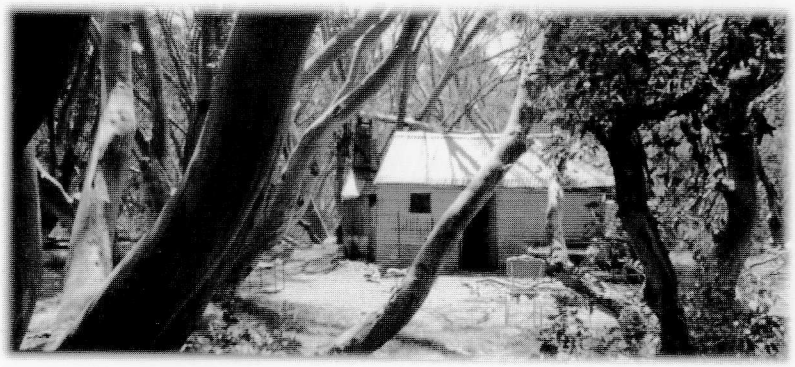
CHRISTMAS WITH ROPER



The silver green carpet of Bogong's high plain
lay shrouded in mist ushered in by the rain,
and the views of the valley in distant blue haze
to a ten metre spread without the sun's rays.

United by hope that a guide pole they'd find,
and soaked to the skin by the climbing's hard grind;
two Alpine Track walkers skirt the sheer rocky rim,
from beauty to wild terror, at the mountain god's whim.

As they prayed for respite from the storm's lashing hail,
there loomed a dim outline of fence-post and rail;
midst twisted, warped snowgums where horses once tethered,
gaunt frame of a building, rough humble and weathered.

For sixty years past Ropers cattlemen's shelter,
now a Christmas day haven - home from the rain's pelter,
and a thin whisp of wood smoke, raced by the wind's blow,
uplifted their spirits, they'd find a fire's glow.

A creaking old door and a flickering fire,
showed a hand-carved old table – tin pots joined by wire.
On a battered old trunk wearing moleskins torn,
snored a bearded old bushie, in riding boots worn.

Strange grey eyes flickered wide as he bid them good day,
said he knew they'd be coming, poured tea, puffed away,
he'd the face of the mountains, rough, weathered and lined,
and spoke in quaint phrases, old fashioned and rhymed.

Though with scarce food for two, and starved, "say the least",
they shared it all out, as a Christmas day feast.
A two inch steamed pudding, and some dry packet meal,
hare stew from his billy, and contented they feel.

Told him tales of the city, above the wind's bluster,
he, intrigued and curious, told them tales of the muster.
Wet snowgum logs hissed, the storm raged on above,
they huddled for warmth, the stranger comfy enough.

Pale dawn showed a fire lit, door still wedged from inside,
but no sign of the bushie, and no-where to hide.
She polished a brass plate, to see words in it cut,
"In memory of Tom Roper, he built this hut."

