

# THE MAN FROM COXS RIVER

IT'S EQUINE FILM HISTORY IN THE MAKING THAT  
WE CAN ALL BE A PART OF!



*Some of the younger brumbies in the yards*





Four brumby stallions in the yards



A brumby mare and foal

*HARD to believe that it's only 80 km from the heart of Sydney, but here, deep in the wild country of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, a shrewd and spirited mob of around 50 Australian brumbies inhabit the beautiful and secretive Burratorang Valley.*

**L**ike an excerpt, from one of Elyne Mitchell's 'Silver Brumby' novels, these wild and untouched horses and their ancestors have roamed these hills and frequented these valleys for decades, and know every trail, rock and tree better than any human could ever do.

But partway through the 1950's the spread and needs of the ever increasing suburbia would change this astounding landscape forever. The picturesque Burratorang Valley, once home to a vibrant farming community, would be flooded to create Sydney's major water supply, the huge Warragamba Dam.

So, for well over fifty years this beautiful and once again untamed valley has since been classified as a Schedule One water catchment area and sealed off to the general public to protect the quality of water entering the storages. Viewed from above, over 50,000 hectares, of a mostly impenetrable carpet of gum trees, surround the Warragamba Dam, now filled close to capacity in the near silent valleys. Coxs River begins just west of the city of Lithgow and flows south for many kilometres before turning east to flow into Lake Burratorang, the lake that was created when the dam was built. It's a major tributary to Warragamba Dam.

To the Aborigines who lived in the area for thousands of years before white settlement, Coxs River was one of two corridors that could be used to cross the Blue Mountains, the other being the Bilpin Ridge, the easiest way to cross the mountains. For those who didn't know this, the mountains were a seemingly impassable barrier.

Now, a real-life Man from Snowy River tale has been captured on film in the wild country of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, with independent award-winning Sydney film makers, Russell Kilbey, and his wife, Amy Scully, of Empress Arts Films, spending almost two



Luke leading a brumby across the Coxs River



years in extreme conditions documenting an amazing and inspiring brumby mission.

Their cameras followed a kind horseman and his team, which included a campdrafter, a Japanese stockman and a young bloke with a lot to learn. On their often serene, often adrenalin pumping adventure across rugged flats and over some the roughest terrain imaginable, they took up the challenge, however emotional, of removing the last of the wild horses from Burrarorang.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service were in a quandary. Classing the brumbies as feral pests, National Parks head office needed to remove the animals without any of the public outcry that marred their previous control operations when they used professional shooters operating from helicopters. Shooting brumbies from helicopters has since been banned in NSW. Besides choppers, the only way in and out of the Burrarorang Valley is by way of a

bone-jarring 5km ride on horses. But as the question emerged again and again as to how to remove these animals in the best way possible, so too did the answer materialize in the form of a quietly spoken and thoughtful local horseman with a deep and solid connection to the now flooded valley.

His name was Luke Carlon.

Luke's great-great grandfather, Patrick Carlon, had settled the isolated and spectacular valley in the 1820s, founding a dynasty of hard-working Irish Catholic cattle farmers who were forced to leave the valley, when it was cleared of buildings and trees to make way for the new dam. Luke's father, Bert, eventually went on to become a horsemaster and stuntman on Australian movie sets such as Charles Chauvel's, 1949 release, 'The Sons of Matthew'. Luke's grandfather resettled in the Megalong Valley, with Luke's parents eventually running the famous tourist attraction for

over 25 years 'Packsaddlers'. In 1998 the Wilderness Area declared, they were left with no option than to shut the popular attraction down.

Using a team of tough and wiry stockhorses, Luke's task would be to capture, handle and lead as many of these wild horses as possible out of the Burrarorang Valley. Luke knew the valley, knew its tracks, its many moods and its creatures. As a young kid he rode all over the Coxs River, even to the point of going to places he wasn't supposed to. But he couldn't help himself, so immersed was he in his surroundings.

Now catching and moving these wild horses out would be a stirring assignment for this man, not only because of his ties and his great love for the area, but because he knew that the roots of these brumbies most likely ran even deeper than his own. Carlon's Head, the towering escarpment, named after his grandfather, is visible from Luke

Luke and Adam Boyd leading a brumby across the Appletree Flat



A brumby takes evasive action

*Given the love we have for horses in general and the respect for the people who handle them held in high regard, we need to see this film well supported in its making and watched by us all. Look out for it!*

*This unique to the world relocation program sees the brumbies caught, handled & lead out on horseback. An amazing feat!*



Jason Carlon handling a young brumby foal



From left to right: Jason Carlon, Adam Boyd, Takeo Suzuki, Luke Carlon, Russell Kilbey with camera and at the back Steve Mills



Carlton's front porch. He knew the mission would be both difficult and dangerous.

To assist him, he'd sought out good mate, Adam Boyd, a champion campdrafter and Takeo Suzuki, a more than able Japanese stockman. Luke's nephew, Jason Carlton, a strong, young bloke who'd been working for a time at the local Power Plant, rode in with a hunger to learn and the desire to have a go. All but Jason, who was keen to find his roots and get to know his heritage, had an ingrained knowledge of the area, one of the requirements of being a part of the delicate extraction.

For any of us that know unhandled horses, we understand they would not want to go willingly or easily. So, for Luke, Adam, Takeo and Jason it would take every bit of their equine knowledge and their bush riding skills and experience to get them through without injury to any person or equine and, hopefully with success. These horses, at least, deserved that.

Amy Scully, writer and producer, was overawed with some of the amazing

interactions between the horsemen and the animals.

*'When people watch this film,' Amy suggests. 'We hope it raises discussion and a more caring understanding of land management in wilderness areas, as well as the place of wild horses in Australia. Too often city based environmentalists and rural people who work the land are at odds with each of the others viewpoints. This story documents the coming together of these sometimes opposing forces to achieve a common goal.'*

Amy and Russell have assembled a rough cut of the film out of over 80 hours of footage and are currently seeking funding to complete the final production. The entire dedicated team hopes to see the completed 90 minute film bring to light the National Parks & Wildlife Service's unenviable position in trying to impliment the sometimes conflicting legislation and directives practically in the field. They also hope the film confounds some of the preconceptions city people have about rural life and the deep connections to this country and its incredible environment

from non-indigenous people. They want the film to have an impression on its viewers and make them think.

Filmed under quite hazardous conditions in this forbidden and rugged part of NSW, confronting questions arise about the Australian wilderness and just what we do with it. Pulled apart with raw emotion is the changing shape of the Australian spirit. This action, adventure documentary is probably much closer to our hearts than we all realize and while we are all so involved with our own horses and lifestyle, we can easily forget what has happened in the past and what was an important part of our past.

So, with 'Clancy of the Overflow' ringing in our ears and 'The Man from Snowy River' etched in our memory, the Australian pride, lifestyle and feel we should never, ever want to let go of, would most likely gallop headlong in support of this exciting and must-have film. **Read below on how we can all be a part of this film...for our true Australian horses, our heritage,our country and us...those in hats!** 🇺🇸

## How can we help to get this documentary on television?

*Anything from a little to a lot!* says Empress Arts Film Producer and Director, Russell Kilbey. *'But it depends upon how badly you want to see it. Television land is a strange place nowadays and this story doesn't have much in the way of gourmet cooking, although Takeo Suzuki did cook up some of his Wagyu sausages around the campfire a few times! When the film was presented it to one public broadcaster they said they already had a show about the outback! I pointed out that 80 km from Sydney is hardly the outback.*

*They replied ignorantly. "You know what we mean... blokes in hats!"'* To start with the film company needs to raise at least \$15,000 to polish the rough cut film, have the sound mixed and have the footage colour graded. If they don't reach the entire goal they'll continue to pursue

other avenues for funding. You can become a part of this venture by donating and no amount is too small.

*'We offer various perks at certain levels,' Russell says. 'We're grateful for any amount anyone can chip in to get this important story told. These horses are part of our true heritage and this is our land. The last two years spent filming, editing and writing has been arduous to get to this stage and we'll be more than keen for the film to finally meet its audience!'*

Thanks from Russell, Amy, Luke, Adam, Takeo and the crew with Empress Arts Film. 'Like' us and visit us on Facebook ... The Man from Coxs River Please leave a comment, as we'd love to hear your opinion. **Visit our Website: [www.themanfromcoxsriver.com](http://www.themanfromcoxsriver.com)** and make your valued donation!



Young brumby in the hands of his handler



NPWS Chris Bannfy the ranger of special area who oversaw the whole program