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Many expert riders claim Man from Snowy River legend

BANJO Paterson should have named his famous poem the “Men” from Snowy River rather than “Man”.

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BANJO Paterson should have named his famous poem *The Men from Snowy River* rather than the singular “Man”.

At last count, at least a dozen expert horsemen are claiming to be the legendary Australian folk hero.

Tourist-conscious Corryong remains ultra-protective of Jack Riley’s claim to the title.

Though Riley still appears the most likely, others are convinced the then 52-year-old could hardly have been described by Banjo as “a stripling”.

The identity of Paterson’s expert rider has long been the subject of debate that the author himself only promoted during his lifetime.

“Banjo Paterson was a very smart man and knew commercially, the public loved a

mystery,” Wangaratta’s “Irish Jack” McGauran said.

Mr McGauran said Paterson had many opportunities to reveal the identity of his most famous hero but deliberately chose not to. He remains convinced the Man from Snowy River is Jim Troy of Wagga Wagga, as do many others.

Lachie Cochran, Hellfire Jack Clarke, Jim Lower, Jim Spencer, Owen Cummins, George Hedger and an Aboriginal tracker called Toby are some of those who have claimed the title over the years.

Riley, the hermit bushman from Mt Tom Groggin Station, believed he was the “man”, who charged his pony down the mountainside after a mob of brumbies and the colt from Old Regret.

Others are less generous — and said Riley was little more than a drunk and horse thief.

Australia recently celebrated the 150th anniversary of the birth of the great poet, who in 1890 penned one of the nation’s most loved pieces of verse.

Riley fans such as Marita Albert from the Upper Yarra Historical Society and historian Richard Hubbard said there was proof Riley actually told Paterson the story of that helter-skelter ride.

“None of the other people had met Banjo before he wrote the poem,” Mr Hubbard said.

Lots believe the “man” was a myth or a combination of many characters Paterson had met during his extensive travels throughout the bush.

There are memorials to the ride at Corryong but also at Cooma, on the Monaro Plains, and other places in southeast Australia.

Neville Locker operates a museum at Adaminaby, deep in the Snowy Mountains, and has co-authored a book exploring the claimants for the title. He has no doubt the legendary rider celebrated by Paterson was Charlie McKeahnie, who was just 27 when he died near Cooma.

McKeahnie was born in Gudgenby, ACT, and was reputed to have been a fearless rider and stockman.

Mr Locker said McKeahnie was known to have chased a well-bred horse through the very rugged country between Yaouk and the headwaters of the Snowy River northwest of Adaminaby at the age of 17. This chase was documented in a poem by poet and friend of the McKeahnie family, Barcroft Boake, called *On the Range*, in which the horse being chased died when it ran into a granite outcrop.

Paterson is reputed to have told people his poem was based on McKeahnie’s ride.

“It is not hard to knock Riley out because of his age,” Mr Locker said. “It has got to the stage some areas don’t care much about the truth.”

Mr Locker agreed Paterson deliberately kept the real identity of the actual rider vague.

“It would have destroyed the mystique, which is part of the charm of the poem.”

Bush poet Bob Healy from Violet Town said he had met a person who’d actually been told by Paterson the “man” was made up.

“The verses were intended as a ballad, not as a newspaper report of a sporting event,”

Paterson is reputed to have said.

Mr Healy said the poem was written before the advent of television and even radio when yarn-spinning was a popular form of entertainment.

“I don’t think it is any one person, I think it is made up.”

Mildura’s Bill Crosby said Riley was “much too old” to be the person described in the poem.

He was also involved in the research for a book into the origins of the poem.

He also points to the claims of Jim Troy, who died aged 33. Troy was related by marriage to Thomas McNamara, said to be “Clancy”, subject of another famous Paterson poem, Clancy of the Overflow.

“Clancy” also had a second claim to absolute knowledge of the “man” having been included in the Snowy River poem as “no better horseman ever held the reins”.

McNamara gave an interview to the Brisbane *Courier-Mail* newspaper in 1938 in which he recalled the actual details of that terrific chase in the hills beside Wagga Wagga.

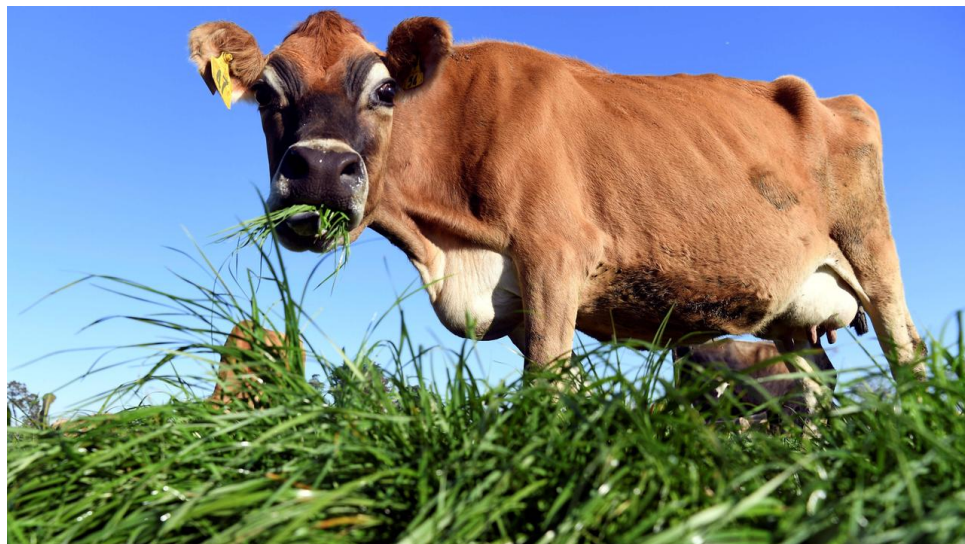
Others make much about “Kosciusko’s side”, the supposed location of the ride “where the pine-clad ridges raise”, and the importance of other tree species factors into the search as well.

Bush poet Healy said the mystery would never be solved because the poem’s author was long dead, though people continue to look for evidence.



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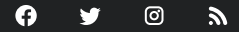
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