THE LAST PIONEERS

(dedicated to Pete McCormack)

Did you miss them droving cattle down our stock routes long and wide?
When dusty man and beast were tested by a fierce, dry countryside?
Do you wish you'd seen the Clydesdales hauling furrows 'cross the flat?
Or straining bullocks bellow wool in from a flooded outback track?

We stand a still young nation; our past is near yet much we've lost,
of the pioneering families who blazed the trail, and paid the cost
and became a different people, shaped by hard and ancient hand,
made dryly tough and independent, to love this withering land.

We have tamed the mighty distance, now the highway not the track,
our helicopters muster cattle out across the far outback.
We have cleared the land and fenced it, and old, hard days are out,
but we haven't tamed the mountains, and we still need them in the drought.

For there's one link to the droving days still living on the range,
which automation can't replace, or economics grow and change.
Where the cattle still are driven, slowly stringing up the track,
and the stockhorse and the cattle dog's nostrils flare at the stock whip's crack.

Where tracks carved by generations guide a tradition unchanged,
for we still have mountain cattlemen, who ride upon the range.
Still they muster through the autumn, tailing strays until they drop,
for the early snows cause havoc if the stock are caught "up top".

Of the leases in their hundreds, scarcely fifty now are left,
the Caledonia fires closed three, and the greenies want the rest.
A hundred and fifty cattle, a five hundred acre lease,
it isn't economic, and it ain't a life of ease.

But if you're lost in our mountains, find a mustering hut to hide,
when only bushman's skills can find you, pray once more the cattlemen ride.
Then spare a thought for a way of life with its future so unclear,
and pray that we don't lose for good, our last pioneers.