

Submission to: Dr Mark Lonsdale
Independent Chair
Independent Technical Reference Group
Re: Wild Horse Damage around Currango Homestead
Made by: Friends of Currango Inc. (FoC)
Date: 13 April 2015

Background – Currango.

The name Currango is associated with:

- the former sheep and cattle station established in the mid 1800s in the north east corner of what is now the Kosciusko National Park; and
- the station homestead building complex now managed by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service.

The relevant map for the area is 8626-4S Rules Point, 1:25,000. From this it can be seen that what is now locally referred to as Currango Creek, is in fact Gurrangorambra Creek down to its confluence with Mosquito Creek, then Mosquito Creek down to its confluence with the Murrumbidgee River in Tantangara Reservoir.

The Currango Homestead precinct is located to the east and south of Currango Creek and its surrounding plain, and now consists of around eighteen late 19th and early 20th century timber buildings.

Friends of Currango Inc. (FoC)

FoC is an association incorporated under the Victorian Associations Incorporation Act 1981, formed in May 1990. FoC took over from an earlier informal group established in 1976, called the “Currango Club”.

The Currango Club was formed initially to support the long-term caretakers Tom and Mollie Taylor in their management of Currango. After Tom and Mollie’s retirement in the late 1980s and our incorporation as FoC, we worked with the NPWS in the maintenance and restoration of the Currango buildings.

Physical involvement in maintenance activity ceased in 2005 due to insurance and OH&S concerns. Since that time FoC has continued its involvement in the management of Currango under the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding with the NPWS. In the early 2000s we had substantial involvement in the development of the Conservation & Management Plan under which Currango is now managed.

The present office bearers in FoC have been visiting Currango since 1970. Most have attended Currango at least once, and some of us up to four times per year. All of us are able to testify to the matters referred to below.

We have been familiar with Currango Creek and its valley ever since we commenced visiting in the early 1970s. The Creek is shown on the map as originating in wetlands. The wetlands have previously been best described as swamp, and this is the description we now use.

In short, the swamp has previously contained rushes with a coverage of water usually knee deep even in summer and autumn. Water has gently moved through the swamp and has cascaded into Currango Creek before making its way to the south and west to join the backed up waters of Tantangara Dam.

The prevailing condition of the swamps 20 to 30 years ago is clearly shown in attached photographs numbers 1 to 3. In photo 2, the height of the grass is clearly evident in relation to the remnant fence line. The fence line is also evident in photo 3, but harder to detect as it is further away.

Horses on Currango Plain

When we first commenced visiting the creek and valley, while frequently seeing numerous wild dogs and pigs, we rarely saw horses. In a visit of a week, we would have counted ourselves lucky to see a single horse, let alone a mob. When we did encounter them, they were always a considerable distance away, and immediately upon seeing us would bolt. We are agreed that this was the situation up until the mid 1990s.

Since then the situation has changed completely. Last year we wrote to the NPWS pointing out the explosion of numbers, and a copy of that letter is annexed. It sets out our considered view as to the increase in numbers.

Recently we have been able to carry out closer inspections of the creek and valley. On Sunday 8 March a group of four members walked up Currango Creek from the causeway on the Port Philip track.

We found that the water in the lower reaches appeared to be clear enough. However, an aerial photo (GoogleEarth) that we now supply shows the entry of water from Currango Creek into Tantangara, and it can be seen that the inflowing water is discoloured. This was not previously the case. A rising Tantangara Reservoir usually inundates this lower part of the creek above and below the Port Phillip Fire Track causeway for a few weeks each year.

As we got closer to the previous site of the swamp we could see many mobs of horses. As we approached, many of the mobs of horses galloped up a hill to the east, while others went to the west towards Old Currango.

At this point there was an overwhelming change in the creek, its bed and surrounds. Whereas, downstream the creek banks, although damaged, are still well defined, from here on upstream, the banks are significantly trodden down. This is evident in attached photos 4 to 8.

Instead of a well-defined creek (as in photos 2 and 3) flowing through banks pocked with holes left by platypus and yabbies, the water, now a milky grey colour, sits in a wide and shallow cavity. There is no longer any obvious vegetation either nearby or in the water, and much of the creek bed has been hollowed out, and is now showing the bedrock

A couple of small tributaries to the creek were unrecognizable from twenty years ago. Their banks could no longer be discerned. It was a dry day, and

instead of green banks surrounding the small creeks there was simply dust, with an ooze of water creating mud.

The lower swamp no longer consists of wetland. One can now walk across it on vegetation 3 to 4 cm high, with no prospect of getting one's feet wet. At all points in this region, including what used to be the swamp, the creek surrounds were covered in horse manure.

In late March, another four of our members conducted a further investigation. They entered the creek where it is tiny, at the bridge on Pockets Saddle Road, and then walked downstream. They found similar conditions to those referred to above. The banks of the creek have been destroyed and there is no wetland where previously water was 20cm deep across the swamp. See photos 10 to 14.

Thus, to our observation the entire wetlands surrounding Gurrangorambla Creek from the Pockets Saddle Road down to Mosquito Creek, and Mosquito Creek down to Tantangara Reservoir appear to have been destroyed. In many places the principal bed of the creek is now abandoned. On the west side of what used to be the swamp is an eroded watercourse many metres wide, with no vegetation whatsoever.

Whereas the stream and adjoining swamp, as shown in photos 1 to 3, were permanent features of the landscape as recently as approximately ten years ago, these features have now completely disappeared.

All of this has occurred in a very short time. And what is still more alarming is that, of the 150 horses sighted on March 8, about one third were juveniles. We understand that, in the nearby area known as Long Plain, there has been a recent roundup and removal of some hundreds of horses. In our view such action is desperately needed in the Currango valley.

We hope this is of assistance to you.

Should you require any further information please contact either:

- Ian Dunn on 0401 107 092, and <iandunn227@gmail.com> or
- Kim Jelbart on 0427 826 820, and <kjelbart@erasystems.com.au>

Ian Dunn
President
Friends of Currango Inc.
13 April 2015



1

Photos of the swamp from about thirty years ago. The fence line in Photos 2 and 3 gives an idea of the height of the vegetation, the base of which sat in about a foot of water. The foreground of Photos 2 and 3 demonstrates the presence of a clean, significant, well-defined stream



2



3



***Walking north along
Currango Creek, from
about 1km above the
Causeway***

March 2015

(1)

4



5



6



***Walking north along
Currango Creek, from
about 1km above the
Causeway***

March 2015

(2)

7



8

***Walking south from
the Confluence of
Currango Creek
and Gurrangorambla
Creek***

March 2015



9



10



11

Aerial View of Gurrangorambla / Currango Creek Entry to Tantangara
(from GoogleEarth, 29/1/14)

12

