Pt. 2 (1932) pp. 63-73.

Campbell also incorrectly cites the *Herald* article as being published on 14 June 1840 (the correct date was Monday 15 June 1840). Recent historians have replicated these errors and Campbell's rather idiosyncratic textual alterations, which is unfortunate as Campbell's version gives a misleading impression as to the location of the massacre site.²⁶ To rectify this situation the original text is reproduced below with the sections discarded, changed or paraphrased by Campbell marked in italic:

MCLEAY RIVER – OUTRAGE BY THE BLACKS

*Mr. Freer, whose gallant conduct in capturing bushrangers on the Gwydir last June, in company with Mr. Fleming, will be in the recollection of our readers, was towards the end of last month, travelling from the New England down the bed of the Macleay River with a large flock of sheep, and having one afternoon at a crossing place, missed three hundred and seventy of them, he returned to search accompanied by a stockman and a mounted black, (attached to his party.) The latter soon discovered that the sheep had been driven in the direction of the mountains by the blacks; after following the tracks about eight miles, they came to precipitous rock, when they turned down a creek, on the sides of which they discovered some two to three hundred blacks busily engaged in roasting *not kangaroos, but* mutton. The instant they perceived Mr. Freer and his party, they took to the spears and boomerangs, retiring to the ranges, but on discovering the weakness of the pursuers, endeavoured to surround them, threatening and abusing them in tolerable English, while daring them to come on. The party being badly armed, Mr. Freer prudently retreated, travelled all night, and reached next day a station of Mr. Steele's *J.P.*; where he was furnished with the assistance of three horsemen. *As soon as possible he retraced his steps, but it took nearly two days to reach* the place where he last saw the blacks; he there found the remains of about sixty sheep, and three yards most ingeniously constructed. *Mr. Freer's black "Sandy" (without whose skill in tracking, nothing could have been done) found much difficulty here, for the artfulness of the blacks had induced them to drive their sheep round and round their late encampment for a considerable distance; but at length he succeeded in finding where they ceased this manoeuvre, and after passing over hills which they otherwise have thought impassable for sheep, they found thirty-five slaughtered but not eaten, these cruelly treated robbers not considering them sufficiently fat and tempting.* Still following on their trail, Mr Freer proceeded about twelve miles up Coonderang Creek, when they again turned across the mountains, *and passed down into another creek, where it was evident that the sheep had refused to cross the stream; for some of the robbers had driven them along the ranges, while the remainder kept the creek side. After ten more miles of excessive toil and uncommon perseverance, Mr. Freer's party once more found those protected worthies, in the act of preparing mutton; on being fired upon they speedily decamped, and the pursuing party were rewarded for their praiseworthy conduct by the satisfaction they felt in recovering two hundred and twenty sheep alive. Mr. Freer was surprised to find so large a body of blacks congregated, but on arriving at his station the seeming mystery was explained by his being there informed that the blacks had made particular enquiries as to the exact time of his expected**

²⁶ Blomfield, *Baal Belbora*, pp. 33-4; Rodney Harrison, *Shared Landscapes*, also quotes the version edited by Campbell, although Harrison derives his citation from another secondary source (Peter Prineas, *Wild Places: Wilderness in Eastern New South Wales* [Sydney: Colong Foundation for Wilderness, 1997] p. 195).

*arrival which plainly shows that sooner or later some thing must be done to stop such outrages.*²⁷

The account concludes in this retributive vein, but also mentions that the sheep were owned by two men named Panton and Betts, who then held the license to an Upper Macleay River Run known as 'Mackenzie's Station' (Freer was probably their overseer).²⁸ According to John Weingarh, Panton and Betts held a license to depasture Wabra station; according to J.F. Campbell, they held a license to Long Flat about this time.²⁹

The *Herald* had previously condoned the use of retaliatory violence in poorly policed frontier regions, and in 1838 the paper had been amongst the most prominent defenders of the men convicted and executed for their roles in the Myall Creek massacre.³⁰ The published account of the Falls episode in 1840 explicitly states that Aboriginals were 'fired upon', while simultaneously implying that nobody was killed. However, this conclusion is contradicted by a second contemporary source, a diary kept by Annie Baxter. Her husband Andrew Baxter had recently resigned his military commission, and in 1840 the Baxters lived on a Macleay River Run known as 'The Limestone Flat' (Yessaba[h]).³¹ Freer visited this station soon after his return and Annie Baxter appears to have been given a first-hand account of events, which she recorded in a personal journal:

Thursday 30th April – Mr Freer came in today – he has met with quite an adventure with the blacks – it seems that after his bringing down 3071 sheep to the Macleay, the men lost sight of 168 – and the blacks got them – they not only eat most of them, but wasted them in the most terrible manner possible – Mr Freer went with two men to get them, and they defied him – of course his party not being sufficiently strong he had to return for more – He did so, and they surprised the Natives eating their mutton at their camp. There was a terrible rencontre – and some of the unfortunate creatures killed – He got some of the sheep back –³²

Although there are discrepancies in some of the detail of the first two accounts, in most respects each corroborates the other – apart from the nature of the violence. The extent of Aboriginal casualties will probably never be known, but the topography of the Falls terrain and the practical limitations of most firearms in this period should be kept in mind. The main problem in recent discussions of these events, however, is the site of the attack. Clearly this did not take place about 12 miles up Kunderang Brook, as implied by Campbell's edited citation. The original source places the final encounter more than ten

²⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 June 1840. Campbell refers alternately to 'Sergeant' and 'Mr.' Freer although the former title is not in the original. He also changes 'Coonderang Creek' to 'Kunderang Brook'.

²⁸ License No. 39/57, dated 5 July 1839, Registers of Licenses to Depasture Crown Lands beyond the Limits of Location, State Records microfilm reel 5068.

²⁹ Weingarh, 'Early Settlement of the Upper Macleay', pp. 216-17. Campbell, 'The Kunderang Ravines of New England', p. 69. Note that Mackenzie's Creek is considerably closer to Wabra than Long Flat.

³⁰ See Roger Milliss, *Waterloo Creek: The Australia Day Massacre of 1838*, George Gipps and the British Conquest of New South Wales (Sydney: McPhee Gribble, 1992).

³¹ License No. 39/403 dated 24 September 1839, Registers of License to Depasture Crown Lands beyond the Limits of Location, State Records microfilm reel 5068.

³² Cited in Lucy Frost, *A Face in the Glass: The Journal and Life of Annie Baxter Dawbin* (Port Melbourne: William Heinemann Australia, 1992) p. 34.

miles (16 kilometres) away from this supposed point of conflict, at an otherwise unidentified location.

Blomfield and Harrison state that in about 1845 Commissioner Robert Massie undertook a similar retaliatory sortie on the upper Macleay, after Aboriginals killed two shepherds and their wives at Kunderang station.³³ Again, the location of this massacre site is not clear, but a contemporary account states that 'a great number of blacks were killed' under a cliff.³⁴ Harrison notes that Geoffrey Blomfield distinguished these events from another massacre said to have taken place at Dourallie Creek, near the later Middle Yards site (see map), also in about 1845. According to Weingarh, however, 'the blacks killed two shepherds and their wives. They were chased up Kunderang Brook and severely dealt with at Aderally Point'.³⁵ Blomfield primarily relies upon oral informants (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) for information about this episode, which Harrison suggests could have actually referred to the killing of the Kunderang shepherds and subsequent retaliatory action.³⁶ Local oral tradition holds that physical remains of the victims of a large massacre could be seen at Dourallie Creek until the early twentieth century, and at least one Aboriginal stockman employed on Kunderang East is said to have been very apprehensive when working in the area.³⁷ However, a (necessarily cursory) search of the Crown Land Commissioner's official correspondence for late 1844, 1845 and early 1846 did not reveal any supporting documentary evidence relating to the murder of shepherds at Kunderang, or any punitive action.³⁸ A reference is made to 'troublesome' Aboriginals at Kunderang in correspondence dated in early 1845 between Commissioner Massie and George Hitchcock, then in partnership with Jobling.³⁹ Possibly the events said to have taken place in about 1845 occurred at another period, but time constraints have ruled out an exhaustive search of potential archival sources.

2.3 Kunderang Station, c. 1856-89

The lease (or promise of lease) to Kunderang Run was transferred at least twice in the mid-1850s before coming under the control of the Crawford family based at Moona Plains.⁴⁰ In fact, prior to the Fitzgerald family's taking up residence at the sub-divided property Kunderang East in about 1893, the property was effectively an outstation operated from less isolated pastoral holdings. This was the case at the very outset of grazing operations, when Kunderang was an outstation of the Macleay station Toorookoo, and continued through the Crawford family's management up until the late 1880s. One ramification of the extended external management of Kunderang was a comparative lack of improvement on the sprawling and often inaccessible gorge run,

³³ Blomfield, *Baal Belbora*, p. 37; Harrison, *Shared Landscapes*, pp. 105-6.

³⁴ H. McMaugh cited in Harrison, *Shared Landscapes*, p. 105.

³⁵ Weingarh, 'Early Settlement on the Upper Macleay', p. 220.

³⁶ Blomfield, *Baal Belbora*, pp. 46-7; Harrison, *Shared Landscapes*, pp. 105-6.

³⁷ Blomfield, *Baal Belbora*, p. 47; Chris Sullivan, 'Report on Kunderang East Station, Upper Macleay River, NSW', for NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, Armidale (November 1989) p. 101.

³⁸ Note that Massie's annual report for the year 1845, (*Historical Records of Australia, Series 1, Governors' Despatches from England*, Vol. 25, April 1846-September 1847 [Sydney: Government Printer, 1925] p. 5) also contains no reference to any violence of this nature in the vicinity of Kunderang.

³⁹ Commissioner R. Massie to George Hitchcock, Toorookoo, 9 January 1845, Crown Lands Correspondence, Macleay River District, 1842-48, State Records microfilm reel no. 2500, fol. 283. Hitchcock and George Jobling appear to have become business partners in 1844-45.

⁴⁰ Campbell, 'The Kunderang Ravines of New England', pp. 66-7.

development being limited to a central compound of accommodation huts, yards and fencing etc. on the Macleay, and ringbarking and the provision of a network of mustering huts and cattle yards along the creek flats of Kunderang Brook. Another point to note in this respect is that in the mid-1850s the management of Kunderang was effectively switched from the Macleay Valley to the New England Tablelands, two related but quite different environments with distinct topographies, climates and local economies.

As we shall see, this point is of considerable relevance when looking at the evolution of access and stock routes in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The shift in the geography of management to the Tablelands also points to the increasing usage of the Upper Kunderang Brook for pastoral usage from about the 1860s, as this area was spatially adjacent to Moona Plains. However, the difficulties in determining Kunderang's evolving southern boundaries in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, primarily due to a lack of relevant documentary evidence, have been noted above. While most pastoral properties in NSW were surveyed and mapped in the mid-1880s, no examples appear to have survived for Kunderang. In addition, one of the primary sets of pastoral holding files for the Eastern Division of New South Wales is not currently available for perusal at State Records.⁴¹ However, a gazetted description of Mooraback from 1869 does suggest that 'Cunderay' then extended to Mooraback's northern boundary at the Racecourse Swamp.⁴² Historical maps of surrounding pastoral holdings such as Moona Plains, Kangaroo Flat and Mooraback confirm that Kunderang (theoretically at least) extended southwards all the way to the Mooraback Run by the mid 1880s.⁴³ The earliest map of Kunderang East held at State Records dates from February 1892 (but may contain later additions).⁴⁴ This map shows that the new station extended to the very head of Kunderang Brook, near the Racecourse on Mooraback. The eastern and western boundaries of Kunderang East also closely followed the watercourse, running at a distance of approximately one mile each side of the Brook.

Following John Robertson's Crown Land Acts of 1861 pastoral runs had been open to potential subdivision in the form of free selection and conditional purchase of up to 320 acres of land.⁴⁵ Robertson's legislation was aimed at promoting closer settlement in rural New South Wales, but relatively little activity of this kind took place on the upper Kunderang Brook. Even subsistence-oriented agriculture was virtually impossible due to the topography and isolation of the gorges. Grazing was even less viable on farms of this size. As is well known, the original Robertson Land Acts (and subsequent amendments) were subject to considerable fraudulent activity (dummying, peacocking and so forth), as graziers attempted to retain control over the key areas in their pastoral licenses/leases. While such competition was comparatively restrained in the Falls country, from about 1892 some rivalry for land did occur on the upper Kunderang Brook, soon after the subdivision of the old Kunderang Run, and the transfer of the newly formed Kunderang

⁴¹ As at March 2005 the Lands Department, Occupation Branch Pastoral Run files for the Eastern Division of NSW are being used by the NSW Department of Lands, and are not accessible at State Records.

⁴² NSWGG, 21 September 1869, p. 2363.

⁴³ Pastoral Maps for Moona Plains, Kangaroo Flat and Mooraback, various dates, <http://www.lands.nsw.gov.au/OnlineServices/ParishMaps/default.htm>, accessed 1 February 2005.

⁴⁴ Map (hand drawn ink tracing) of Kunderang East Holding dated 10 February 1892, enclosure 1423, Preferential Occupation License Files, Eastern Division, No. 585, Lands Department, Occupation Branch, State Records, container 3/5330.

⁴⁵ John Ferry, 'The History of Rural Properties from Official Records', unpublished typescript dated 15 December 1988, Historical Resources Centre File, UNEARHC.

East station from the Crawford family to Alexander McDonell and Joseph Fitzgerald in about 1889.

2.4 The Fitzgerald/McDonell Management of Kunderang East, 1889-1973

In 1884 new Crown Lands legislation was implemented to overhaul John Robertson's 1861 acts. The most significant practical reform was the extinction of existing pastoral leases and the subdivision of pastoral runs into approximately equal leasehold and resumed areas. Existing occupiers were granted the option of continuing operations on an area protected from selection under the terms of a new five-year lease; this usually contained the most valuable and improved country, and on expiry of the five year leases occupants also had the right to continue operations under a preferential occupation license.⁴⁶ The 'resumed' portion of the subdivided run, on the other hand, remained open to conditional purchase or various forms of lease. However, pastoralists could still control un-alienated land in the resumed section of the holding by way of an occupation license (or preferential occupation license), as well as other forms of leasehold over smaller portions of land.

In the mid-to-late 1880s the Kunderang Pastoral Lease of 49,435 acres (No. 564) was cancelled and divided into Kunderang East and Kunderang West. The latter was an 18,000 acre property that was retained by the Crawford family (and which remains in private hands today). Alexander Crawford sold Kunderang East (31,600 acres) for £1,000 to Joseph Fitzgerald (born c. 1850) and Alexander McDonell (born c. 1833) in about 1889.⁴⁷ The Kunderang East Preferential Occupation License (as it became) included land along Kunderang Brook all the way to its headwaters, as well as a smaller section along the upper Macleay.

Unlike the majority of large landholders in north eastern New South Wales, the McDonell and Fitzgerald families were both Catholic, and Joseph (Joe) Fitzgerald had married Katherine McDonell, one of Alexander McDonell's daughters. While Joe Fitzgerald soon bought out McDonell's stake in Kunderang East (apparently in the early-to-mid 1890s⁴⁸), the relationship between the families remained close, and Alec McDonell, a grandson of Alexander McDonell, later managed Kunderang East from the mid 1930s to 1973. Alec McDonell knew Alan Youdale well, and was on Kunderang East station when Youdale arrived in 1931.⁴⁹

'It is the most out of the way run in New South Wales', claimed Joe Fitzgerald in 1897 of Kunderang East.⁵⁰ Living in isolation but relative comfort, the Fitzgerald family built a successful pastoral station at Kunderang East in the early twentieth century. Joe Fitzgerald experienced considerable financial difficulties during the drought and depression stricken 1890s, but he was able to survive and recover, partly due to financial

⁴⁶ E.W. Brierly and T.W. Irish, *The Crown Land Acts of New South Wales Simplified* (Sydney: Marsden, 1906) p. 149.

⁴⁷ Sullivan, 'Kunderang East Station', p. 11; Deposition of Joseph Fitzgerald dated 28 July 1899, Lands Department Occupation Branch, Preferential Occupation License Files, Eastern Division, No. 585, State Records, container 3/5330.

⁴⁸ The figure is taken from Sullivan, 'Kunderang East Station', p. 12.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁵⁰ Joseph Fitzgerald to Colonial Treasurer, 13 December 1897, Lands Department Occupation Branch, Preferential Occupation License Files, Eastern Division, No. 585, State Records container 3/5330.

assistance from his friend Alexander Crawford of Moona Plains.⁵¹ In his evidence to a Land Board court in July 1899, while prosecuting an appeal against a rental appraisal made over Kunderang East in 1891, Fitzgerald made a number of interesting points about the property, and reiterated some of the problems he had faced since taking over the station:

I have held the license for about 10 years & it is the same area now as it was when I got it. I applied to have the license fee reappraised because I consider the present rental excessive. It is £92.3.4. per annum.

I have a double frontage of 4 miles to the Macleay River and 20 miles to Kunderang Brook. The country might be used for sheep except that the dingoes are bad. The supply of water in the main streams is never failing. I consider that my stock do not forage over more than 10000 acres. There are no flats on the run, the country is steep ... The unavailable country is too steep & rocky for stock to get on to. The country is over run with wallabies and wallaroos & five men are in there shooting now. I returned about 950 head of mixed cattle this year & that has been the highest return for 5 years. They consisted of steers, cows, calves and bulls. The run is subject to drought. I lost 600 head in 1895; I lose some every year. I have sold fat cows off the run but I sell my cattle as stores. I only sold 56 head last year. My income from the run last year was £156. I have been compelled to cut scrub for my cattle. I only didn't one year. I get my stores from Kempsey at a cost of carriage of £2.10.0 a ton, & then have to pack them 34 miles.⁵²

George Silcock, a Lands Department Inspector based at Armidale, observed in his evidence that the ringbarked portion of Kunderang East was well grassed, but elsewhere the feed was 'coarse & sour'. 'I did not see one beast in green timber, thus proving that the country not ringbarked is of very little value for grazing'. Silcock noted that concerted wet weather played havoc with station operations. As the 'only practicable track' on the holding followed Kunderang Brook, the property was 'very difficult to work in wet seasons', and flooding in 1893 had 'destroyed couch flats on the River'. When the Macleay was up, 'all communication is stopped'.⁵³

Silcock arranged his inspection report of Kunderang East's carrying capacity (which was the main factor determining the annual rental) into five areas. Although the geology, timber, and carrying capacity of each area is described in some detail in the synopsis presented to the Land Board in evidence, frustratingly few clues are given to the geographic location of each area. Apart from ringbarking, which increased the carrying capacity of the land, improvements are not noted. However, Silcock's description appears to commence at Kunderang East's southern boundary (he refers to Limestone outcrops in areas he denoted 'A' and 'B'). While it is clear that relatively little (just 150 acres) of ringbarking had taken place on the southerly rim of the gorge country, areas downstream (including Alan Youdale's later original leasehold) had undergone considerable ringbarking by the early 1890s. In fact, about one-quarter of the 'available [or useable] land' of about 4,000 acres in this vicinity (which Silcock denoted 'B') appears to have been ringbarked by Joe Fitzgerald soon after the purchase of Kunderang East

⁵¹ Sullivan, 'Kunderang East Station', p. 12.

⁵² Deposition of Joseph Fitzgerald dated 28 July 1899, State Records, container 3/5330.

⁵³ Inspection Report by George Silcock dated 22 April 1899, Kunderang East POL, Lands Department Occupation Branch, Preferential Occupation License Files, Eastern Division, No. 585a, State Records, container 3/5330.

from the Crawfords. It is possible that earlier attempts at ringbarking had also been made by the Crawfords in the comparatively flat and well watered pastures near Youdales Hut.

In the late nineteenth century Joe Fitzgerald ran Kunderang East with an elder son (probably Joseph junior) and two employees. In 1897 Joe Fitzgerald stated that he would have to abandon the holding if no rental reduction was made, but perhaps his financial position had improved by 1899, as he then also leased land at Elsinore (near Bellbrook on the Upper Macleay) where 250 cattle were depastured.⁵⁴ In any event, Joe Fitzgerald survived the floods, drought and depression of the 1890s, the family retaining ownership of Kunderang East until 1967. The Fitzgeralds' remarkable photographic collection, copies of which are kept by the NPWS, forms an evocative record of pastoral life in the gorge country in the early twentieth century. The family built the present heritage listed Kunderang East Homestead in the early 1890s, and resided at the property until the 1930s. Subsequently the Fitzgeralds' relative Alec McDonell and his family lived at the homestead until about 1950, when the McDonells moved to less isolated accommodation at Georges Creek.⁵⁵ Thus at this point Kunderang East reverted to non-residential management, one of the features of its early history.

2.5 Kellion Management of Kunderang East and Inclusion in Oxley Wild Rivers National Park

Although the Fitzgerald family sold Kunderang East station to Claude Kellion in 1967, Alec McDonell remained as station manager until his retirement in 1973.⁵⁶ Kellion and McDonell modernised mustering facilities on the property, building new corrugated steel huts at Middle Yards on Kunderang Brook (see map), Left Hand Yards and Front Tableland (to the west of Kunderang Brook). Oxley Wild Rivers National Park was declared in 1986, and the Kellion holding was purchased by the NPWS. The Service restored Kunderang East homestead complex, which is now state heritage listed, and is used as a public accommodation facility within Oxley Wild Rivers National Park.⁵⁷ The Kellion-built corrugated steel mustering huts at Middle Yards and Front Tableland have recently been restored under the supervision of the Walcha office of the NPWS.⁵⁸ Crown Leases for pastoral purposes held in Loch parish by Alan Youdale were also in the mid 1980s acquired by the NPWS and subsumed into Werrikimbe National Park (as noted earlier, the former Youdale land is now encompassed by the expanded Oxley Wild Rivers National Park).⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Joseph Fitzgerald, Notice of Grounds of Appeal, Lands Department Occupation Branch, Preferential Occupation License Files, Eastern Division, No. 585a, State Records, container 3/5330.

⁵⁵ Sullivan, 'Kunderang East Station', p. 40.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁵⁷ http://www.heritage.nsw.gov.au/07_subnav_01_2.cfm?itemid=5051459, accessed 2 March 2005.

⁵⁸ *Armidale Express*, 19 January 2005, p. 3.

⁵⁹ Piers Thomas, Ranger, NPWS Walcha, personal communication, May 2005.

Section Three: Land Use History, Loch Parish

3.1 Loch Parish

Youdales Hut is located in Loch Parish, Vernon County, which from the late nineteenth century formed the most southerly portion of the Kunderang East station (see map). The Falls country at the head of Kunderang Brook created a natural border between the Counties of Vernon, Dudley and Macquarie, and the formidable aspect of the escarpment also divided Kunderang from runs established on the eastern edge of the Tablelands such as Mooraback and Kangaroo Flat. From a southern boundary on the gorge rim, Loch falls away quickly in a northerly direction towards the Upper Macleay, encompassing Pinnacle, Cedar, Bull and Threadneedle creeks, and the other smaller tributaries feeding Kunderang Brook.⁶⁰ Loch is bounded to the north by Fitzroy parish, which historically was also part of the Kunderang East holding.

When historians turn to the evolution of land use the first source consulted is usually the parish map. The earliest surviving map of Loch parish was drawn in 1888, but this is of little help to the researcher, as it contains virtually no cadastral information.⁶¹ A second edition drawn in 1900 does contain later references to the Crown Lease subdivision that took place after World War One, but again suggests that no other form of alienation or lease ever took place, a situation that continues to the present (fifth) edition.⁶² Of course, the apparent lack of land development in this area is hardly surprising given the nature of the country. But in this particular case parish maps need to be augmented by alternate sources, as the latter indicate that numerous (albeit often unsuccessful) attempts were made to own or control land in the upper Kunderang Brook area from the early 1890s.

One alternative source is a map of the Kunderang East Resumed Area No. 585, dating apparently from about 1906-07, which survives in rather fragile form at the University of New England Archives and Regional Heritage Centre.⁶³ Unlike parish maps of the same area, this map shows four relatively small subdivisions of land in Loch parish: one at Middle Yards, a considerably larger block in the vicinity of Cedar Creek (near where Youdales Hut was later built) and, finally, two contiguous blocks near Kenny's Creek (where the second Dyson/'Speleo' Hut was later located). The form of usage or alienation is not noted on any of these portions, but some references are seemingly made to them in surviving Walcha Crown Land Agent records (which are also kept at UNEARHC). A study of the latter collection (which amounts to about sixty registers recording various types of land transactions dating from the 1860s to the 1970s) has revealed a history of land acquisition attempts in Loch parish that is not apparent from relevant parish maps.

3.2 Conditional Purchase and Annual Lease Applications, Loch Parish

The river flats and creeks feeding the upper reaches of Kunderang Brook have a long grazing history that belies the precipitous topography of the area. We know that by the 1890s stockyards had been constructed at 'Middle' and 'Top' Yards, which as their names suggest, were located near Kunderang Brook at approximately central and southerly points on the watercourse. The map of Kunderang East drawn in 1892 held at State Records shows two sets of yards in Loch parish, one at Middle Yards and a second

⁶⁰ Green Gully 1:25,000 Topographic & Orthophoto Map (3rd ed.) 9335-4N.

⁶¹ NSW Lands Department, Loch Parish Map, Vernon County, 1888 edition.

⁶² NSW Lands Department, Loch Parish Maps, Vernon County, 1900 and 1973 editions.

⁶³ Kunderang East Resumed Area Map, c. 1906, UNEARHC.

higher up on the eastern bank of Kunderang Brook, a little way north of its intersection with Pinnacle Creek.⁶⁴ The latter appears to have been Kunderang East's 'Top Yards', located at a central southerly mustering position on the watercourse near steep bridle trails heading east to Parrabel Creek, and south to Mooraback.⁶⁵ These and other yards built along trails leading out of the gorges formed a network of overnight holding points, never more than about ten kilometres apart, that enabled cattle to be driven, watered and housed during daylight hours, and then held securely overnight in readiness for the following day's travel.⁶⁶ In addition, the Fitzgeralds built a slab-sided mustering hut at Middle Yards around the turn of the twentieth century. We can also surmise that the establishment of the first mustering yards/accommodation huts along Kunderang Brook possibly dated from about the 1860-70s, for mustering simply could not have been carried out in such difficult country without this network in place.

As noted earlier, however, from the early 1860s any mustering or droving facilities built on Crown Land near Kunderang Brook were theoretically subject to usurpation by conditional purchase or lease. While the mountainous and inaccessible nature of the country clearly discouraged free selection, Harrison shows that the Fitzgerald family made strenuous efforts to consolidate and protect the Kunderang East holding by the strategic purchase (including dummying) of small blocks in the vicinity of the Macleay.⁶⁷ It should be remembered that Joseph Fitzgerald's control of nearly all Kunderang East station was vested in a relatively insecure Preferential Occupation License, which basically amounted to a large annual lease. Harrison does not analyse free selection in the upper Kunderang Brook (Loch parish), possibly because no such activity is intimated in the most familiar cadastral record (the parish map). As pointed out above, however, a history of attempted land control does emerge from alternative primary sources.

The earliest selection in Loch parish appears to have been made by Thomas Kenny in 1892, near the Kenny's Creek area, about two kilometres south of the Youdales Hut site. As might be expected, attempted occupation of this extreme southerly portion of Kunderang East originated not from the Macleay, but from the Mooraback district on the Tablelands, the nearest place of settlement. According to records kept by the Local Land Agent at Walcha, Kenny applied to purchase 50 acres in Loch parish (portion 2 on the Kunderang East map dated c. 1906) in conjunction with the annual lease of an adjacent block of 150 acres. Conditional purchases usually cost £1 per acre (payable over ten years), and the purchase of a small block (40 acres minimum) next to a larger leased block maximised land control while limiting capital expenditure. The annual rent chargeable on Kenny's leased block was £1 11s. 3d., but it is difficult to imagine how a small property of 200 acres in the Falls country could have been utilised for either pastoral or agricultural purposes in the midst of an economic depression in the early-to-mid 1890s. Lands Agent records indicate that Kenny was late paying rent on his annual lease in 1894, while his conditional purchase was forfeited in July the following year.⁶⁸ He died a few years later, in 1897, aged about 51.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Hand drawn map of Kunderang East Holding dated 10 February 1892, Enclosure 1423, Preferential Occupation License Files, State Records, container 3/5330.

⁶⁵ The trail to Parrabel Creek is marked on the map of Kunderang East dated c. 1907.

⁶⁶ See Harrison, *Shared Landscapes*, chap. 6.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-9.

⁶⁸ Register of Gazetted Conditional Leases, Walcha Crown Land Agent, Fol. 23; NSWGG, 31 July 1895.

⁶⁹ NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages, Death Registration No. 7407/1898.

Annual leases of up to 1920 acres were usually granted for pastoral purposes and could be acquired by application, auction, tender or after-auction tender.⁷⁰ Married women could not legally apply for (but could inherit/hold) annual leases, while any improvements to land were automatically made over to the Crown on the lapse or forfeiture of the lease.⁷¹ Permission had to be obtained for pasture improvement by ringbarking.⁷² Leases could not be sub-let, but right of lease could be transferred via successful application to the Local Lands office.⁷³ On the whole, improvements to land held under annual lease were likely to be kept to a minimum, due to the inherent lack of long-term protection vested in this form of tenure.

While annual leases required comparatively little improvement, conditional purchase applicants were legally obliged to fence and improve their holding, build accommodation facilities, and permanently reside on the land. The last requirement would seem to have been a major stumbling block in the Falls country. Thomas Kenny possibly built the yards located on his block, near Kenny's Creek, at the foot of Mooraback spur. Local grazier Mick Dyson's diary shows that he used 'Kenny's Yards' for mustering until about 1942, but both Mick's son John Dyson and Alan Youdale's elder daughter Betty Bridge recall that these yards were in ruins by the late 1940s.⁷⁴ Also, if the map of Kunderang East dated 1892 is accurate, these yards need to be distinguished from the Fitzgerald's Top Yards, which were located nearby, but apparently on the eastern side of Kunderang Brook. No accommodation facilities are known to have existed in this vicinity until the mid-twentieth century, when Mick Dyson's son Cec Dyson built the family's second accommodation hut (later known as the 'Speleo Hut') in the same area.

Another attempt to occupy a much larger (but unfortunately unidentified) portion of the upper Kunderang Brook was also made in the early 1890s. Walcha Crown Land Agent Records show that Joshua Henry Head briefly held almost 4,000 acres of land in Loch parish by virtue of six annual leases taken out in 1893. At about this time Head also selected more accessible land at Mooraback.⁷⁵ However, four of his annual leases in Loch parish were not renewed in 1894, and Head later appears to have been declared bankrupt.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ W.G. Acocks, *The Settlers' Synopsis of the Land Laws of New South Wales* (Maxwell: Sydney, 1901) p. 73; Brierly and Irish, *Crown Land Acts*, pp. 123, 143-5.

⁷¹ Acocks, *Settlers' Synopsis of Land Laws*, p. 75; Brierly and Irish, *Crown Land Acts*, pp. 122-3.

⁷² Brierly and Irish, *Crown Land Acts*, pp. 125-6.

⁷³ Acocks, *Settlers' Synopsis of Land Laws*, p. 101.

⁷⁴ John Dyson, field trip observation, 2004. E.R. Dyson, diary excerpts for January 1936, October 1937 and September 1942 in John Dyson, 'The Dysons of Kunderang Brook'. Interview with Joyce Green and Betty Bridge, Walcha, 5 March 2005.

⁷⁵ NSWGG, 21 March 1893, p. 2293. Existing records do not record the exact location of the leased land. Bruce Mitchell, 'Mooraback Pastoral Station in Werrikimbe National Park: A History Commissioned by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service' (2004) p. 22.

⁷⁶ NSWGG, 1 February 1894, p. 703. Mitchell, 'Mooraback Pastoral Station', p. 22. The fate of Head's remaining two leases in Loch parish is not clear.

Below: Eileen (left) and Mary Fitzgerald, undated photograph. Source: NPWS.



Below: undated photograph (possibly 1920s) of the enlarged Middle Yards hut. The original Fitzgerald mustering hut (c. 1900) stands to the rear (left) of an additional building at the right of picture. The addition appears to have been built by the Sunderland family after 1919. Source: NPWS.



These early ventures thus failed, which is not surprising given that they were established in difficult country during the midst of a major depression. Even Joe Fitzgerald, a comparatively large-scale grazier, was said to have been forced to seek employment as a drover during this period.⁷⁷ Forfeited or otherwise non-renewed leases usually reverted to their earlier status, in this case the Kunderang East Preferential Occupation License held by Fitzgerald. In the first decade of the twentieth century the family actively sought to deny competitors from controlling accommodation and holding facilities Joe Fitzgerald recently had built at Middle Yards, which were centrally located on Kunderang Brook, and thus crucial to mustering and droving operations. However, the family was in practice forced to rely on various annual leases to protect their assets at Middle Yards, as none of the families' numerous conditional purchase (and associated lease) applications for land in Loch Parish appear to have been successful.

For example, upon reaching the age of 17 the Fitzgerald siblings Alexander (born John Alexander in 1882) and Mary (born 1889) both applied for free selections in Loch parish. (John) Alexander's first application, made in June 1900 for 40 acres including 'house, paddock and branding yard' (evidently Middle Yards), was dismissed in August 1901 after he failed to appear.⁷⁸ A subsequent effort to purchase 100 acres in the same area was withdrawn in 1903.⁷⁹ Mary Fitzgerald's 1906 application to select 80 acres of completely unimproved land in Loch parish, however, was disallowed by the Local Land Board.⁸⁰ The reasons for the decision were not recorded in surviving records, but the members of the Board were obviously aware that Mary's father Joseph held the Occupation License for the same area, and were perhaps bemused by the vision of a young single woman of Mary's social status carving out a farm in ravines where 'no white woman had ever been'.⁸¹ These failures did not deter the Fitzgeralds from similar attempts to purchase and lease land in Loch Parish in 1908, although these applications (by Joe and James Fitzgerald [born 1891]) were again withdrawn.⁸² In practice, the Middle Yards area appears to have been secured from competition by an annual lease of 640 (later 610) acres held by Joseph Fitzgerald between 1899 and 1919.⁸³

3.3 Changes in Land Classification and the Introduction of Crown Leases

From 1909 the state took a much more active role in determining the future of land usage on the Upper Kunderang Brook. In that year the state government vetoed any further applications for land within 51,000 acres in and surrounding the Kunderang East Resumed Area 585a (including the parishes of Kunderang, Loch and Fitzroy). This move ultimately helped the Fitzgeralds protect their improvements for about a decade (although clearly this was not the intention of the decision), as they no longer had to resort to legally questionable conditional purchase applications to protect Middle Yards and other ringbarked areas (Joseph Fitzgerald's existing lease of Middle Yards does not seem to

⁷⁷ Sullivan, 'Kunderang East Station', p. 12.

⁷⁸ Walcha Crown Land Agent, Conditional Purchase Register (hereafter CPR) Application No. 1900-12, UNEARHC.

⁷⁹ Walcha Crown Lands Agent, CPR Application No. 1902-70, UNEARHC.

⁸⁰ Walcha Crown Lands Agent, CPR Application No. 1906-10, UNEARHC.

⁸¹ Annotation attributed to Addie Fitzgerald, Fitzgerald family photo albums cited in Sullivan, 'Report on Kunderang East Station', pp. 17-18.

⁸² Walcha Crown Lands Agent, CPR Application No. 1908-26, 1908-66, 1908-67, UNEARHC.

⁸³ Walcha Lands Agent Annual Lease Register, 1899-44, UNEARHC. NSWGG, 29 December 1899, p. 9720; 29 January 1908, p. 531; 22 April 1908, p. 2199; 8 February 1911, p. 800; 31 May 1911, p. 3098; 28 January 1914, p. 576; 27 September 1918, p. 4826; 31 January 1919, p. 680.

have been affected by the reclassification). A similar bar on selection or lease of land was also placed on resumed areas in the Kangaroo Flat, Mooraback and Moona Plains districts.⁸⁴

The following year the parish of Loch was formally confirmed as reserved from sale, along with land in the parishes of Styx, Mooraback and Kangaroo Flat. The government's reasons for reclassifying the land soon became clear when preparations were made to lease large portions of Loch as Settlement Lease Farms – a sub-division that would have reduced the Fitzgeralds' holding substantially. The reclassification and proposed sub-division of Kunderang East was part of continuing state-sponsored efforts to promote closer settlement in the early twentieth century, and successful applicants were supposed to take up residence on the planned 5,000 acre blocks within three months of signing 40-year leases, at a rent of between about £27 and £35 per annum. Notices published in the *Government Gazette* stated that improvements on the new blocks amounted to nothing more than some ringbarking of land, which was described as:

Undulating country and foothills of red loam, stony and rocky in parts, cover about quarter of the area of each farm, the balance being stony and rocky ridges and deep gullies ... small rich loam flats, suitable for cultivation of a domestic character only, are to be found in the angles of Kunderang Brook; on about one-third of the area of each farm the pasturage is good and suitable for fattening sheep or cattle; on the remainder it is coarse and rough and sparse; suitable only for strong dry stock in its present state, but capable of much improvement; the unimproved grazing capacity varies from 1 beast to 12 acres on blocks 521 and 522 to a beast to 20 acres on block 523, improvable to a beast to 9 acres, or a sheep to 1½ acres on blocks 521 and 522, or a sheep to 2 acres on block 523; to run sheep dog-proof fencing will be necessary ... suitable fencing and building timber exists; dingoes and rabbits are numerous.⁸⁵

The brief descriptions published in the *Government Gazette* in 1910 also give us an idea of the transportation problems that faced any potential occupant. Block 521, which appears to have been considered for the area where Youdales Hut was later built, was described as being 73 miles from Walcha, including '20 miles by packhorse only; 23 miles by rough bush track; remainder good roads'.⁸⁶ The latter clause referred to the main road between Walcha and Port Macquarie (later the Oxley Highway).

Settlement lease applicants were legally bound to control rabbits and inedible scrub. Similarly, from the second year of residence tenants had to fell 10 per cent of uncleared land per annum, although this requirement did not extend to trees over six inches in diameter (potential sleeper and fence timber had to be conserved). Most importantly, successful applicants had to take up permanent residence within three months; every ten years lessees were also required to prove compliance with the lease's conditions. The Local Land Board was scheduled to sit at Walcha on 22 December 1910 to hear applications for the leases and, in the case of contested applications, determine priority by ballot. Unfortunately it is not clear whether this ballot was conducted (no local newspaper files have survived from this period). What is clear is that the proposed settlement leases along Kunderang Brook were not proceeded with in 1911.⁸⁷ Possibly

⁸⁴ NSWGG, 4 August 1909, p. 4439.

⁸⁵ NSWGG, 2 November 1910, p. 6010.

⁸⁶ *Loc. cit.*

⁸⁷ See revocation notices in the NSWGG, 14 June 1911, p. 3337; 12 July 1911, p. 3824.

the permanent residential requirement of Settlement Leases was deemed impracticable and inappropriate to the Falls country, although it should be noted that later subdivision plans also included a somewhat less onerous residential requirement.

Joe Fitzgerald's control of Kunderang East was thus maintained virtually intact from the turn of the century until 1919, when his long-standing annual lease of 640 acres in the vicinity of Middle Yards was not renewed. This decision represents the start of Kunderang East station's slow decline, as during 1919 a Crown Lease Area (No. 3,350) was imposed over 9,500 acres in the Loch and Fitzroy parishes, including the improved area at Middle Yards (see map, portion 4).⁸⁸ Original Crown Leases for pastoral purposes gave the successful applicant secure tenure for 45 years, but also required lessees to take up residence within six months of signing the lease, and then continue to reside on the land for at least 5 years, in addition to the usual conditions regarding fencing, clearing, and control of rabbits and noxious weeds. The successful applicant for this first Crown lease apportioned in Loch Parish, for which rent was set at £65 14s., was Ivy Gibson Sunderland.⁸⁹

Little is known about Ivy Sunderland, but she (or her family) built a second hut at the Middle Yards site, apparently to make the location more habitable. Photos survive from about 1912 of the original Fitzgerald hut at Middle Yards, a vernacular slab structure that resembled Youdales Hut in proportion and design (the main obvious difference being the use of a shingled roof at Middle Yards).⁹⁰ The additional hut built c.1920 was located directly adjacent to the earlier Fitzgerald hut, which apparently survived until the late 1960s, when the present Kellion-built mustering hut was erected.⁹¹ In 1923 E.G. Sunderland also applied for one of three additional Crown Leases made available in Loch. However, he/she was not successful at the ballot, and the original Sunderland Crown Lease over the northern part of Loch parish (Middle Yards) was transferred to Mary Fitzgerald in 1929.⁹²

The three additional Crown Lease areas gazetted and distributed in 1923 encompassed all the remaining land in Loch parish (see map, portions 1-3). In other words, by 1923 the state had excised the entire Upper Kunderang Brook from the Fitzgerald's Preferential Occupation License over Kunderang East. Many conflicting applications were submitted for the three new blocks, including applications by the Sunderland, Laurie, McDonnell and Fitzgerald families.⁹³ However, the winner of a subsequent ballot held at Walcha Court House in October 1923, Harold Williams of Boorolong (near Armidale), appears to have been a relative newcomer to the Falls Country.⁹⁴ Williams won a block (see map, portion 2) that Alan Youdale would later win in a similar ballot process. The *Government Gazette* notification relating to this area stated that it contained a set of yards (the location is not identified), and had by far the most improvement through ringbarking, an important consideration when embarking on a grazing venture in the Kunderang gorges.⁹⁵

⁸⁸ NSWGG, 24 January 1919, p. 561.

⁸⁹ NSWGG, 19 May 1922, p. 2917; 2 June 1922, p. 3179.

⁹⁰ Sullivan, 'Report on Kunderang East Station', p. 79.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 77, 80.

⁹² Walcha Crown Lands Agent, CLR App. 1923-6, UNEARHC.

⁹³ Walcha Crown Lands Agent, Register of Gazetted Crown Leases, 1923, Area No. 4018, UNEARHC.

⁹⁴ Walcha Crown Lands Agent, Crown Lease Register (hereafter CLR) App. 1923-7, UNEARHC.

⁹⁵ NSWGG, 20 July 1923, p. 3272. Yards valued at £20 are noted on Portion B in this gazettal notice.

Of the other two remaining blocks allocated by ballot in 1923, the southerly portion of the parish (Block 3) was won by Joseph Fitzgerald, while the eastern side (portion 1) was won by Robert Laurie.⁹⁶ The Lauries were a well-known local grazing family who had close social ties with the Fitzgeralds. The latter family's control of Kunderang East was slowly unravelling: as we have seen, by late 1923 both Middle and Top Yards (which were located in blocks 4 and 3 respectively) were in other hands (although the Fitzgeralds did regain control of Middle Yards in 1929). Perhaps these intrusions explain why Joseph Fitzgerald forfeited his right to Block 3 in 1925 (for non-payment of deposit), as there was seemingly little point in controlling an isolated and relatively unimproved area cut off from the rest of the family's holding.⁹⁷

In theory, Joe Fitzgerald would also have been obliged to convince the Local Lands Board that he was residing full-time at the head of Kunderang Brook, where no accommodation facilities had yet been constructed. Robert Laurie and Harold Williams faced the same problem, and both appear to have been in financial difficulties in 1926-27. In 1926 Robert Laurie forfeited his Crown Lease for non-payment of rent, but he was able to pay the arrears and have the lease reinstated.⁹⁸ By 1932, however, Laurie's block was in Alec McDonell's hands.⁹⁹ Harold Williams had also forfeited his lease for non-payment in 1927.¹⁰⁰ In 1931 this block was re-offered under the terms of a new Crown Lease, the right to which was contested by various applicants including Alec McDonell, Kathleen Fitzgerald and the newly-arrived Alan Youdale.

Section Four: Alan Youdale and Youdales Hut

4.1 Alan Youdale Arrives at Kunderang Brook

Alan George Youdale was born at Timaru in New Zealand in 1900. He visited Australia in 1920 and decided not to return to New Zealand, but to look for work in Australia.¹⁰¹ The Youdale family was predominantly of Scottish heritage and had been involved in the pastoral industry in New Zealand, where Alan Youdale had obtained experience as a shearer.¹⁰² Personal tragedy also may have played a part in his decision to leave New Zealand, as two of Alan's sisters died in the influenza epidemic of 1918-19, which took million of lives worldwide.¹⁰³

After initially living and working in Sydney, Alan Youdale worked in western New South Wales and Queensland as a shearer. He became widely regarded as a blade-shearer, a skill that he had learnt in New Zealand, and which he employed at famous merino studs such as Haddon Rig (near Warren).¹⁰⁴ At Cobar Alan met his father, Hugh, whom he had not seen for many years (Youdale senior had earlier immigrated to Australia from New

⁹⁶ It is unclear whether the Fitzgerald application was made by Joseph senior or junior.

⁹⁷ Walcha Crown Lands Agent, CLR App. 1923-8, UNEARHC.

⁹⁸ Walcha Crown Lands Agent, CLR App. 1923-6, UNEARHC; NSWGG, 1 October 1926, p. 4115; 29 October 1926, p. 4601.

⁹⁹ Walcha Crown Lands Agent, CLR App. 1932-9, UNEARHC.

¹⁰⁰ Walcha Crown Lands Agent, CLR App. 1923-7, UNEARHC; NSWGG, 18 November 1927, p. 5391.

¹⁰¹ Alan Youdale, Interview with Hugh Legge, 1986.

¹⁰² Interview with Betty Bridge and Joyce Green.

¹⁰³ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁰⁴ Lindsay Youdale, 'Memoirs of Alan George Youdale', unpublished typescript, 2003, p. 3.

Below: Alan Youdale stands outside his first bark hut at Kunderang Brook during the 1930s. Note the external shelter, possibly used for cooking. Source: Joyce Green.



Below: Youdale pack horses negotiating Kunderang Brook in the 1930s. The rider leading is possibly Henry Thompson, who assisted Alan Youdale on the lease in the early years. Source: Joyce Green.



Zealand after serving in the Boer War).¹⁰⁵ In 1926 at Coonamble Alan married his first wife, Margaret Quinton, with whom he had three children.¹⁰⁶ However, disaster struck this marriage when one of the children, Patricia, died in an accident, and Alan and Margaret separated and later divorced. Perhaps seeking a new start, Alan sold his house in Gilgandra in about 1931 for £100 (one fifth of what he had paid for it) and travelled to the New England region, bringing with him his infant daughters Betty and Joyce.¹⁰⁷ In 1941 Alan married Beryl Coyne at Walcha, with whom he had a further six children: Ross, Lindsay, Ronald, Eric, David and Sue.¹⁰⁸

Work was scarce in 1931, but Alan Youdale seems to have been intent on making himself completely independent of employers. Soon after arriving in Armidale he sought a pastoral lease of his own, and was advised of an upcoming Crown Lease on the Upper Kunderang Brook. However, he had virtually no knowledge of the Falls country he was to spend the rest of his life in ('real country', he later called it).¹⁰⁹ After contacting and visiting Kunderang East (travelling from Armidale via Georges Creek), Youdale was shown the boundary marks and creek crossings of the former Williams lease by an experienced Aboriginal stock worker employed on Kunderang East station.¹¹⁰

As noted above, considerable competition existed for this Crown Lease (now classified Area 4,807), and eight conflicting applications were decided by ballot in 1931.¹¹¹ Youdale's success at the ballot meant that a concerted Fitzgerald/McDonell attempt to re-establish control over a comparatively cleared portion of the former Kunderang East station had failed, family members now having to compete in a public lottery for land. Note also that the gazetted description of the lease had changed little since 1923. Despite being technically obliged to live on the block, Harold Williams does not appear to have built any accommodation facilities during the years 1923-26, as the only improvements noted in 1931 were ringbarking and yards valued at £20.¹¹²

Alan Youdale had to stock the lease from scratch, and to do so he journeyed to Tamworth saleyards and purchased 44 heifers for £2. 7s. a head. He then drove the cattle back up to Kunderang via Woolbrook and Walcha, purchasing a bull from the Nivison family on the way for £5.¹¹³ There was virtually no fencing on the Upper Kunderang Brook and Alan Youdale recalled losing a few of the original herd he brought from Tamworth. It appears that in the early years he also tried running sheep, but was unsuccessful in this regard due to the preponderance of wild dogs.¹¹⁴

Over the next fifty years or so Youdale consolidated and greatly enlarged his original stock of cattle, and he and his eldest daughter Betty acquired considerable further leased country both on Kunderang Brook and at Green Gully Creek (to the west of Kunderang

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Betty Bridge and Joyce Green.

¹⁰⁶ NSW Births, Deaths and Marriages Registry, Marriage Reg. No. 6900/1926.

¹⁰⁷ Alan Youdale, Interview with Hugh Legge, 1986.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Betty Bridge and Joyce Green; NSW Births, Deaths and Marriages Registry, Marriage Reg. No. 3424/1941.

¹⁰⁹ Alan Youdale, interviewed by Hugh Legge, 1986.

¹¹⁰ *Loc. cit.* Unfortunately the name of Youdale's guide is not known.

¹¹¹ Walcha Crown Lands Agent, Register of Gazetted Crown Leases, 1931, Area No. 4807, UNEARHC.

¹¹² NSWGG, 27 March 1931, p. 1278.

¹¹³ Alan Youdale, interviewed by Hugh Legge, 1986.

¹¹⁴ Information supplied by Lindsay Youdale to NPWS Armidale, 1992, in Youdales Hut Restoration Files.

Brook).¹¹⁵ Betty Youdale worked virtually full-time in the Falls country with her father between 1941 and 1955, and provided invaluable assistance in virtually all facets of the day-to-day running of the family's cattle breeding operations. More will be said of this below, following a brief discussion of the focus of this report, Youdales Hut.

4.2 Youdales Hut and Yards

As noted earlier, Alan Youdale's original accommodation hut was located about 40 metres south of the present slab hut. It appears that Youdale built the former structure himself soon after occupying the lease in mid-to-late 1931. A brief inspection of the site in late 2004 revealed no visible remains of the first hut, but photographic evidence exists showing its external appearance and the relative location of both the huts built by Alan Youdale on the site. Definitive evidence of the date of construction of the surviving yards adjacent to Youdales Hut, however, has not yet surfaced.

Rodney Harrison notes that by the early twentieth century Kunderang East mustering huts and yards had been 'constructed at Front Tableland (Happy Land), Top Creek, and Middle Yards. Yards were also constructed at Left Hand and at the headwaters of the Kunderang Brook on a block later taken up by Alan Youdale in 1930'.¹¹⁶ It is not clear whether Harrison is here referring to the yards at Youdales Hut, but we have already seen that documentary and oral sources suggest that possibly two sets of yards (Top Yards and Kenny's Yards) had earlier been built further up Kunderang Brook, beyond the boundary of the original Youdale lease. Joyce Green and Betty Bridge both believe that their father and Patrick 'Paddy' Hogno built the yards at Youdales Hut some time between 1931 and the early-to-mid 1940s.¹¹⁷ While documentary sources consistently state that yards existed somewhere on the original Youdale lease (they were referred to as improvements in gazetted descriptions of the block published in 1923 and 1931), an aerial photo taken in early February 1943 does not appear to show recognisable yards adjacent to the Youdale hut complex.¹¹⁸ Of course, the yards referred to in gazetted descriptions may have been located somewhere else on the original Crown Lease.

Photographic evidence provided by the Youdale family shows that the yards at the hut were in place by the late 1940s. Cattle yards in the Falls country required virtually annual maintenance and repair and an interesting feature of the Youdales Hut yards is the extensive and methodical use of groves of native trees situated along the pen lines. These trees were deliberately planted with the intention of providing living (and therefore hardy) augmentation to the decay-prone post and rail fencing structure. The trees, once matured, also provided shade for cattle. The present groves of trees do not appear visible in a photo (taken from a considerable distance) of the huts and yards dating from

¹¹⁵ Interview with Betty Bridge and Joyce Green; Joyce Green, personal communication, 6 April 2005.

¹¹⁶ Harrison, *Shared Landscapes*, p. 74. Note that Alan Youdale occupied his original lease in 1931.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Betty Bridge and Joyce Green; Joyce Green, personal communication, 5 March 2005; photo of Youdale huts and yards, c. 1942-45.

¹¹⁸ 1:19,000 Aerial Photo, Mooraback area, February 1943, Map 598, Run 5, 64628, United Photos and Graphics Service, Blackburn Victoria.

Below: These men are believed to have been involved in a trigonometrical survey of the Kunderang Gorges during World War Two. Alan Youdale is pictured at right. His first hut and the southerly portion of the current building can be seen in the background at right. Source: Joyce Green.



Below: Betty Youdale with her horse Taffy near Youdales Hut in the 1940s. Source: Joyce Green.



Below: Joyce Youdale pictured in the garden in the Youdales Hut yard in about 1943. Source: Joyce Green.



Below: Youdales Hut and environs, looking south west in the mid-to-late 1940s. The original hut was still standing when this photo was taken. The yards and home paddock fencing can also be seen. Source: Joyce Green.



the mid-to-late 1940s, but Lindsay Youdale recalls carting water from the Brook to water the saplings at about this time. Trees were also used as structural elements in the stockyards built elsewhere in the Kunderang Gorges (often as corner or gate posts¹¹⁹), but this form of improvisation was usually *ad hoc* in nature, not exhibiting the level of long-term planning evident at the Youdales Hut yards.

Alan Youdale's initial hut at Kunderang Brook comprised at one stage of two related structures: an A-Framed building (with living space estimated at about 3 metres by 4 metres), clad and roofed in bark; and a smaller, skillion roofed, pole frame and bark shelter (about 1.5 metres by 2 metres), that possibly provided protection for an open fireplace/cooking area. Later photographic evidence from the mid-to-late 1940s, after the current slab hut was built, shows that this secondary shelter had been removed. At about this time the original hut appears to have fallen into disuse altogether and was dismantled. Betty Bridge, who began working with her father on the lease in 1941, made the point while being interviewed that she never stayed in the original bark hut.¹²⁰

The first hut's bark roof was secured to supporting joists in the vernacular manner with external, laterally placed poles, probably cut from local timber; the bark roof of the smaller shelter was also held down by an assortment of logs and large stones (the latter probably sourced from nearby Kunderang Brook). Photographic evidence shows that the roofing cross-members in the smaller, skillion-roofed shelter were located by natural forks in the timber, another common piece of bush improvisation that simplified construction procedures considerably. The space between the two structures (about two metres) was also partly covered with corrugated steel. This lightweight but strong building material was a rare commodity at Kunderang Brook in the 1930s, although corrugated steel was later utilised for the roofing of Alan Youdale's slab hut.

Alan Youdale and his family never had the luxury of a water storage tank at Kunderang Brook, as items of this size could not be safely transported by packhorse into gorge country. Rather, the Youdales relied on the brook for domestic and stock water requirements. A small dam for watering horses and cattle was also built just northeast of the second hut (the home paddock did not extend to the Brook).¹²¹ Another feature discernible from photographic evidence of the original A-framed hut is the gardens immediately surrounding the hut: these were an important and enduring feature of the Youdales Hut site, and vegetable gardens were also located on a flat to the north-west of the cattle yards.¹²²

The structure now known as Youdales Hut was built in about 1941, just to the north of the earlier bark hut. Existing NPWS sources place the second hut's construction in 1931, but Betty Bridge and Joyce Green both witnessed the slab hut being built, and Joyce specifically remembers that it was constructed about the time of her eleventh birthday (and hence the approximate date of 1941).¹²³ Note that this period was also about the time that Betty Youdale, then aged 14, began regularly accompanying her father to work on the lease for extended periods, having completed her secondary education at Walcha High School.

¹¹⁹ See Harrison, *Shared Landscapes*, pp. 112, 132.

¹²⁰ Interview with Betty Bridge and Joyce Green.

¹²¹ Betty Bridge, personal communication, 1 May 2005.

¹²² *Loc. cit.*

¹²³ Youdales Hut Restoration Files; Interview with Betty Bridge and Joyce Green.

The construction of the current slab hut required bush-building skills of a higher order than the original bark hut. Alan Youdale thus engaged his friend Paddy Hogno, a former sleeper cutter, to carry out the specialist axe-construction techniques used to shape and secure the slabs. The hut was built from local stringybark and messmate timber obtained on the nearby ridges of the eastern side of Kunderang Brook. The timber was all dressed with axe and broadaxe on site. In line with prevailing vernacular building traditions in New South Wales, the hardwood slabs were mounted vertically. The roofing metal was purchased in Walcha, transported by vehicle to the top of the Racecourse, and then brought down to the hut on skids pulled by draft horses.¹²⁴

An architectural report on the hut's construction and condition was undertaken prior to the 1992 reconstruction, and a comparison of this research with the photographic evidence that survives from the mid-to-late 1940s suggests that the hut was not altered externally between its construction and reconstruction fifty years later.¹²⁵

Youdales Hut is a small two-roomed building augmented by a veranda. The hut is approximately 7.5 metres in length and 5.2 metres wide (including the fireplace and veranda). The building is a relatively late example of the vernacular timber slab hut commonly built in rural areas of New South Wales from the early nineteenth century.¹²⁶ The foundations consist of a bed of adzed logs, while the slab walls are secured by timber battens (top and bottom) and large corner posts (30 cm diameter). The corrugated steel roof is secured to sapling battens and rafters by collar ties. The fireplace, about 1.50m by 1.90m in dimensions, was built of a timber frame, corrugated steel cladding and a concrete hearth on a stone base. The hut's front and rear doors and floors were also of local slab construction. Glass louvred windows were built in the western and southern walls.¹²⁷

Internally the hut is little altered from the time of its construction, consisting of two rooms divided by a slab partition. The larger of the two rooms containing the fireplace (with mantle) was used for cooking, eating and sleeping, while the smaller room was used for sleeping and storage. The veranda was also used as a sleeping and rest space. The interior of both rooms is entirely functional in character, and simple furnishings such as an improvised bush table remain in the hut. Betty Youdale used the smaller southern room while she worked on the lease, and when Alan's second wife Beryl and family visited Kunderang Brook a tent was erected at the rear of the hut to provide extra accommodation for the younger Youdale children.¹²⁸ As noted earlier, no water storage facility was ever installed at Youdales Hut, fresh water being obtained from the nearby brook.

¹²⁴ Report by D.C. Hardman, Ranger, Armidale District, 6 November 1992 in Youdales Hut Restoration Files.

¹²⁵ Youdales Hut Restoration Files.

¹²⁶ See generally Philip Cox and John Freeland, *Rude Timber Buildings in Australia* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969).

¹²⁷ This description relies heavily on drawings prepared by R. Lonie in April 1992 prior to the Hut reconstruction, Youdales Hut Restoration Files.

¹²⁸ Interview with Betty Bridge and Joyce Green.

Section Five: Working the Falls Country

5.1 Getting to Kunderang Brook

The transportation of materials down to Kunderang Brook for construction of the hut was a complicated and potentially dangerous process. Earlier we saw that the first attempts at occupying the upper Kunderang Brook were made from the Mooraback district in the 1890s. Crucial to these efforts was a bridle trail down Mooraback spur from the Racecourse, a route Alan Youdale later used extensively until the 1950s. Rodney Harrison argues that European tracks and stock routes in the Upper Macleay essentially followed existing Aboriginal communication and ceremonial routes and this was possibly the case for the upper Kunderang Brook area, even if there was comparatively little movement between the coastal hinterland and the Tablelands by Aboriginal groups.¹²⁹ Evidence of Aboriginal occupation of Youdale's Cave, at Cave Yard, has been found dating back approximately 1,500 years.¹³⁰ Alan Youdale also camped in this shelter while working downstream from his hut, but Betty Bridge recalls that it was 'full of funnel web spiders'.¹³¹

Today Youdales Hut can be accessed by three four-wheel-drive trails. The first, West Youdale's Trail, runs down to Kunderang Brook from the vicinity of Kangaroo Flat, and was built along a line surveyed by Alan Youdale. The other modern access point is via East Youdale's Trail, which links to Coachwood Road, a logging route put in during the 1950s when the Haydon brothers were harvesting cedar from the area. The third means of access is a recently constructed vehicular trail linking Middle Yards to Youdales. This was originally a bridle trail: the NPWS formalised the trail in 2003 to aid easy access to Middle Yards.¹³²

However, these trails are comparatively recent, post-World War Two routes. A north-south route along Kunderang Brook from the Macleay was probably the earliest line of communication in the area, and a similar route was reserved for a 'road' in the early twentieth century. This track, which was difficult to use in wet weather, was referred to in Land Inspector Silcock's report on Kunderang East.¹³³ It is also shown on a Vernon County Map dated 1929, and was commonly used for stock mustering and droving up and down Brook.¹³⁴ Today wilderness declarations prevent public vehicular access along this route beyond West Youdale's Trail, although the recently built management trail generally follows the old bridle trail that originally linked Left Hand, Middle and Top Yards. As noted earlier, bridle trails also linked the Top Yards area with Mooraback to the south, and Parrabel Creek to the east.

Even today care must be taken negotiating steep ravine trails in wet weather. Before the advent of four wheel drive trails, however, the only means of getting to Kunderang Brook

¹²⁹ Harrison, *Shared Landscapes*, pp. 116-19.

¹³⁰ Luke Godwin, 'Inside Information: Settlement and Alliance in the Late Holocene of Northeastern New South Wales', Unpublished PhD thesis, University of New England, 1990, pp. 198-202, 237-40, 280-1.

¹³¹ Betty Bridge, personal communication, 1 May 2005.

¹³² Information on roads provided by Piers Thomas, personal communication, 2005.

¹³³ Inspection Report by George Silcock dated 22 April 1899, Department of Lands, Occupation Branch, Kunderang East POL, State Records, container 3/5330.

¹³⁴ NSW Lands Department, Vernon County Map, 1929, UNEARHC.

was by horse or on foot. John Dyson recalls the first time he was taken to the family's hut on Pinnacle Creek in about 1944-45:

I must have been 9 or 10 when I was first taken to Kunderang. The only way to get there was on horseback with our supplies being taken on packhorses. The first time it seemed as though we would never get there. As we rode up out of Outside Creek, I wondered if there was some kind of crane on top to lower us down the other side ... Cec and I spent a freezing night at Pinnacle yards, sleeping with all my clothes on, and woke up with a thick layer of ice covering my bedding. I had to use a stone to break the ice in the creek to get some water for breakfast. With all my clothes still on, including two pairs of socks, we set off to climb the Kunderang spur to the top. As we climbed a bitterly cold westerly wind became stronger ... With my feet numb and my nose bleeding, it seemed as though we would never get to the old bark hut.¹³⁵

Alan Youdale usually accessed Kunderang Brook from the Walcha side, driving a two-wheel drive Model T Ford to the Racecourse Swamp on Mooraback, where he had built a corrugated steel shed for the car (this location also served as a holding point for his packhorses). From the Racecourse a team of packhorses would be led down Mooraback spur: a photograph, probably dating from the 1930s, survives of Youdale packhorses loaded with provisions being led over a crossing on Kunderang Brook (see page 28).

Access problems were clearly a key consideration in the classification and occupation of the land in the Falls country in the early twentieth century. When the first roads were built, they were often little more than manually-cleared paths through the brush, later augmented by bulldozed clearing, levelling and drainage works to facilitate not only grazing, but also cedar harvesting and mineral prospecting. This was the case for Youdale's Trail, which was originally cleared as a bridle trail by Alan and Betty Youdale and other helpers using manual tools. In 1959 a pioneering local dozer operator, Norman Goodwin of Walcha, was contracted by Alan Youdale to improve the trail for vehicular traffic (note that the current road takes a slightly different route to the original bridle trail).¹³⁶ At about this time Alan Youdale also acquired a Land Rover, as the steep descent down to the Brook still required a four-wheel-drive vehicle, particularly in wet weather.¹³⁷ When Alan was informally interviewed just before his death in 1986, he stated that he was quite proud of Youdale's Trail and, certainly, its original manual clearing and construction does seem a remarkable feat of bush engineering and application. Norm Goodwin's dozer improvements to this steep trail, completed in ten ten-hour sessions in 1959, are also remembered by Lindsay Youdale as a 'mighty job'.¹³⁸

In approximately 1948 Alan Youdale built the first of two accommodation facilities near the southern boundary (or 'on top') of the Kunderang lease at Cedar Creek. This land was purchased from Paddy Hogno, and the first hut was built of weatherboard and fibro cladding with a corrugated steel roof (it remains intact). In about 1970 the hut at Cedar Creek was superseded by a modest demountable house located nearby.¹³⁹ The Cedar

¹³⁵ John Dyson, 'The Dysons of Kunderang Brook'.

¹³⁶ Alan Youdale, interviewed by Hugh Legge, 1986. Lindsay Youdale, 'Alan George Youdale', p. 4. Field trip to Kunderang Brook with Lindsay Youdale, 21 June 2005.

¹³⁷ Joyce Green, personal communication, 21 April 2005.

¹³⁸ Lindsay Youdale, 'Alan George Youdale', p. 4.

¹³⁹ Interview with Betty Bridge and Joyce Green; Joyce Green, personal communications, 6 April 2005, 21 April 2005.

Creek dwellings thus gave Alan Youdale a base that was relatively accessible from both Walcha and the Kunderang lease, particularly after Youdale's Trail was cleared in its original form during the early 1950s.

In recent years Alan Youdale's Cedar Creek home has been converted to a NPWS field barracks and depot, and in this capacity served as a crucial fire-fighting base during the 2000 bushfires that afflicted the region. Officially designated the 'Kunderang-Cheyenne Section 44 Bushfire Emergency', approximately 80,000 hectares was burnt out of the Macleay Gorges in the state-wide bush fires of November-December 2000. Up to seven helicopters were operating from the Cedar Creek property during the height of the emergency, and about 80 fire-fighters were camped at the site, which was temporarily equipped to cater for up to 200 personnel.¹⁴⁰

5.2 Upper Kunderang Brook Stock Routes and Pastoral Land Management

The Kunderang run appears to have been predominantly used for cattle grazing since its inception in the early 1840s. During the Fitzgerald management period a small flock of Romney Marsh sheep were kept at Kunderang East to provide fresh meat, but by this phase the station's lifeblood were Devon/Shorthorn cross cattle.¹⁴¹ Each year three-year-old bullocks would be mustered by male members of the family and Kunderang East's Aboriginal stockmen, and then driven out of the gorges, often to Dungog by various routes between Moona Plains and Gloucester.¹⁴²

There is also documentary evidence that the Fitzgeralds drove cattle out of the gorges via Kunderang Brook and Mooraback in the early twentieth century. One brief but valuable source that has survived in this respect is an excerpt from the diary of Arthur Scott, a station manager at Elsinore on the Macleay. In 1906 Scott recorded a droving trip he undertook with the Fitzgeralds from Kunderang East station to the Attunga district:

Left home on 17th April, 1906 – went to Kunderang – heard there were other drovers on road back to Bellbrook, sent wires to stop them – arrived back (Kunderang) on the 22nd and started to muster – a good bit of sport – 23rd went as far as Middle Yards with cattle. 24th mustered all day. 25th mustered all day. 26th Shifted up to the yard at the foot of Mooraback – all ready for the road. Cattle rushed in the night and took four panels of fence. 27th – Next morning not a beast in sight.

With a lot of luck and hard riding got them all back before dark, put them back and watched all night. Next morning we went up hill, got to Mooraback early. Camped in a corner – had to watch. I put Billy on first watch. I went down to house to fix up statement. While I was away cattle rushed twice – Billy got up a tree and let his horse go with the cattle, so Frank and Des went on watch till 12 o'clock then Joe and I went on till daylight. The cattle rushed all night – next morning early there was one beast crippled.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Piers Thomas, personal communication, 27 June 2005.

¹⁴¹ Sullivan, 'Kunderang East Station', pp. 109-14, 121.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 109-10; Cindy McRae, personal communication, 14 March 2005.

¹⁴³ Typescript copy of excerpts from Arthur Scott's diary, April 1906, in the possession of John Dyson, Port Macquarie. I must thank John for alerting me to this source.

Note here the use of Middle, Top and Mooraback station yards as overnight holding points, and the need to repair wooden yards that quickly decayed in the Falls Country. The necessity of watching cattle overnight is also apparent from this excerpt, suggesting that droving cattle long distances was an unremitting and exhausting task.

Alan Youdale's cattle were mainly Hereford.¹⁴⁴ Like the Fitzgeralds at Kunderang East, Alan Youdale kept dairy cattle for domestic purposes and good horses for pack-work and mustering. Although Kunderang-bred stallions were famed regionally, Betty Bridge and Joyce Green believe that their father acquired most of his early horses from the Yarrowitch area.¹⁴⁵ Alan Youdale was an excellent horseman (as one had to be to run cattle in the Kunderang ravines), and horses were valuable assets that were actively used in the Falls country right up to the declaration of much of the area as National Park in the 1980s. Alan Youdale's horses were generally kept in two paddocks built near the hut and yards. Upon retirement the horses were allowed to remain on the lease, in Betty Bridge's words, to 'finish their lives running free'.¹⁴⁶ Betty and Joyce also recall that chickens were kept for a period in a small yard built near the slab hut, supplementing the vegetable gardens and fruit trees planted nearby.¹⁴⁷

Mustering on Kunderang East was usually done in summer, before and after Christmas.¹⁴⁸ The lack of fencing along Kunderang Brook enabled cattle to feed effectively in drought-prone, low capacity grazing country, but also meant that cattle were often difficult to find and control (particularly when wild cattle were present). The lack of fencing also meant that disputes might arise between neighbours over unbranded beasts, but Alec McDonell and Alan Youdale 'were pretty good neighbours'.¹⁴⁹ Co-operation commonly took place between these neighbours at mustering time, but whereas McDonell employed a largely Aboriginal workforce on the Kunderang East property, Alan Youdale and the Dysons predominantly relied on the assistance of neighbours and family members. For example, Lindsay Youdale recalls his father, elder brother Ross, himself, and members of the O'Keefe and Simpson families assisting Jack Smyth rounding up wild bulls in the Green Gully/Apsley River area in 1954. 'Nearly all the men wore hand guns', Lindsay recalls, 'and I have seen them use these guns on charging wild bulls several times. It was a case of kill or be killed as these bulls showed no mercy, and would drop a horse's guts out in the blink of an eye'.¹⁵⁰

The stock routes used by these families, whose leases were located in the higher reaches of Kunderang Brook, also differed somewhat from the Moona Plains-oriented routes usually taken from Kunderang East. Betty Bridge, who gained considerable experience mustering and droving with her father in the 1940s and 1950s, recalls that cattle were often taken east to sales at Willawarrin and Kempsey on the Macleay River.¹⁵¹ Alternatively, the Youdales also drove cattle south to Yarras and Long Flat, via the old trail leading up Mooraback spur to the Racecourse.¹⁵² Occasionally, cattle were also taken on to Gloucester.¹⁵³ Lindsay Youdale recalls that his father drove cattle to

¹⁴⁴ Joyce Green, personal communication, 6 April 2005.

¹⁴⁵ Sullivan, 'Kunderang East Station', pp. 115-20; Interview with Betty Bridge and Joyce Green.

¹⁴⁶ Betty Bridge, personal communication, 14 May 2005.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Betty Bridge and Joyce Green.

¹⁴⁸ Sullivan, 'Kunderang East Station', p. 110.

¹⁴⁹ Alec McDonell quoted in Sullivan, 'Kunderang East Station', p. 42.

¹⁵⁰ Lindsay Youdale, 'Alan George Youdale', p. 4.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Betty Bridge and Joyce Green.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Betty Bridge, personal communication, 14 May 2005.

Walcha, Tamworth, Long Flat and Kempsey. It took about five days to drive cattle to Kempsey, while the trip to Tamworth was more arduous, taking almost two weeks to complete.¹⁵⁴

Lindsay Youdale was the first to truck cattle out of Kunderang Brook to the family's Cedar Creek property, using a seven-ton four-wheel-drive Bedford truck to negotiate the precipitous trail:

I tried 23 head first load. The truck reared with the front wheels two feet in the air climbing out of Surveyors Creek. I stayed in the truck while Lewis Clarke went back to the hut for the Fiat dozer to hook on to the front of the truck to bring it back to earth. I wasn't game to try and back down, as the surface was slippery and steep. After passing this section ... the rest of the climb was made by the truck under its own steam. It took 1½ hours in low range from the yards at the Brook to the yards at Cedar Creek.¹⁵⁵

John Dyson states that his family mainly used stock routes heading out east towards the Macleay, often driving cattle out in this direction in conjunction with the Youdales.¹⁵⁶ John has helpfully recorded the route his family took in from their home at Yessabah, which took three full days to negotiate when cattle were being driven:

We would ride to Boonanghi, then to the Lower Place, follow Dungay Creek to the junction of Outside Creek, then up that creek and over into Parrabel creek at the junction of Kemp's Creek and the property owned by the late Tom Smythe ... We would then follow Kemps Creek to the junction of Coachwood creek, then climb up the Kunderang Spur to about the end of the Coachwood road, then out along what is now known as Youdales Trail East. Where this trail turns west we would go straight on and down into Pinnacle Creek or Kunderang Brook.¹⁵⁷

Compared to the climb up Mooraback spur to the Racecourse, this route in and out of Kunderang from the east was perhaps more strenuous as it involved a steep ascent and descent of about 500 metres on each trip.¹⁵⁸

Sullivan notes that apart from clearing, burning was the only form of pasture improvement ever deployed on Kunderang East.¹⁵⁹ The controlled and seasonal use of fire in winter to improve grazing lands was also Alan Youdale's primary land management strategy. Rodney Harrison makes the point that graziers such as Alan Youdale believed that their use of fire regenerated grasses, reduced weeds and soil erosion, and cleared overgrown trails.¹⁶⁰ In other words, controlled burning of land was perceived as a practical conservation measure. As an experienced local grazier, Ken O'Keefe, put it:

It depends on the country – whether it was the sunny sides or the shady sides. Or the seasons ... Or how heavy it's been grazed ... Alan was always poking

¹⁵⁴ Lindsay Youdale, 'Alan George Youdale', p. 4.

¹⁵⁵ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁵⁶ John Dyson, 'The Dysons of Kunderang Brook'.

¹⁵⁷ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁵⁸ Kemps Pinnacle Topographic Map, 9335-1N (3rd ed.).

¹⁵⁹ Sullivan, 'Kunderang East Station', pp. 130-1.

¹⁶⁰ Harrison, *Shared Landscapes*, p. 141.

around. The fact that he smoked meant that he always had a box of matches in his pocket and if there was a task that needed burning, it got burnt. I thought Alan managed his fires very well.¹⁶¹

Uncontrolled bushfires, on the other hand, created potentially disastrous situations. Chris Sullivan states that in 1895 all Kunderang East's wet cows were lost in a bushfire, compounding Joe Fitzgerald's somewhat precarious financial situation at the time.¹⁶² During Alan Youdale's period of occupation, at least one major bushfire occurred in the Kunderang Gorges, in about 1950.¹⁶³

The last point that needs to be mentioned is that controlled burning was also a significant component of the long-term pasture improvement and clearing process initiated through ringbarking. As noted earlier, appraisals of improvements to land in the Loch parish show that considerable clearing had taken place on the Youdale lease before his arrival in 1931, and the extent of this (and later) work is quite evident in historic aerial photos of the upper Kunderang Brook dating from World War Two. The terms of Annual and Crown leases technically controlled clearing of timber to some extent, but like the residential condition of the latter leases, these clauses do not appear to have been policed particularly stringently in the Falls country.

5.3 'He always said the rabbits put him on his feet!'¹⁶⁴

Nearly all the Gazetted descriptions of the land surrounding Kunderang Brook from 1910 onwards noted considerable rabbit infestation. This was a serious problem for graziers such as Alan Youdale as large rabbit populations depleted grass stocks, hindered grass renewal, and contributed to soil erosion.¹⁶⁵ In 1916 Joe Fitzgerald resorted to making representations to the Lands Department via a local member of the Legislative Assembly, H.D. Morton, claiming that rabbit infestation on Kunderang East had contributed to the catastrophic loss of 1,000 head of cattle the previous year, which Fitzgerald stated were 'more than half my stock last summer'.¹⁶⁶ Rabbit warrens also presented safety dangers to stockriders, particularly in dangerous environments such as the Falls country. Interestingly, no mention of rabbits occur in the surviving documentation relating to the rent appraisal made of Kunderang East in the late nineteenth century, which means we can almost certainly date their arrival to the first decade of the twentieth century.

¹⁶¹ Ken O'Keefe cited in Harrison, *Shared Landscapes*, p. 141.

¹⁶² Sullivan, 'Kunderang East Station', p. 131. Joseph Fitzgerald's evidence to the Land Board Appraisal hearing in July 1899 also refers to his loss of 600 head of cattle in 1895, but the reason why this occurred is not recorded.

¹⁶³ Sullivan, 'Kunderang East Station', p. 131.

¹⁶⁴ Joyce Green, Interview with Betty Bridge and Joyce Green.

¹⁶⁵ See, for example, NSWGG, 2 November 1910, p. 6010.

¹⁶⁶ Joseph Fitzgerald to H.D. Morton, 3 July 1916, Lands Department Occupation Branch, Preferential Occupation License Files, Eastern Division, No. 585, State Records, container 3/5330. Morton was a member for Hastings and Macleay between 1910 and 1920, and later a Federal MHR. See Heather Radi, Peter Spearitt and Elizabeth Hinton, *Biographical Register of the New South Wales Parliament, 1901-70* (Canberra: Australian University Press, Canberra, 1979) p. 203.

Below: Alan Youdale pictured in the 1930s near Youdales Cave drying rabbit skins.
Source: Joyce Green.



Below: The Dyson family also undertook extensive rabbiting in the 1930s and 1940s. This photo was taken near the site of the Dysons' second hut, later known as the Speleo Hut. Source: John Dyson.



Rabbit control measures were another specific condition of the Crown Leases implemented in the Falls Country after World War One, and in 1916 Joe Fitzgerald had utilised 'two poison carts' in eradication attempts.¹⁶⁷ Fifteen years later Alan Youdale made the most of the situation, and actually relied heavily on income derived from selling rabbit skins in the early years of his lease, which coincided with the worst years of the Great Depression.¹⁶⁸ In 1933 a McRae Bros. advertisement placed in the *Walcha News* announced: 'Rabbits! Rabbits! Now is the Time to Get After Bunny And Make Money'.¹⁶⁹ 'Prices have jumped considerably', proclaimed another advertisement placed by Pitt, Son and Badgery, Ltd., a Sydney firm soliciting local rabbit skin consignments via rail.¹⁷⁰ A photo survives from the 1930s of Alan Youdale preparing rabbit skins (near Youdale's Cave) for storage and transportation to Walcha. According to information supplied by Lindsay Youdale to the NPWS in 1992, Alan and a Danish friend named Henry Thompson earned a reasonable income of about £50 per month by trapping up to 3,000 rabbits a month and then transporting the skins to a Walcha dealer (usually the consignments were made on a quarterly basis).¹⁷¹

However, the McRae Bros. advertisement also reveals that brand new Victor and Lane rabbit traps were not cheap items (they cost 22s. 6d. and 21s. 6d. respectively).¹⁷² Alternatives were to use rifles, which was also expensive in terms of ammunition, or set cheaper but usually less efficient improvised traps. Betty Bridge was often required to help her father with rabbiting during and after World War Two, but she found this work somewhat distasteful, and recalls releasing many trapped animals while out of the sight of her father.¹⁷³ It should be noted that Alan Youdale also continued to work sporadically as a shearer in the 1930s, thus providing another source of income to supplement his comparatively small-scale grazing operations in this period.¹⁷⁴

Like Alan Youdale, the Dyson family regularly trapped rabbits for fresh meat and skins after taking occupation of their lease on the Upper Kunderang Brook in 1932, and John Dyson has been able to provide a number of photographs of his elder brother Cec preparing skins for transportation, probably after World War Two. The Dysons usually relied on Alan Youdale to transport their skins to a Walcha-based dealer, as unlike Alan Youdale, the family rarely travelled from Kunderang Brook to Walcha.¹⁷⁵ Rabbiting continued to offer sporadic financial opportunities in the 1940s, particularly during the drought of 1946-47, a circumstance that invariably placed strains on smaller family-oriented pastoral enterprises. However, during the same period international rabbit skin prices skyrocketed, and in 1946 export sales actually exceeded the combined value of the NSW's frozen lamb, veal, mutton and beef exports.¹⁷⁶ 'Rabbit skins are bringing high prices' noted the *Walcha News* in June 1946, 'and good cheques are being received by local trappers. One trapper in a few weeks earned £84'.¹⁷⁷ The local Farmers and

¹⁶⁷ Fitzgerald to Morton, 3 July 1916.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Betty Bridge and Joyce Green.

¹⁶⁹ *Walcha News* (hereafter *WN*) 23 June 1933.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2. E.V. Maguire, a local Walcha agent, also purchased rabbit and fox skins during this period. *WN*, 30 July 1933, p. 7.

¹⁷¹ Report by D.C. Hardman, Ranger, Armidale District, 6 November 1992 in Youdales Hut Restoration Files, NPWS, Armidale District; Harrison, *Shared Landscapes*, p. 83. *WN*, 23 June 1933.

¹⁷² Interview with Betty Bridge and Joyce Green.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.* Field trip with Lindsay Youdale, Kunderang Brook, 21 June 2005.

¹⁷⁴ John Dyson, *The Dysons of Kunderang Brook*.

¹⁷⁵ S.R. Carver, *Official Yearbook of New South Wales, 1947-48* (n.p., n.d.) pp. 437, 442-4, 528.

¹⁷⁶ *WN*, 7 June 1946.

Graziers' Association even complained that men on the Tablelands were deserting the pastoral industry (particularly shearers) to work independently as rabbiters.¹⁷⁸ According to Betty Bridge's husband, John, rabbiters working in the gorge country from the 1950s period predominantly sought rabbit carcasses, which were transported by a refrigerated truck operating from the Cedar Creek property.¹⁷⁹ Apart from rabbiting, Lindsay Youdale in later years also did a considerable amount of pig hunting on the family property.¹⁸⁰

5.4 'Hard work never killed anybody'

Betty Bridge recalls that one of her father's favourite mottoes was that 'Hard work never killed anybody'.¹⁸¹ Having worked with her father in the Falls country for about fourteen years prior to her marriage to John Bridge in 1956, Betty knows the meaning of these words better than most. Alan Youdale typically worked at Kunderang Brook for three-week periods interspersed with three-days of rest in Walcha, where Betty and Joyce boarded with the family of Mrs Sarah Taffe. Alan Youdale's second wife Beryl and their six children also lived at Walcha.¹⁸² After Betty left school in 1941, however, she found herself living primarily at Kunderang Brook, doing exactly the kind of hard work that would have been expected of a young male stock-worker – difficult tasks such as mustering, droving, ringbarking, and even the construction of the original Youdale's Trail, which initially was a bridle trail. Another of Betty's early jobs during the war years was to guide workers engaged in a trigonometrical survey of the Falls country, a task her father also assisted with.¹⁸³ In addition to stock work, Betty was also responsible for most of the domestic chores carried out in the hut (particularly cooking).

Betty's husband John Bridge points out that Betty was effectively a 'bushman' during her years working with her father.¹⁸⁴ It should also be remembered that Betty had virtually no other female company while living at Kunderang Brook.¹⁸⁵ Lindsay Youdale recalls the debt the younger Youdale children owed to Betty while staying on the lease during holiday periods: 'When kids, I think that if it wasn't for Betty, our sister playing either the accordion or mandolin, or violin or harmonica, we would have went stir crazy some times'. Lindsay also describes his father as 'tough as nails'. 'Dad wasn't an easy man to work with as he had hardened himself to this life, camping out, rabbiting, chasing cattle in the mountains, fencing, bush work'.¹⁸⁶

Despite its natural beauty, Kunderang Brook was a very dangerous environment, particularly when so much time was spent on horseback. Betty Bridge broke her leg as a teenager in a riding accident, and only obtained medical treatment after being forced to ride out of Kunderang Brook. Betty recalls: 'I galloped after a beast, and busted my leg on a tree stump, and had to ride many miles in this condition'.¹⁸⁷ On another occasion Betty narrowly avoided serious damage to her eyes when a shard of metal lodged in her cheek while she was working with an axe.

¹⁷⁸ *WN*, 2 August 1946, p. 4. Good prices were also being paid at this time for Kangaroo hides. See *WN*, 9 August 1946, p. 1.

¹⁷⁹ John Bridge, personal communication, 14 May 2005.

¹⁸⁰ Field trip to Kunderang Brook with Lindsay Youdale, 21 June 2005.

¹⁸¹ Interview with Betty Bridge and Joyce Green.

¹⁸² Joyce Green, personal communication, 6 April 2005.

¹⁸³ Interview with Betty Bridge and Joyce Green.

¹⁸⁴ John Bridge, personal communication, 14 May 2005.

¹⁸⁵ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁸⁶ Lindsay Youdale, 'Alan George Youdale', p. 4.

¹⁸⁷ Betty Bridge, personal communication, 14 May 2005.

John Dyson recalls a near fatal accident that occurred while he and his elder brother Cec were riding up Mooraback Spur:

There had been a storm, which had cut a gutter down one of the ridges. When we got to the gutter, Cec had to climb up the ridge to get across the gutter. He moved up above me when his horse slipped, knocking my horse and me down into a tree on the edge of a 20 metre sheer drop into the creek. Thank God the tree was there, or I would have gone over the edge.¹⁸⁸

Joe Fitzgerald senior was killed in a riding accident on Kunderang East in 1927, and a number of other fatal accidents (including the drowning of eleven year old Edward Fitzgerald in 1900) occurred on the station over the years.¹⁸⁹ In early 1978 Alan Youdale also was very seriously injured in a riding accident in the Falls country (see below).

Betty Bridge has fond memories of her years at Kunderang Brook in the 1940s and 1950s, but she also found the seclusion, the manual and domestic workloads, and the spartan living conditions something of an ordeal. While the relatively affluent Fitzgeralds were able to afford some leisure facilities (including a tennis court) at Kunderang East station, recreation at Youdales Hut was limited to simple after-work activities such as Betty's musical renditions, reading, or playing cards. The Fitzgeralds also had telegraph and later telephone contact with the outside world.¹⁹⁰ This was not the case at Youdales Hut, where no electricity or telephone was ever installed, although in later years a battery-powered Breville radio was taken to the hut.¹⁹¹ Apart from this contact with the external world, the Youdales' day-to-day life at Kunderang Brook virtually emulated a nineteenth-century pioneer existence.

5.5 Mining in the Vicinity of Kunderang Brook

From the early 1940s the Kangaroo Flat, Mooraback and Yarrowitch areas became the centre of a small but regionally significant manganese mining industry. Mining operations were typically undertaken by small, family-based groups of men, and the ore was generally shipped from Walcha Road railway station to Newcastle and Sydney, where it was used in steel and dry cell battery production. Manganese continued to be mined in the local region until the late 1960s, by which time Australian requirements were largely met from huge manganese mining operations opened at Groote Eylandt in the Gulf of Carpentaria.¹⁹²

The Youdale family have photos of Alan and Betty Youdale with Paddy Hogno at an unidentified manganese mine (see page 45), and NSW Department of Mines *Annual Reports* record that Alan raised 14 tons of battery grade ore (valued at £203) in 1955-56, and 30 tons the following year (valued at £459).¹⁹³ The location from which the ore

¹⁸⁸ John Dyson, 'The Dysons of Kunderang Brook'.

¹⁸⁹ Sullivan, 'Kunderang East Station', pp. 106-7.

¹⁹⁰ The Fitzgeralds appear to have had a telephone installed at Kunderang East by November 1913. See Post-master General to Joseph Fitzgerald, 27 November 1913, Kunderang East Station Records, UNEARHC, Accession No. A268.

¹⁹¹ Lindsay Youdale, 'Alan George Youdale', p. 5.

¹⁹² See Andrew Messner, 'Manganese Mining in Werrikimbe National Park', unpublished report commissioned by NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (Walcha Office, 2003).

¹⁹³ NSW Department of Mines, *Annual Report, 1956*, p. 22; *Annual Report, 1957*, p. 24.

Below: Paddy Hogno (left) and Betty Youdale pictured at an unidentified manganese mine in the mid-to-late 1940s. Source: Joyce Green. A friend of Alan Youdale, Paddy Hogno helped build Youdales Hut.



Below: The corrugated metal hut located near the antimony mine on a spur above Little Bull Creek, June 2005. The small open-cut mine is located in the left background, about fifty metres from the hut.



was raised is not recorded in these summary official accounts, but the mine appears to have been located near Rock Creek on the Cedar Creek property.¹⁹⁴ Betty Bridge recalls manganese prospectors working in the gorge country in the mid twentieth century, but no payable deposits appear to have been found.¹⁹⁵

In the later 1970s Alan Youdale attempted to mine an open-cut antimony prospect located on a ridge above Little Bull Creek, to the east of Kunderang Brook (see map). A substantial road of about seven kilometres was also installed from East Youdale's Trail, but little mining activity appears to have taken place.¹⁹⁶ According to Department of Mineral Resources records, the site was explored by E.A. Neill and L.C. Mitchell in 1976, but no recorded production appears to have occurred.¹⁹⁷ A field trip to the site in May 2005 revealed that a corrugated metal shelter built adjacent to the mine has survived bushfire activity, and remains in situation (see photo p. 45). The road built to service the mine is unused and overgrown in parts, but the cuttings remain in surprisingly good condition.¹⁹⁸

5.6 The Dyson Family

A year after Alan Youdale arrived at Kunderang E.R. (Mick) Dyson of Yessabah was granted a similar Crown Lease of land encompassing Pinnacle Creek and the upper Kunderang Brook (see map, portion 3).¹⁹⁹ Unlike Alan Youdale, Mick Dyson did not manage to win the ballot held between nine applicants in early 1932 (he was third: other unsuccessful applicants included Alec McDonnell and Michael Fitzgerald).²⁰⁰ However, the first and second placed applicants, Vincent Murray and John Mitchell, appear to have declined to occupy the land, thus enabling the Dyson family to extend their Yessabah-based grazing operations into the Kunderang Brook area. Mick Dyson, who had lost a leg while serving in World War One, died in 1947, after which his son Cec managed the lease until about 1954, when control of the block was transferred to Alan Youdale, increasing the latter's holding to almost 25,000 acres.²⁰¹

Prior to this transfer a number of accommodation and mustering structures were constructed on the Dyson property, and pasture improvement by ringbarking was also undertaken in various places. The family's original accommodation hut (with external dimensions of about seven by four metres) and a set of cattle yards were built by Mick Dyson at Pinnacle Creek in the 1930s (see map). John Dyson remembers that this hut had 'an open fireplace at one end. Although the roof was covered with bark, I recall that there was galvanized ridge capping. It had a dirt floor and a solid timber window that could be opened to let in light and for ventilation in the summer time'.²⁰² The hut was built

¹⁹⁴ Information supplied by Lindsay Youdale and Piers Thomas during field trip to Kunderang Brook, 21 June 2005.

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Betty Bridge and Joyce Green.

¹⁹⁶ Lindsay Youdale, Field Trip to Kunderang Brook, 21 June 2005.

¹⁹⁷ L. B. Gilligan and J.W. Brownlow, Eds, (Department of Mineral Resources) *Mineral Survey of New South Wales, Tamworth-Hastings 1:250,000 Metallogenic Map* (n.p.: Department of Mineral Resources, 1987) p. 77.

¹⁹⁸ Field trip with Piers Thomas to antimony mine site, 17 May 2005.

¹⁹⁹ NSWGG, 22 January 1932, p. 383.

²⁰⁰ Walcha Crown Lands Agent, Register of Gazetted Crown Leases, 1932, Area No. 4871, UNEARHC.

²⁰¹ John Dyson, 'The Dysons of Kunderang Brook'.

²⁰² *Loc. cit.*

Below: Tom Dyson (left) and Mick Dyson at the family's Pinnacle Creek Yards, early 1940s. The Dysons' original mustering hut was located near the yards, just out of shot. Source: John Dyson.



Below left: Cec Dyson outside the family's second hut near Kunderang Brook, c. 1950. Cec built this hut partly with materials recycled from Alan Youdale's abandoned vehicle shelter located at the Racecourse. The hut was enlarged and improved by the Kempsey Speleological Society in the early 1960s, but unfortunately has since been destroyed by fire. The photo at right shows the enlarged 'Speleo' Hut during the mid-1980s. Source: John Dyson.



not only to provide accommodation when family members were working on the lease, but also to satisfy its residential requirement. Remnants of the hut and yards built in the early 1930s are still evident at the Pinnacle Creek site, but both structures have been almost completely destroyed by bushfires.²⁰³

The Dyson lease had less ringbarked and cleared land than Alan Youdale's relatively improved block, making ringbarking a priority for the family. John Dyson recalls that this task usually consisted of 'ring barking the trees in selected areas and then following up by knocking off the suckers from time to time'.²⁰⁴ Fencing was also built to hold cattle when mustering, and in 1946 a weaning paddock was constructed at Pinnacle Creek. This was built by Mick Dyson, his brother Tom, sons Cec, Keith and John (then aged 11), aided by the locally renowned axeman Jack Haydon (brother of Bill Haydon, remembered in north eastern New South Wales as the 'Cedar King'). Additional fencing and a temporary yard were built by the Dysons at the upper boundary of the lease near the Racecourse (John reports that traces of the fencing remain). Mick Dyson also cleared a scrub paddock on the lease and seeded the area with Kikuyu grass.²⁰⁵ This effort to improve feed was no doubt undertaken to maximise the comparatively limited grazing capacity of the Dyson block.

The Dyson and Youdale families co-operated in droving, mustering and rabbiting work, and met for social occasions such as Sunday tea followed by a game of cards.²⁰⁶ The families led similar lives, journeying into the Brook from external bases, and relying primarily on family members for labour. As mentioned above, in the late 1940s Cec Dyson utilised corrugated steel from Alan Youdale's abandoned shed at the Racecourse to construct a second hut on Kunderang Brook. Like Alan Youdale before him, Cec dragged the sheets down into the Gorges by packhorse. The second Dyson hut was located close to limestone caves at the foot of Mooraback Spur, and in the early 1960s this structure was enlarged and used for field trip accommodation by members of the Kempsey Speleological Society. Society members also installed hitherto unknown luxuries such as a shower, a water tank and pump, and a slow combustion stove. Unfortunately the 'Speleo' Hut (as the second Dyson Hut became known [see map]) was recently destroyed by fire, although remains of improvements such as the combustion stove and shower compartment floor are still evident.²⁰⁷

5.7 Alan Youdale's Later Grazing Operations

As noted at the outset of this report, Alan Youdale's lease holdings on Kunderang Brook amounted from the mid-1950s to about 25,000 acres, or roughly half of Loch Parish. According to family sources, the Crown Leases at some point were converted to Perpetual Leases, but Local Land Agent records do not appear to have survived for these transactions.²⁰⁸ In addition to leases held by Alan in the vicinity of Kunderang Brook, daughter Betty also from about 1950 to 1999 held a Crown Lease (later converted

²⁰³ Observation of Pinnacle Creek Dyson Hut site made during field trip to Kunderang Brook and Pinnacle Creek, 2004.

²⁰⁴ John Dyson, 'The Dysons of Kunderang Brook'.

²⁰⁵ *Loc. cit.*

²⁰⁶ *Loc. cit.*

²⁰⁷ Observation of Speleo Hut site made during field trip to Kunderang Brook and Pinnacle Creek, 2004; John Dyson, 'The Dysons of Kunderang Brook'.

²⁰⁸ Joyce Green, personal communication, 6 April 2005.

to Perpetual Lease) over 5,032 hectares of adjacent gorge country at Green Gully, in the parishes of Mooraback and Kangaroo Flat.²⁰⁹

It is thus somewhat misleading to describe Alan Youdale as typifying, as Rodney Harrison does, 'small scale subsistence grazing'.²¹⁰ This description may well have been apt when Youdale commenced his lease at Kunderang Brook, virtually broke, in 1931. But the description is not really accurate for the latter period of grazing operations, when Alan Youdale ran up to 1,200 head of cattle on the upper Kunderang Brook, and the total family holding in the Falls country amounted to about 37,000 acres (or approximately 15,000 hectares). The area of land under Alan Youdale's effective control from the mid 1950s onwards was actually larger than Kunderang East station in its heyday (31,600 acres, or about 12,800 hectares).²¹¹

Alan Youdale continued to work in the Falls country until early 1978, when he suffered a near-fatal riding accident while looking for cattle in extremely rugged country on Betty's Green Gully Creek lease. This accident left Alan hospitalised for three months with a broken pelvis and ribs, a punctured lung, and associated internal injuries.²¹² Lindsay Youdale was present when his father fell, and recalls the nightmarish scene:

Coming out of a steep ravine, it was raining and storming. At 2.30 pm the bank cattle track leading up out of the gully gave way when Dad was approximately 15 to 20 feet up. He quickly slid off his horse (Cameron) and came down into the gully on his bum. Cameron his trusty horse tried desperately to stay on his feet and climb out, but the rain had weakened the soil, which gave way, and Cameron came back straight on top of Dad. ... I had to, with all my strength, roll the horse and finally it got up, but in the process [the horse] stood on Dad's chest. After getting the horses sorted out I tried to move Dad out of the watercourse ... He was in terrible pain, and thought his back was broken. But thinking he would drown I just had to take the chance. I did the best I could, and he didn't want me to leave him; he was concerned that I wouldn't be able to find my way back to him, not knowing the particular area ... I said: 'Dad I have to go', as help was miles away.²¹³

Lindsay made his way back to Cedar Creek as quickly as he could, and then went for help in his father's Subaru station wagon. He just managed to pass a bogged logging truck blocking the road, and was lucky in that the forestry workers camped nearby had a radio to summon medical assistance. However, the two-wheel-drive ambulance could not get beyond Burraki station, more than fifteen kilometres from the accident location, due to

²⁰⁹ Betty Bridge, personal communication, 1 May 2005. Details of Betty Bridge's lease(s) are taken from departmental correspondence and memoranda pertaining to the possession of additions to Oxley Wild Rivers National Park, Portions 3 and 5 Mooraback Parish and Portion 14 Kangaroo Flat Parish, January to March 1999, held at Walcha Office, NPWS; also Joyce Green, personal communication, 6 April 2005.

²¹⁰ Harrison, *Shared Landscapes*, p. 82.

²¹¹ Alan Youdale, interviewed by Hugh Legge, 1986. Rodney Harrison, who does not appear to have been aware of this source, states that Youdale ran 600-700 head of cattle (see *Shared Landscapes*, pp. 82-3).

²¹² Joyce Green, personal communication, 6 April 2005.

²¹³ Lindsay Youdale, 'Alan George Youdale', p. 5.

Below left: Alan Youdale pictured in 1951. Below right: Alan at the Youdales Hut yards just before his death in 1986. Source: Joyce Green.



Below: Youdales Hut prior to the 1992 reconstruction. Lindsay Youdale's caravan is pictured in the background at left. Source: NPWS.



the wet road conditions. Apart from the ambulance driver no medical, police or other staff were assigned to the rescue effort, which relied completely on the cooperation of forestry workers and Alan Youdale's neighbours.

The accident – and the exceedingly difficult rescue operation – made the front-page headline in the *Walcha News*:

nine men went back through the thick scrub to locate Mr. Youdale. The ruggedness of the country can be gauged by the difficulty these men had in carrying the stretcher three miles ...They took four hours to get him to the ambulance in horrid conditions. The average carry was only 50 yards, caused by the heavy rain making their hands slippery and leeches by the hundreds getting on them.²¹⁴

Lindsay Youdale recalls that his father's ordeal lasted about 15 hours before he finally arrived at Tamworth Hospital. The rescue effort undoubtedly saved Alan Youdale's life, but the accident virtually brought to an end his long career as a grazier.²¹⁵ He subsequently spent considerable time recuperating, living for a period with his daughter Joyce's family near Walcha, although he later recovered to the extent that he was able to take up riding again in his eighties.²¹⁶ As Lindsay notes, 'for a man 77, Dad did well to survive this ordeal'.²¹⁷

Alan soldiered on for almost another decade before dying of peritonitis in 1986. He is buried in Walcha.²¹⁸ By the end of his life he had acquired a considerable reputation as perhaps the most experienced cattle grazier in the Falls country. As Alan's son-in-law, John Bridge puts it, Alan carved 'an empire in this wilderness'.²¹⁹ Nor should the role played by Betty Bridge and, later, Lindsay Youdale be forgotten. They too worked and lived in difficult conditions for many years, and made valuable contributions to the family's pastoral enterprise.

Section Six: National Parks and the Reconstruction of Youdales Hut

6.1 Oxley Wild Rivers National Park

In the mid-1980s perhaps the most historically significant change in land use and management on the Upper Kunderang Brook occurred with the formation of Oxley Wild Rivers National Park. As noted at the outset, this large conservation (and Wilderness) area included the residual Kunderang East station holding as well as the Crown (later Perpetual) Lease areas encompassing the Upper Kunderang Brook in Loch parish. The latter area currently forms the southern boundary of the Park, which consists of a number of discrete sections on the New England tableland and escarpment currently totalling 143,275 ha.²²⁰

²¹⁴ *WN*, 2 February 1978, p. 1.

²¹⁵ Joyce Green, personal communication, 6 April 2005.

²¹⁶ *Loc. cit.*

²¹⁷ Lindsay Youdale, 'Alan George Youdale', p. 6.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²¹⁹ John Bridge, personal communication, 14 May 2005.

²²⁰ Piers Thomas, personal communication, June 2005.

In 1994 Oxley Wild Rivers National Park was included in the Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves of Australia World Heritage estate, primarily because of the significance of the dry rainforest found in Kunderang Brook and elsewhere in the park. Warm temperate rainforest is also found in the higher reaches and creeks of the gorge country. As at 2002, over 900 plant species had also been identified in the Upper Macleay gorges, including a number of rare or threatened species.²²¹ In the mid 1990s most of the remaining cattle in the Kunderang Brook area were mustered and driven out of the ravines by experienced local graziers such as Jeff O'Keefe.²²² As at 2002, other introduced animal species such as feral pigs posed a danger to the Park's natural ecology.²²³ Ongoing pest species management is being implemented in Oxley Wild Rivers Park, and controlled burning also continues to be deployed by the NPWS as part of Service's fire management and suppression programmes.

In physical terms former Youdale land has changed quite markedly since its integration into National Park. Most obviously, cleared portions of land along Kunderang Brook have been subject to considerable re-growth. Lindsay Youdale recalls that his father took pains to control lantana along the Brook, and Lindsay believes that the introduced Whiskey grass that now also forms a threat to the local environment only became prevalent after four-wheel-drive access was established.²²⁴ On the other hand, the brumbies that could be found in the area prior to the National Park period are no longer present. In later years Lindsay was able to catch a couple of these animals, break them in, and use them as saddle horses.²²⁵ Wild pigs and dogs remain in the area, though rabbits largely have succumbed to almost a century of concerted eradication attempts.

6.2 Youdales Hut Reconstruction, 1992

It would be fair to say that Alan Youdale and his family were not particularly impressed by the at times unsympathetic bureaucratic process by which the Youdale lease country was converted to National Park in the mid-1980s. When interviewed by Hugh Legge just before his death in 1986, Alan emphasised that he had put in, at considerable expense over many years, about 40 miles of road to both sides of the upper Kunderang Brook – roads that remain the main access routes to the area. However, these and other improvements, (which Alan estimated to have been worth about \$150,000 in 1986), were not recognised when the Youdale leases were purchased and integrated into the National Park estate.²²⁶

This sense of alienation was ameliorated to some extent by the Service's sympathetic reconstruction and restoration of Youdales Hut in 1992. Prior to reconstruction the hut required major repairs, as fifty years' exposure to the elements had taken an appreciable toll. Corrugated steel sheeting was missing, as were several wall slabs, while other timberwork had been burnt. The structure was found to be visibly 'leaning to the west and south due to decay in corner posts and below ground'. This damage was attributable to both rotting of timber and termite infestation, compounded by overflow from the adjacent dam.²²⁷

²²¹ DPM, pp. 16, 18.

²²² Harrison, *Shared Landscapes*, p. 129.

²²³ DPM, pp. 27, 29-30.

²²⁴ Lindsay Youdale, Field Trip to Kunderang Brook, 21 June 2005.

²²⁵ *Loc. cit.*

²²⁶ Alan Youdale, interviewed by Hugh Legge, 1986.

²²⁷ Departmental files on Youdales Hut Restoration, 1992.

Below left: The interior of Youdale's Hut after reconstruction. Below right: a yard fence line showing the use of trees as structural elements. Source: NPWS.



Below: A photo taken during the 1992 reconstruction, showing foundation repairs. Source: NPWS.



Below: Joyce Green (left) and Betty Bridge pictured at Joyce's Walcha home, 2005.



Below left: John Dyson pictured during a Kunderang Brook field trip, 2005. Below right: Lindsay Youdale at Middle Yards Hut, 2005.



NPWS Research Architect Geoff Ashley, NPWS Armidale Ranger and Project Supervisor Don Hardman and Consultant Architect Steve Gorrell devised a conservation strategy. Stabilisation and conservation work ensued, including the 'reconstruction of the pole frame floor and corner post structure, and restoration of vertical slab walling, removed temporarily during structural stabilisation'. Where possible, this work by NPWS staff utilised traditional bush craft skills such as 'splitting logs with wedges, and trimming with adzes as well as modern tools such as chain saws, where appropriate'. Replacement slab timber was sourced locally from Enfield State Forest.²²⁸

As well as renewal of damaged elements of the structure, the reconstruction process undertaken over a period of about 6 weeks in the winter of 1992 entailed a painstaking process of removal, numbering and replacement of timber, doors, windows, the fireplace and other components. A drainage channel was also dug from the dam, as this had been a source of water-borne damage. It should be noted that the restoration work was done on a comparatively small budget (about \$4,000), and the successful reconstruction was indeed 'proof that conservation works on traditional vernacular buildings are economical, and easily within the capabilities of the highly motivated and skilled NPWS staff'. Youdales Hut remains in excellent condition in 2005, although camping is not permitted in the hut as part of its ongoing conservation strategy (a camping area is provided nearby).²²⁹

Conclusion: The Significance of Youdales Hut

In the terms of the NSW Heritage Act, 1977 and associated guidelines, Youdales Hut exhibits local heritage significance. The hut and its associated structures are the oldest remaining examples of cattle mustering facilities located on the Kunderang Brook. Indeed, Youdales Hut is one of the few buildings of any type in the heart of Falls Country, a comparatively inaccessible area with virtually no history of permanent habitation. Other similar structures in the area have been destroyed by fire (for example, the Dyson family huts on Pinnacle Creek and Kunderang Brook), or replaced by relatively modern buildings (such as the Kellion-period mustering hut at Middle Yards). Youdales Hut is also quite rare in that it is a comparatively late example of the Australian vernacular slab hut, having been built in about 1941 by highly proficient bush workers, Paddy Hogno and Alan Youdale. By this period most buildings of this type were built of more lightweight, less labour-intensive construction (usually milled timber frames and steel corrugated cladding – as were the Kellion-built Kunderang East mustering huts dating from the late 1960s, or the later shelter built at the Little Bull Creek antimony mine site). Youdales Hut's physical isolation in the Kunderang gorges would appear to a large extent to have dictated its heavy, traditional style of construction, using predominantly local materials (the main exception being the hut's corrugated metal roofing). Had the hut been built after vehicular access was put in to Kunderang Brook in the 1950s, it is likely that a rather different style of building would have eventuated.

The other main theme to emerge from this history is the impact of the Falls country on lives and work. Alan Youdale and Betty Bridge (nee Youdale) endured conditions in the mid twentieth century comparable to those experienced in the mid nineteenth-century colonial period in more populated areas. Although a very small and utilitarian form of accommodation, Youdales Hut was the centre of Alan and Betty's lives while working on

²²⁸ *Loc. cit.*

²²⁹ *Loc. cit.*

the lease. And although reconstructed in 1992, a considerable proportion of the original fabric of Youdales Hut has been retained, and care was taken during reconstruction to ensure that building techniques followed vernacular traditions. The site complex (consisting of the slab hut, yards, dam and home paddock) is remarkably little changed from the late 1940s: the only obvious built addition is the race erected in the 1980s at the southern end of the stockyards for loading cattle on to a truck. The final factor to remember when gauging the significance of Youdales Hut is the way in which the history of the site had been operationally tied to the Kunderang Run/Station and Kunderang East Station in the years prior to Alan Youdale's arrival, the homestead complex of the latter having been deemed of state heritage significance.²³⁰

²³⁰ NSWGG, 2 April 1999, p. 1546; see also online NSW Heritage Office database, http://www.heritage.nsw.gov.au/07_subnav_02_2.cfm?itemid=5051459, accessed 2 March 2005.

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Below: Youdales Hut looking south west, 2005. Source: NPWS.



Below: Youdales Hut looking north west, 2005. Source: NPWS.

