

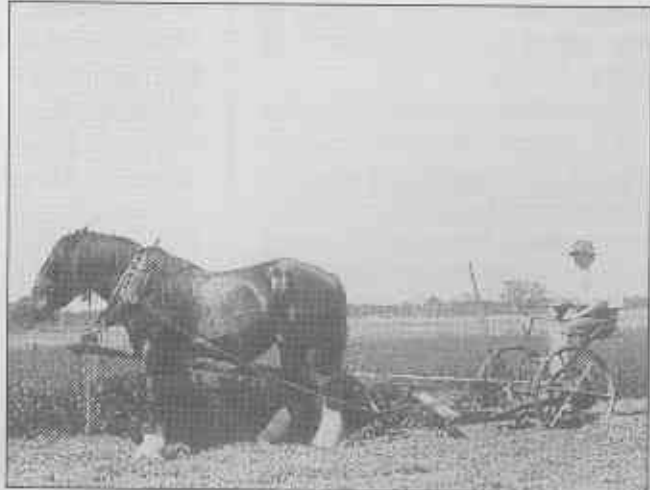
THE WAY WE WERE ...

Irrigation from the Moore River

by Geraldine de Burgh-Day



R.H. (Bob) de Burgh mowing irrigated lucerne on The Flat at Cowalla in 1935. The black stallion was purchased from C.J. Roberts of Dandaragan.



Farm workers mowing irrigated sorghum with Samuelson mower, 1930s.

A member of LFW in Victoria sent us this comment.

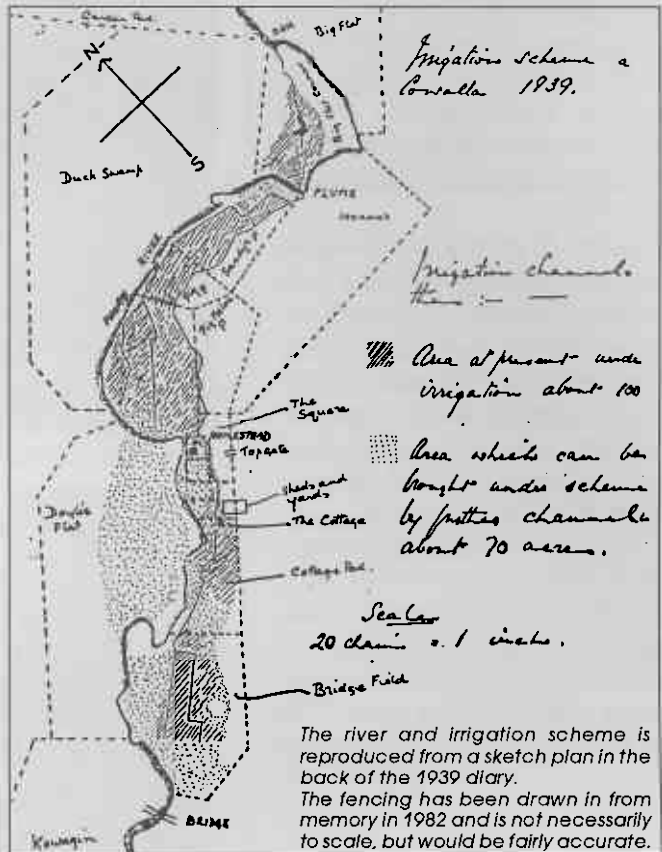
THE photos show cutting sorghum and lucerne, grown under irrigation, at Cowalla in the 1930s. As you can see, they were good crops.

Cowalla was established very early, in 1850. It is on the coastal plain north-west of Gingin, where the Moore River bends abruptly south for Guilderton and the sea. An agent's description of the property in about 1908 said: "The estate is one of the most valuable properties in WA for extensive irrigation operations. There is an unlimited supply of fresh water, which has a perennial flow. The river is flanked by rich alluvial flats ... (which) ... are abundantly adapted for the production of maize, sorghum, millet, lucerne, paspalum, rye, couch and other grasses, or clovers."

In those days, of course, all work on the property was done with horses, which needed an immense amount of feed. Drought years and economic pressures led to a bold decision in 1914, when S. de Burgh decided to implement the irrigation proposal and pump from the Moore River. It worked well, and was eventually extended to irrigate about 100 acres (see map).

Alas, by the mid 1950s clearing upstream was turning the river water saline. With regret, the system was abandoned as the water was too saline for crops.

On a recent visit, I noted that the sweet-water river pools I used to swim in are now saltier than the sea and, in addition, the water has a metallic mineral taste. A sad comment on the way we now are.



Gerri de Burgh-Day was brought up on Cowalla, but now lives at Mt Macedon. She can be contacted on (03) 5426 4188.

[More information about the early history of the Moore River area, including a page of photos of the irrigation system at Cowalla, can be found in W.J. de Burgh's "Neergabby"; pub. Shire of Gingin, 1976. - Ed.]