THE CATTLE ARE BACK

The creeping weeds are claiming back the well-worn stockyard path
as he strides with restless energy to the Bluff Hut's warming hearth.
It's fifty years since first he axed the timbers for the beams,
and packed the tin up for the roof, five thousand feet from the stream.



His horses' snorts are carried through the crisp cold mountain air,
and enter the hole in the rooftop, reminding him why he's there.
Though it saved his life from storm and snow he's forbidden to fix his hut;
the government's thrown the cattlemen out, and the National Park gates are shut.

He lies in wait for his neighbour as the dawn's pink blushes the gums,
he was rivals and worse with the father, hard men on neighbouring runs.
But adversity always enjoined them, he was saved when his stock stuck in snow,
once more they're in strife to their eyeballs, they must face it together they know.

A cattle camp is stirred to life, men rise from their swags with a yawn,
soft whump of a saddle and clank of a girth; the cattlemen ride with the dawn.
The eager stockhorse pricks his ears, faint hoofbeats thud on the track,
it's the Merrijig crew and would you believe, they've bought the cattle back!

Yes the cattle are back in the mountains, the drovers unite with a roar;
and they swear they'll be back every year, 'till the mountains are shared once more.
They're droving from Heyfield and Dargo to meet in the high countries' heart,
where the valley is locked in by mountains only stockroutes and rivers should part.

They're teaching the youngsters the lessons that only experience can teach,
how to guide the stock through Hells Window, when the outside world's out of reach.
It's the essence of being Australian, resourceful and tough when alone,
so the pioneer skills can live onward, for every Australian to own.

The cattle may all be impounded, it's happened before long ago,
yet they've vowed to meet in the valley, so across the high plains they go.
To be outlawed for living as your father - a human rights issue some say,
but country folk speak with their actions, and they'll laugh at the rangers one day.

The cattle run down the valley's side, to drink at the clear cool stream,
the weary horses earn their rest, while the riders reflect and dream.
Five days, and one more stage to make, they mount up without hesitation;
they come together and shake their hands, by the old Wonnangatta station.

The northern track is cut once more, as the country dries and changes,
you've got to know your watering points to cross the Barry ranges.
The bellowing stock are pushed along, the stockwhips earns its place,
a dry camp they are watched all night, for fear they'll rush and race.

At Rose River valley the tall grasses wave, their families wait in the heat.
The hum of the insects lulls the senses, where they've all come together to meet.
The children's cries rouse up the parents, their heroes raise dust on the track,
they've crossed the high country and would you believe, they've bought the cattle back!

