

BILLYS CREEK

*(A brief history of Billys Creek compiled by
Hilmar Batza – September 2003)*



*Northway Family at Billys Creek
Photo: by ?
Date: c.1906*

Location

Billys Creek is located about 14km south of the Princes Highway near Morwell, Gippsland. The creek meanders through Morwell National Park before passing through cleared farmland to join Middle Creek which in turn joins the Morwell River north of Yinnar.

Early Days

In April, 1840, Count Paul Strzelecki was the first white man to see Morwell River and explore the Morwell district. The first squatting run, Hazelwood Station (17,330 acres), was taken up by Albert Brodribb and William Bennett in 1844. Other runs were soon to follow including Maryvale, Merton Rush and Scrubby Forest. It should be noted that land taken up by squatters was usually flat to undulating with access to river or creek frontages because of easy access for watering stock.

Billys Creek was named after William (Billy) Hillier, who together with Nicholas (Nicol) Brown, were the first holders of Scrubby Forest Run (5,730 acres) from 1848 to 1868. The area was heavily wooded and very mountainous towards the south, thus giving an area of only 10 square miles for practical use. The original homestead was located in the north-western corner of the run (on Driffield Road just before Middle Creek coming from Yinnar).

It would appear that both men had some sort of a 'fall-out' because they divided the run into two with Hillier taking the eastern half between Middle Creek

and Billys Creek and Brown taking the western half between Morwell River and Middle Creek.

Hillier built himself a hut and stockyard on the other side of Billys Creek and began a hermit-like existence. His part of the Scrubby Forest Run came to be known as 'Billys Side'. In those days the area was very wild with lots of dingoes and mobs of kangaroos. Local aboriginals wandered around the area and were often regarded as troublesome. Hillier planted a number of gooseberry bushes and a furze hedge around his hut in an apparent effort to protect himself and to keep the aboriginals away. Around 1870, Hillier was found dead on the banks of Billys Creek after being speared by aboriginals. He was buried on a small rise about three chains from Billys Creek on property later owned by Douglas McFarlane, who acquired it through the Soldier Settlement Scheme after World War 1. All that remains of the burial site today is a small briar rose bush. The site is located somewhere near the boundary line of O'Hara's and Laws' properties.

Brown did not live on his run for long as he had a hotel ('Drover's Rest') and coach stables at Shady Creek. He would grow horse feed at Scrubby Forest and cart it to Shady Creek to supply Cobb & Co's horses. Brown's second wife was unfaithful to him and he shot and killed her lover, 'Billy the Mailman' (William Laughton) in 1868. Early in 1869 Brown was sentenced to life imprisonment (20 years) but was released in 1887 on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Jubilee. Brown then managed a property at Upper Flynns Creek and in 1894 tried his hand at gold mining in Coolgardie and struck it rich. He returned to live with his son in Rosedale and eventually remarried a third time in 1903 at the age of 83 and died in 1916.

For many years, the O'Hara family, employed by Brown, had occupied the Scrubby Forest homestead and a road close by is still called O'Hara's Road today.

John Shiels, who came from Rosedale with his two sons Frank and Harry, took over Scrubby Forest Run from 1869 to 1874. This was a period of time when squatters with vast areas of land held on lease gave way to settlers looking for smaller blocks. In 1872, Frank Shiels became the first selector to carve his block out of Scrubby Forest. He took a section on Middle Creek on either side of Jumbuk Road. James McDonald was next in 1873. The rush for land was on.

In 1874 George Firmin and two of his sons (other members of the family came later) arrived at Middle Creek and took over the Scrubby Forest Run. Other early selectors on Scrubby Forest Run were Henry Wicks and John Quigley. George Firmin eventually handed the license back to the Government in 1885 when the area that was of any use for grazing

purposes was made freehold and taken up by selectors. Scrubby Forest as a run ceased to exist.

The early settlers faced many hardships in the district. Rabbits, first introduced to Victoria in 1859, eventually became a problem in the district with a rabbit plague starting in 1904. By 1916, rabbits had laid many of the farms bare where once rich pastures flourished. Wombats destroyed many of the farmers' fences making rabbit control measures ineffective. Major fires swept through the area in 1889. During the Great War the lack of farm labour allowed introduced plants such as blackberries, ragwort and thistles to take over the land. By 1919 many farms in the district had been abandoned.

With the introduction of the Soldier Settlement scheme, the Government acquired Donald McMillan's 3700 acre holding along Billys Creek near Hazelwood. As a result, Hazelwood Estate was established in 1922 and the area was sub-divided into 45 allotments varying in size from 49 to 189 acres.

Morwell National Park Extensions – Billys Creek Valley

Morwell National Park was originally declared on November 26, 1966 to become Victoria's 20th national park. Since then, there have been a number of additions made to increase the size of the park to over 500 ha. The most important addition was the Billys Creek Valley extension in 1989. This included land bounded by Junction Road, Jumbuk Road and Reidy's Road towards the east.



Weir Park sign (in storage)
Photo: by Hilmar Batza
Date: 20-07-03

Morwell Weir was built at Billy's Creek in 1913 and for many years the area was known as '**Weir Park**'. At one stage Billys Creek Valley was totally cleared for grazing including the surrounding steep hillsides.

One of the biggest Blue Gums to be felled in the area was undertaken by Fred Foot who was able to provide some 2000 fence posts for his effort. The site of the tree was not far from the present Braniffs' Road access.

Prior to World War II many dairy herds of 80-100 cows grazed in the area. This gradually gave way to sheep farming as demand for wool increased to make clothing for the war effort. The Army set up a rifle range ('stockbutts') during the war with the farthest targets placed some 500-600 feet away. The range was kept open for a period of time after the war.

'**Potato Flat**' (also once known as 'Ragwort Flat') got its name because crops of maize, pumpkin and potatoes were grown on the flats by Doug Trewin in the rich soil deposited by Billys Creek.

Friends of the Morwell National Park (FMNP)

In May, 1986 a volunteer group calling themselves 'Friends of the Morwell National Park' was formed to assist with revegetation programs, weed removal, and flora and fauna surveys. A major reforestation program has been underway since Billys Creek Valley was added to the Park to plant and grow trees from seedlings collected from some of the remaining trees in the area. This work has been mainly carried out by the FMNP under the supervision of the local Park Ranger. Some 32,000 trees have been planted to-date.

Morwell Weir, Billys Creek

All that remains of the Morwell Weir is the concrete wall and end supports across Billys Creek. From July 1910 to May 1912, Morwell Shire Council considered two competing water supply schemes for Morwell. The first scheme proposed by Traralgon Shire Engineer, Mr Sambell, involved piping water north through a six-inch main from Billys Creek. The estimated cost of the Project was 10,000 pounds. The second scheme, proposed a few months later by John Hoyle involved a cheaper method of piping water east from the Morwell River. In May, 1912, the Murray Report recommended the first scheme. The scheme was finally approved by the Morwell Shire Council after running a ratepayers' poll which also supported the first scheme. The Morwell Waterworks Trust was established to oversee the work.

The contractor in charge of construction of Morwell Weir was Ike Billingsley (Russ Billingsley's father). Les Hare had the contract to cart the pipes from the Morwell Railway Station to Jeeralang using a dray and bullock team. A 6-inch cast-iron pipe was laid from the weir to Morwell. The depth of water at the Weir's barricade was 12 feet. More than a year later in December, 1913, the water was turned on. At the official opening ceremony, the hydrant supplied

sufficient pressure to shoot the water 40 feet into the air in front of the Post Office in Commercial Road, Morwell.

After the construction of the Weir it became a popular picnic spot with visitors driving in by horse and buggy. It would appear that a special dinner set was struck at some stage with pictures of the Morwell Weir printed on plates, saucers and cups. A few of these items can still be found in the possession of some families living in Morwell.



*Weir Cup & Saucer
(Owner unknown)
Photo: by Eric Lubeke*

As the demand for water increased, a 9-inch wooden pipeline made from wooden staves (timber slats bound with wire and coated in tar) replaced the existing pipeline.

The Weir supplied water to Morwell until 1954 when Moondarra Reservoir took over. In 1962 the Latrobe Valley Water & Sewerage Board took over some sections of the Trust's pipelines and the Ridge Reservoir when the Trust started purchasing Moondarra water out of the Morwell Reservoir via the Tolmie Street Pump Station.

During a particularly dry spell the local farmers downstream from the Weir were not thrilled about all the water going to Morwell. They took matters into their own hands and drilled a hole(still there today) through the main Weir wall below the overflow so that water would be released into the creek. Today the Weir remains a historical feature of the park, even though most of the Weir's holding area has been filled in by silt, gravel and vegetation. Access to the Weir is via the Weir Track(1km) from Braniffs Road or from Junction Road carpark via the Billys Creek Trail(1.6km) which joins the Weir Track.

Lodge Track

This track was named after a hall that had been built for Scouts and Rovers to use during the seventies. In 1969, Morrie McGlashen, a civil engineer with the SEC purchased 256 acres for less than \$2000 from a Mr Cameron who owned 400 acres(2 titles) that included the area of the current Lodge Track, Clematis Track and the Zigzag Walk. The other title of land was bought by Harry Surman. Prior to Cameron, the previous land owners included Koon, Colonial Mutual Life and Bryant. McGlashen was heavily involved in the scouting movement in Melbourne and wanted to build a 'Lodge' for the Reservoir 1st Scouts and Rovers to stay in when they came to the area. The whole area was over-run with blackberries. It took some 3-4 years to clear the land with tractors. Things sped up when McGlashen was able to buy a bulldozer. Access to the land was initially from Bill Roberts' place off Jumbuk Road. The Reservoir Troop, who camped in tents of a weekend, dug a track down the hillside. Eventually a bulldozer was hired to finish the track. A bridge was built across 'Side Creek' and a track carved into the hillside to get to where the Lodge was going to be built. Later the army widened the track and took it through to Morans Road. Because of his job, McGlashen traveled to various work sites around the State and was able to get hold of tools, engines, motor bikes, building materials and old cars at a cheap price or even have some of the items donated. The timber for the Lodge came from an old house in Yarram. Many trailer loads of timber were hauled up the Lodge Track by tractors to build the Lodge. A workshop area together with generators was set up near the bridge across Side Creek. Some 200 yards of one-inch square railway line was laid from opposite the workshop and ran parallel to Side Creek on its southern side. Around 1977 McGlashen had to give up his involvement with the scouts because he had turned 55. However, he was soon persuaded to take on the 1st Preston Boys who became known as the 'Boys Club'. Some of his former Reservoir Rovers who were now married came on weekends with their wives to help him run the Boys Club. Many a night was spent sitting around a large campfire. In 1982, McGlashen sold the land to Rodney Walsh because he had become fed up with the constant vandalism and theft of property whilst no-one was there to look after the property during the week. The last straw had been when the Lodge was burnt to the ground. Rodney Walsh set up a Flying Fox over the weir. Once the land became part of the Morwell National Park, much of the remaining rubbish from human habitation was taken to the tip or bulldozed into the ground.

Additional Items

1. Morwell & Yinnar Gazette 1900, April 30

Engineer's report to the Shire of Morwell states:

"The Engineer reports to Council that the Public Works department has advised that grant money received for bush fire damage following the 1898 bushfire, could not be used for repairing the Billy's Creek Road (Junction Road) culverts as they were destroyed by the December 1899 fires".

2. Victorian Electoral Roll 1903 (on microfiche)

Find electorate of Gippsland, then the sub-division of Morwell within that electorate. Listed are the names of those people on the electoral roll at that time who stated that they lived at Billys Creek.

3. Family History and Recollections of Hugh Murray Thompson – Xmas 1998

Billys Creek Road Reserve – *'The Ford'* was a popular picnic spot at Billys Creek

1909 The Shire of Morwell built a bridge over the Creek which stood for 60 years before being replaced. Billys Creek was known for blackfish.

Jeeralang Junction

1904 Jim McNamara built a four bedroom house and opened a General Store. He left to become a Licensee of a hotel in Argle Street, Traralgon. Sold store to Jack Howard who owned a nearby farm. The store was often managed by his mother. Jack Howard became a contractor for the Jeeralang mail round. Mrs Howard became the Jeeralang Post Office postmistress. The Howards left Jeeralang Junction for Dandenong.

Around 1909 the Jeeralang Store was closed

1910 Junction School was established and it was used both as a school and as a hall. About 1910 the house and store was sold to Dave Hendry, a butcher who owned 90 acres nearby. Hendry built a slaughter house close to Billys Creek and had a butcher's round in Hazelwood and the Jeeralangs. Dave Hendry was a handyman

1920 The Hendry's sold and moved to live in Melbourne.

The Willaton family subsequently ran the Post Office.

4. Extract of the School Council Minutes Hazelwood South State School No 3350

1941, Feb 10 Present - Bill Rowley, Bert Fox, Jack Medew, Jim Medew and Teacher

Agreed combined picnic with Jeeralang to be held at Billys Creek on 22 February, 1941.

Agreed to write to Shire of Morwell asking for public conveniences to be erected at the Picnic Reserve at Billys Creek.

5. Shire of Morwell Council Minutes

1947, Jan 15 Councillor D. J. White brought to Council's attention that the fireplace at Billys Creek Reserve needs to be rebuilt.

6. Billy's Creek Photos

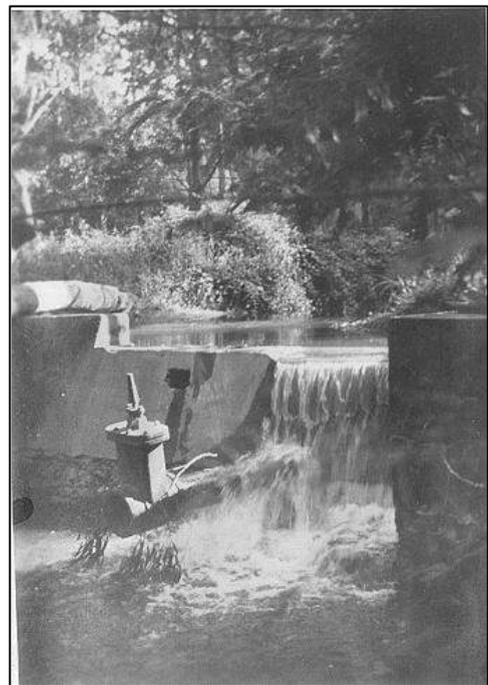
Bruce McMaster has some early photos (4) of the weir, including one showing a cup and saucer with the Morwell Weir on them.

Marj Jones(nee Billingsley) has a plate (30cm) with the Morwell Weir on it.

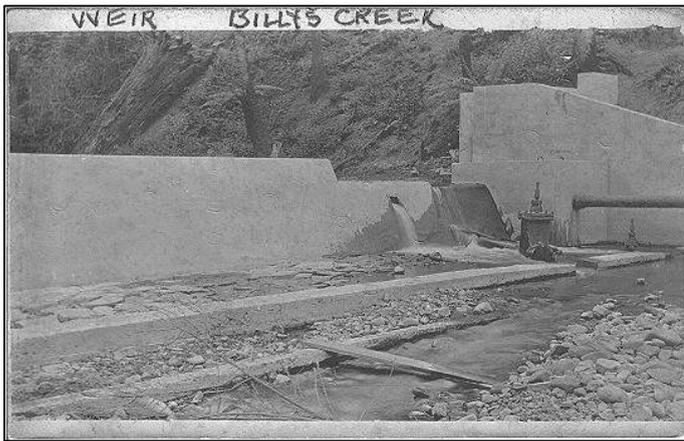
Rob de Souza-Daw has photocopies of 2 pictures depicting the Northway family at Billys Creek taken in c.1906 & the Northways and Mackeys in c.1908



*Dinner Plate (30cm) of Weir
Photo: by Hilmar Batza
Date: 8-9-01*



*Billys Creek Weir
Photo: by ?
Date: c.1949*



*Early photo of the Weir
Photo: by ?
Date: c.1914*



*Weir under construction
Photo: by ?
Date: c. 1913*



*Remains of old pipe-line
Photo: by Hilmar Batza
Date: 20-07-03*

References and Sources of Information

1. **Legg, Stephen M, 'Heart of the Valley' A History of the Morwell Municipality 1992**
2. **The Morwell Historical Society News**
21/10/63 – Early Morwell by I.T. Maddern
10/10/65 – Reminiscences on Yinnar by
Walter Firmin
10/11/66 – Shady Creek Cemetery
10/09/68 - Early Morwell by J Lubeke
3. **The Traralgon & District Historical Society Inc. (Website)**
May Meeting 1986 Part 1 – The story of Shady Creek
by Andy Ringin
4. **Audio Tapes**
23/11/89 – Morrie McGlashen and Harry Surman
reminiscing to Yvonne Aplin about Billys Creek
Valley in the 70's & Early 80's
12/02/94 – Stuart McFarlane reminiscing about
Billys Creek Valley to Tom Lawless

Information Wanted

If any reader has information, including photos,
about Billys Creek, please contact Hilmar Batza.

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Please Note!

*According to the Place Names committee, Billys
Creek is spelt without an apostrophe.*