

PART I
PURPOSE AND AREA
OF THE SURVEY



Plate 2. Hume Dam

The recent increase in capacity necessitated the installation of spillway gates and overhead control gear.

PURPOSE OF THE SURVEY

Lake Hume is one of the major irrigation storages in Australia. Its importance can be gauged from the fact that although its catchment is only two per cent of the total Murray catchment, it provides more than 25 per cent of the average flow of the Murray.

All of the major valleys have been developed for agriculture, and there is a continual demand for virgin land to be made available.

Predictions of rising requirements for wood products have led to an increased demand for land suitable for the establishment of pine plantations, and the more intensive management of existing eucalypt forests.

In order to evaluate the land for the various forms of land-use, it is necessary to understand the ecological relationships and to assess the effects of a change in land-use. It is the function of the Soil Conservation Authority to collect basic information about the environment so that better use may be made of the land.

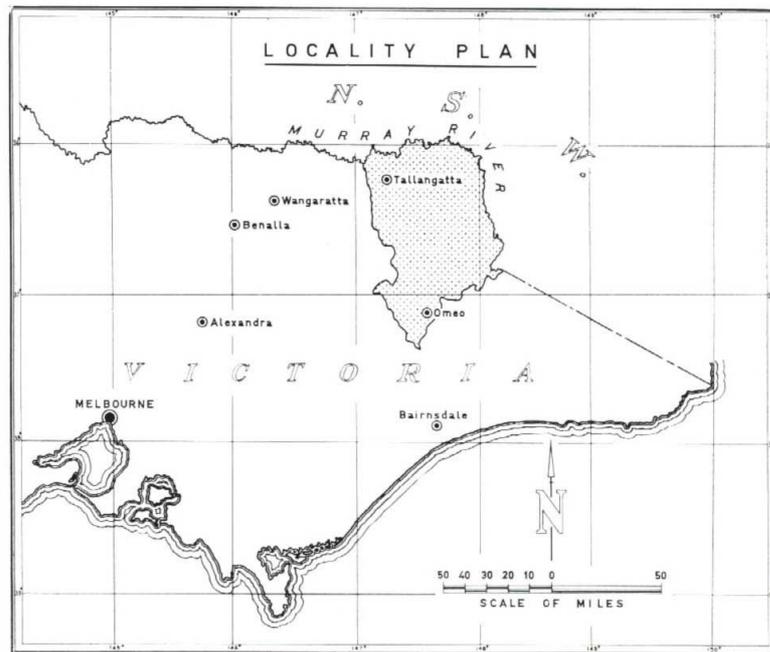
THE AREA

The Hume dam impounds the waters of the Murray and Mitta Mitta Rivers just below their junction, about 9 miles east of the New South Wales city of Albury. The Lake has a capacity of 21 million acre-feet.

The total catchment to the reservoir is approximately 6,000 square miles. However, this report is concerned only with the 3,900 square miles in Victoria. A detailed report has been prepared for the New South Wales side of the catchment by R. T. Morland (1958-59-60).

The catchment is mainly mountainous with elevations ranging from about 600 feet in the valleys in the north-west to 6,500 feet on Mt. Bogong, Victoria's highest mountain. Several geographic zones are recognised. The extensive valley tracts are in the north of the catchment. Plateaux of varying elevations occur throughout the catchment. The rolling country of the Omeo-Benambra district in the south is regarded as dissected tableland.

The western boundary of the catchment is the divide between the Kiewa and Mitta Mitta Rivers and its southern boundary is the Great Dividing Range from Mt. Hotham to Forest Hill at the head of the Indi River. The Indi, and further north, the Murray River which is formed when the Swampy Plains River joins the Indi, form the eastern and northern boundaries.



The catchment consists of the whole of the County of Benambra and the eastern part of the County of Bogong. It includes the Shires of Towong and Upper Murray and small parts of the Shires of Yackandandah and Wodonga in the north. In the south it includes the northern half of the Shire of Omeo.

The principal towns are Tallangatta (population about 850), Corryong (800), and Omeo (450). Smaller settlements are at Cudgewa, Walwa, Eskdale, Benambra, Bethanga, Mitta Mitta and Granya.

Several State highways traverse the catchment. The Murray Valley Highway enters the north-western corner from Wodonga and serves Tallangatta, Granya, Walwa and Tintaldra before terminating at Corryong. The Omeo Highway originates on the Murray Valley Highway, just west of the Mitta Mitta River bridge, and follows the valley to Mitta Mitta township. It then traverses the Snowy Creek valley and skirts to the east of Mt. Wills at a maximum elevation of 4,550 feet, before descending steeply to the Big River (Upper Mitta Mitta River) at Glen Valley. It then follows the river most of the way to Omeo, and 6 miles south of Omeo, it leaves the catchment through Tongio Gap.

The third highway is the Alpine Road which runs from Omeo across Mt. Hotham, where it reaches an elevation of about 6,000 feet. It then leaves the catchment and continues on to Harrietville on the Ovens River.

Major roads run up most of the larger valleys and occasionally cross divides via low saddles such as Lockharts Gap on the Tallandoon-Sandy Creek road, Sassafras Gap on the Nariel-Benambra road and at Shelley and again at Wabba Gap on the Tallangatta-Corryong road.

Additional vehicular access is provided to areas of Crown land and reserved forest by-roads constructed by the Forests Commission and occasionally by sawmillers.

The only railway runs from Wodonga to Cudgewa through Tallangatta. There is no passenger service on this line but regular goods services are run between Wodonga and Cudgewa. As the only railway is in the north, most of the catchment is dependent on road transport. This applies particularly to the Omeo-Benambra country where the nearest rail-head is Bruthen some 70 miles to the south. This results in relatively high transport costs, and places the southern part of the catchment at an economic disadvantage compared with most other agricultural areas of the catchment.

HISTORY

Discovery and Early Settlement

The information in this section was derived from Andrews (1920) and Roberts (1924).

The first Europeans in the area were members of the Hume and Hovell expedition who crossed the Murray (which they named the "Hume") a short distance upstream from its confluence with the Mitta Mitta River in November, 1824.

The first settlement in the area was made in 1835, when William Wyse, acting under instructions from Charles Ebden, established a cattle run at Mungabareena, now the site of Albury. A few weeks after his arrival, whilst following straying cattle across the Hume River, Wyse discovered the extensive flats between the Little River (Kiewa) and the Mitta Mitta River and took up the area in his own name, calling it "Bonegilla".

At about the same time, a party led by George McKillop and James MacFarlane crossed the mountains from the Monaro and came upon the tableland around Lake Omeo. MacFarlane established the Mt. Pleasant run, later called Omeo B, in late 1835 or early 1836. Thus the distinction of being the first to establish runs in the catchment is shared by Wyse and MacFarlane; neither was aware of the other's occupancy.

In 1836 several cattle runs were established along the Murray, "Talgarno" by John Jobbins, and "Bunjil" by John Waite for John Hore.



Plate 3. Weeping willows line the banks of the Mitta Mitta River at Tallandoon. Crack willows are now preferred for stream-bank plantings.

The year 1837 saw an increase in the expansion of settlement and a number of new stations was formed.

Expansion was rapid in the north in the following years, and by 1840 most of the land which is now freehold had been claimed. Stations frequently changed hands a number of times in these few years and it is difficult to follow the progress of the settlement at this stage.

Settlement in the south was less rapid. Cobungra Station was established probably by Wells Bros. before 1842, the date is not clear, and Hinno Munjie was established in 1842 by James Day.

The weeping willows which are an important feature of the streams in the north of the catchment were introduced during the early settlement.*

* When William Balcombe emigrated from St. Helena he brought with him some cuttings from the tree which shaded Napoleon's tomb. These cuttings he planted at Kenmore Station (near Goulburn). When a Mr. Stuckey established a station near Gundagai he took some cuttings from the Kenmore trees. Stuckey's station was the stepping-off point for many of the original settlers in the Upper Murray and it was natural for them to take cuttings from the homestead willows to establish a bit of the "Old Country" green around their new homes. Thus the willows were carried throughout the Upper Murray area. (Andrews 1920).

For many years the settlers, or squatters as they were more commonly called, had no legal claims to the land they occupied. Various legislation provided for some form of leasing and later, purchase, after a number of years of leasing. Under these insecure tenures the landholder was not encouraged to make improvements, and for this reason properties changed hands frequently. During the 1860's several Acts were passed which provided for selection with security of tenure. The pattern of development which followed was more orderly and gradually larger runs were broken down, until in the early part of this century the situation became fairly stable and has remained so to the present.

During the early 1850's the discovery of gold in the colony brought thousands of prospectors to the country. Gold was first discovered at Omeo in April, 1854. Alluvial deposits were worked around Omeo, in the Mitta Mitta valley, and along the Cobungra River, Snowy and Little Snowy Creeks. Some alluvial gold was also found in sub-basaltic gravels on the southern end of the Bogong High Plains. Gold-bearing reefs were worked in the Dart River, around Tallandoon, Mitta Mitta and Corryong. Lodes were discovered at Bethanga in 1875 but the gold proved difficult to extract from the ore. However, between 1909 and 1911 new plant enabled profitable extraction from this area. Until recently gold was being obtained from the "Maude and Yellow Girl" mines at Glen Wills and the "Firebrace" mine near Granya.

As the gold fever died, the district, in common with most gold-bearing areas, was left with many ex-miners who then turned to the land for a living.

The Hume Dam

As early as 1863 the importance of control and utilisation of the waters of the Murray River was recognised. Numerous enquiries and meetings and several Royal Commissions were held. A report on these is to be found in "A Short History of the River Murray Works" by J. H. O. Eaton (1945), from which the following information was obtained. The first comprehensive meeting was held in May 1902 when the Prime Minister of Australia and the Premiers of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia were present. The storage of water for irrigation and the improvement of conditions for navigation of the river by a system of locks was recommended. Following lengthy correspondence, numerous meetings and considerable investigation, the River Murray Agreement as presented on 9th September 1914, was finally ratified by the Commonwealth and the State Parliaments in 1915. The *River Murray Waters Act* 1915 was then passed by the Commonwealth and the State Parliaments, to give force to the Agreement and provide the necessary authority for carrying out the proposed works.

Early construction work on the dam wall was poorly co-ordinated, Victoria and New South Wales being responsible only for the works in their respective States. Later, however, work was co-ordinated by the River Murray Commission and completion of the initial stage to a capacity of 141 million acre-feet was achieved in 1936.

The raising of the wall of the Hume dam to increase the capacity of the reservoir to a maximum of 2½ million acre-feet was commenced in 1951, and was completed in 1961. Major works in addition to work on the dam wall included the shifting of the township of Tallangatta (with a population of about 850) to a site at Bolga, and extensive re-alignment of roads and the railway. The official opening of the new Tallangatta township took place in 1956. The reservoir is now officially named Lake Hume.

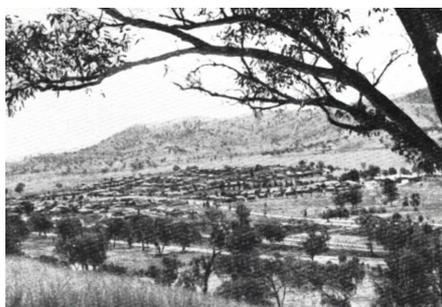


Plate 4. Tallangatta-the new township, officially opened in 1956. The town is on a low hill and rolling terraces on the Mitta Mitta arm of the Hume Reservoir. The background hills and steeper slopes are in the Bethanga land system.