

## The History of Kay's Picnic Ground

Kay's Picnic Ground is one of three picnic areas on the Sassafras Creek between Kallista and Monbulk.

It was named after James Kay, the first settlers on this land. James had been a chain-man with the survey team responsible for marking out the subdivision for the Parish of Monbulk so he took the opportunity to select a 10-acre block for himself and his family. The Kay family moved to their land above the present Kay's Picnic Ground in September 1893.

In the early days the coach route into Monbulk from Belgrave was along the Graded Road from Beagley's Bridge across Perrin's Creek at South Sassafras (Kallista) and along the present Upper Coonara and Holden Roads above the Sassafras Creek. It was known as the Graded Road until after World War One. The establishment of the Country Roads Board in 1912 meant the building of better roads. The Kallista to Monbulk Road was part of this development and in 1918 a Mr McKimmie obtained the contract to supply metal for this new road. The metal was quarried from



Nations Coach on the Graded Road

the top block on the Graded Road where Upper Coonara Road comes out.

When the new road was built to connect Monbulk and Kallista the landholders along the Sassafras Creek began supplying hot water and food to picnickers and campers to help supplement the

income from their land. The Kay family built a small kiosk to cater for the visitors but later petrol rationing during World War Two meant very few people could travel up to the hills. After the war families once again came for camping holidays on Sassafras Creek, some returning year after year with their extended families and a second generation of children enjoyed the cold creek waters on a hot day.

Before Christmas each year Kay's Camping Ground was crowded with berry pickers camping by the creek and walking up to Camm's jam factory area each day to work. There was a toilet



Kay's cottage opposite Kay's picnic ground 1919

block but no shower facilities at the reserve so a cold wash in the creek became part of their daily routine.

Mrs Muriel Kay, then President of the Monbulk Swimming Pool Fund Raising Committee sometimes organised an evening at Kay's Picnic Ground, setting up stalls that sold food and drinks. Her daughter Carmel Mitchell well remembers the crowds of locals who attended the social event and swelled the Swimming Pool funds with their purchase of hotdogs and other items for their tea.

Local Ranger Harry Gay was employed by the Shire to maintain the tourist tracks and the little bridges over the creek. He looked after all the

tracks between Kallista and Monbulk and from Monbulk to Emerald becoming a familiar sight in his old Holden utility with his dog by his side. Harry, a big man, always dressed in overalls and navy singlet in summer and winter taking pride in his work keeping the tracks in excellent condition. Believing visitors were sometimes having trouble filling their billies with clean water, he installed a new pipe to enable them to fill containers with spring water which had become an added attraction in the Reserve. After many years Harry retired from this job in the 1960's to become a dairy farmer in the Lakes Entrance area. Camping is no longer permitted on the Sassafras Creek so visitors to Kay's Picnic Ground today are usually enjoying a day out away from

suburbia. People have enjoyed many activities in this delightful spot over the years so perhaps James Kay had chosen wisely when he selected his land on Sassafras Creek all those years ago.



Kay's property. New Monbulk Road 1919

## Grant for Monbulk Historical Society

Monbulk Historical Society (MHS) has been successful in receiving a Yarra Ranges Council 2016 Arts & Heritage Development Grant to produce a book.

With the recent discovery of the Monbulk Progress and Fruit Growers Association's minute books we felt it was important to tell the story of the history of fruit growers in the Monbulk area and how the 1918-19 national sugar shortages impacted the local farmers. They show how this dedicated group of local residents took on the job of communicating with other necessary groups in the progression of Monbulk, making it a safe place to live and maintaining its roads.

Well known Monbulk identity Peter Hayne is writing the content for the book and says the story demonstrates how the industry shaped the area, as well as where Monbulk sat in a national context.

Peter has a real interest in the industry of

fruit growing and the sugar shortage as his grandfather, Joseph Hayne, not only worked in the sugar cane industry in Queensland when he first arrived in Australia but went on to live and grow fruit and berries in The Patch from the 1890's. He experienced the hardships first hand and was also one of the dedicated members of the Monbulk Progress and Berry Growers Association.

MHS will join the Yarra Ranges Regional Museum in their upcoming exhibition 'Preserving Memories' (21st May - 14th August, 2016) with a display of photos and the Monbulk Progress and Fruit Growers Association's minute books of the time. It is intended that our new book will be launched at this event.

*We would like to thank the May Family for the donation of the minute books of the Monbulk Progress & Fruit Growers Association. The books date from 1918 - 1961 and give a detailed commentary on the development of Monbulk's township, berry growing and roads and those who were involved in its progress.*

*If you are cleaning out and find old papers or books relating to Monbulk, The Patch or Kallista, please think of Monbulk Historical Society before throwing them away. We love to preserve our heritage!*



MHS members would like to thank the wonderful **team at the Yarra Ranges Council front desk**. They go out of their way to help us where they can and make it is a pleasure to work in such a pleasant environment.

## THANK YOU!

MHS members would like to thank **Angela Arnott**, our retiring Treasurer, for her meticulous work in keeping our books over the past 22 years and volunteering her time each week. We are pleased to know that Angela is staying on as a member and continuing to assist the Society in its various activities.

