



1890

# The Top 20 Greatest Banjo Paterson Poems of All Time

Andrew Barton Paterson

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# [Clattery MacHinery on Poetry](#)

**September 3, 2006**

## [The Top 20 Greatest Banjo Paterson Poems of All Time](#)

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Below are the Top 20 poems by [Australian](#) poet Andrew Barton “Banjo” Paterson (Barty to his friends, by the way), who lived from 1864 into 1941. They are arranged from number 20 down to number 1, placed in order by my preference after reading the 222 Paterson poems found on the web. The poems are ordered this way, for one so that a reader being introduced to his poetry, will read his excellent work, and want to read more as the poems get ever better.

Paterson is a rather fun poet in his approach to his subject matter and language. Yet, he does not shy away from serious and the most grim subjects. They seem to be the main ingredient of what made him a writer. On the other hand, he apparently poured a cup of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow into his recipe, and has what New Englanders may find as a Robert Frost flavor, in the way he introduces the reader to his environment, but also by his rhyming and some meter—and note the unspoken end of his 1902 “The Road to Gundagai” (#4 below) as the road he will travel. Yet, he may be more similar to another New England writer, Jack Kerouac, in that both clearly saw a road less travelled to communicate, both had a restlessness and fearlessness against the status quo, and an urgency to drive both culture and society.

After the top poem, comes the song lyric *Waltzing Matilda*



(*Carrying a Swag*), with its own webography. Who cannot love that song. Be sure to click into the links, including a couple renditions of the song.

As you read through the 20 poems, when a title to one is hyperlinked, it is because I found a discussion, essay, or other relevant work online that relates to Paterson's poem.

Andrew Barton "Banjo" Paterson links:

[Wikipedia: Banjo Paterson](#)

[The University of Queensland, Australia: The Works of Banjo Paterson](#)

[Middlemiss: Australian Authors: A. B. \("Banjo"\) Paterson \(1864-1941\)](#)

[Project Gutenberg: Paterson, A. B. \(Andrew Barton\), 1864-1941](#)

[Whitewolf: Andrew Barton 'Banjo' Paterson](#)

[Australian Dictionary of Biography: Paterson, Andrew Barton \(Banjo\) \(1864-1941\)](#)

[Google search A.B. "Banjo" Paterson](#)

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## The Top 20 Greatest Banjo Paterson Poems of All Time

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## #20

*from The Bulletin, April 8, 1893*

### Behind the Scenes

The actor struts his little hour,  
Between the limelight and the band;  
The public feel the actor's power,  
Yet nothing do they understand

Of all the touches here and there  
That make or mar the actor's part,  
They never see, beneath the glare,  
The artist striving after art.

To them it seems a labour slight  
Where nought of study intervenes;  
You see it in another light  
When once you've been behind the scenes.

For though the actor at his best  
Is, like a poet, born not made,  
He still must study with a zest  
And practise hard to learn his trade.

So, whether on the actor's form  
The stately robes of Hamlet sit,

Or as Macbeth he rave and storm,  
Or plays burlesque to please the pit,

'Tis each and all a work of art,  
That constant care and practice means—  
The actor who creates a part  
Has done his work behind the scenes.

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## #19

*from Rio Grande's Last Race and Other Verses, 1902*

### On the Trek

Oh, the weary, weary journey on the trek, day after day,  
With sun above and silent veldt below;  
And our hearts keep turning homeward to the youngsters far away,  
And the homestead where the climbing roses grow.  
Shall we see the flats grow golden with the ripening of the grain?  
Shall we hear the parrots calling on the bough?  
Ah! the weary months of marching ere we hear them call again,  
For we're going on a long job now.

In the drowsy days on escort, riding slowly half asleep,  
With the endless line of waggons stretching back,  
While the khaki soldiers travel like a mob of travelling sheep,  
Plodding silent on the never-ending track,  
While the constant snap and sniping of the foe you never see  
Makes you wonder will your turn come—when and how?  
As the Mauser ball hums past you like a vicious kind of bee—  
Oh! we're going on a long job now.

When the dash and the excitement and the novelty are dead,  
And you've seen a load of wounded once or twice,  
Or you've watched your old mate dying—with the vultures overhead,  
Well, you wonder if the war is worth the price.  
And down along Monaro now they're starting out to shear,  
I can picture the excitement and the row;  
But they'll miss me on the Lachlan when they call the roll this year,  
For we're going on a long job now.



## #18

*from The Australasian Pastoralists' Review, September 15, 1896,  
& Rio Grande's Last Race and Other Verses, 1902*

### **With the Cattle**

The drought is down on field and flock,  
The river-bed is dry;  
And we must shift the starving stock  
Before the cattle die.  
We muster up with weary hearts  
At breaking of the day,  
And turn our heads to foreign parts,  
To take the stock away.  
And it's hunt 'em up and dog 'em,  
And it's get the whip and flog 'em,

For it's weary work is droving when they're dying every day;  
 By stock-routes bare and eaten,  
 On dusty roads and beaten,  
 With half a chance to save their lives we take the stock away.

We cannot use the whip for shame  
 On beasts that crawl along;  
 We have to drop the weak and lame,  
 And try to save the strong;  
 The wrath of God is on the track,  
 The drought fiend holds his sway,  
 With blows and cries and stockwhip crack  
 We take the stock away.  
 As they fall we leave them lying,  
 With the crows to watch them dying,  
 Grim sextons of the Overland that fasten on their prey;  
 By the fiery dust-storm drifting,  
 And the mocking mirage shifting,  
 In heat and drought and hopeless pain we take the stock away.

In dull despair the days go by  
 With never hope of change,  
 But every stage we draw more nigh  
 Towards the mountain range;  
 And some may live to climb the pass,  
 And reach the great plateau,  
 And revel in the mountain grass,  
 By streamlets fed with snow.  
 As the mountain wind is blowing  
 It starts the cattle lowing,  
 And calling to each other down the dusty long array;  
 And there speaks a grizzled drover:  
 'Well, thank God, the worst is over,  
 The creatures smell the mountain grass that's twenty miles away.'

They press towards the mountain grass,  
 They look with eager eyes  
 Along the rugged stony pass,  
 That slopes towards the skies;  
 Their feet may bleed from rocks and stones,  
 But though the blood-drop starts,  
 They struggle on with stifled groans,  
 For hope is in their hearts.  
 And the cattle that are leading,  
 Though their feet are worn and bleeding,  
 Are breaking to a kind of run-pull up, and let them go!  
 For the mountain wind is blowing,  
 And the mountain grass is growing,

They settle down by running streams ice-cold with melted snow.

The days are done of heat and drought  
 Upon the stricken plain;  
 The wind has shifted right about,  
 And brought the welcome rain;  
 The river runs with sullen roar,  
 All flecked with yellow foam,  
 And we must take the road once more,  
 To bring the cattle home.  
 And it's 'Lads! we'll raise a chorus,  
 There's a pleasant trip before us.'  
 And the horses bound beneath us as we start them down the track;  
 And the drovers canter, singing,  
 Through the sweet green grasses springing,  
 Towards the far-off mountain-land, to bring the cattle back.

Are these the beasts we brought away  
 That move so lively now?  
 They scatter off like flying spray  
 Across the mountain's brow;  
 And dashing down the rugged range  
 We hear the stockwhip crack,  
 Good faith, it is a welcome change  
 To bring such cattle back.  
 And it's 'Steady down the lead there!'  
 And it's 'Let 'em stop and feed there!'  
 For they're wild as mountain eagles and their sides are all afoam;  
 But they're settling down already,  
 And they'll travel nice and steady,  
 With cheery call and jest and song we fetch the cattle home.

We have to watch them close at night  
 For fear they'll make a rush,  
 And break away in headlong flight  
 Across the open bush;  
 And by the camp-fire's cheery blaze,  
 With mellow voice and strong,  
 We hear the lonely watchman raise  
 The Overlander's song:  
 'Oh! it's when we're done with roving,  
 With the camping and the droving,  
 It's homeward down the Bland we'll go, and never more we'll roam;  
 While the stars shine out above us,  
 Like the eyes of those who love us—  
 The eyes of those who watch and wait to greet the cattle home.



The plains are all awake with grass,  
 The skies are deepest blue;  
 And leisurely the cattle pass  
 And feed the long day through;  
 But when we sight the station gate,  
 We make the stockwhips crack,  
 A welcome sound to those who wait  
 To greet the cattle back:  
 And through the twilight falling  
 We hear their voices calling,  
 As the cattle splash across the ford and churn it into foam;  
 And the children run to meet us,  
 And our wives and sweethearts greet us,  
 Their heroes from the Overland who brought the cattle home.

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## #17

*from The Bulletin, May 19, 1900*  
 & Rio Grande's Last Race and Other Verses, 1902

### **There's Another Blessed Horse Fell Down**

When you're lying in your hammock, sleeping soft and sleeping sound,  
 Without a care or trouble on your mind,  
 And there's nothing to disturb you but the engines going round,  
 And you're dreaming of the girl you left behind;  
 In the middle of your joys you'll be wakened by a noise,  
 And a clatter on the deck above your crown,  
 And you'll hear the corporal shout as he turns the picket out,  
 'There's another blessed horse fell down.'

You can see 'em in the morning, when you're cleaning out the stall,  
 A-leaning on the railings nearly dead,  
 And you reckon by the evening they'll be pretty sure to fall,  
 And you curse them as you tumble into bed.  
 Oh, you'll hear it pretty soon, 'Pass the word for Denny Moon,  
 There's a horse here throwing handsprings like a clown;  
 And it's 'Shove the others back or he'll cripple half the pack,  
 There's another blessed horse fell down.'

And when the war is over and the fighting all is done,  
 And you're all at home with medals on your chest,  
 And you've learnt to sleep so soundly that the firing of a gun  
 At your bedside wouldn't rob you of your rest;  
 As you lie in slumber deep, if your wife walks in her sleep,  
 And tumbles down the stairs and breaks her crown,  
 Oh, it won't awaken you, for you'll say, 'It's nothing new,  
 It's another blessed horse fell down.'

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## #16

*from The Bulletin, January 26, 1895*  
 & *The Man from Snowy River and Other Verses, October 20, 1895*

### Johnson's Antidote

Down along the Snakebite River, where the overlanders camp,  
 Where the serpents are in millions, all of the most deadly stamp;  
 Where the station-cook in terror, nearly every time he bakes,  
 Mixes up among the doughboys half-a-dozen poison-snakes:  
 Where the wily free-selector walks in armour-plated pants,  
 And defies the stings of scorpions, and the bites of bull-dog ants:  
 Where the adder and the viper tear each other by the throat,  
 There it was that William Johnson sought his snake-bite antidote.

Johnson was a free-selector, and his brain went rather queer,  
 For the constant sight of serpents filled him with a deadly fear;  
 So he tramped his free-selection, morning, afternoon, and night,  
 Seeking for some great specific that would cure the serpent's bite.  
 Till King Billy, of the Mooki, chieftain of the flour-bag head,  
 Told him, 'Spos'n snake bite pfeller, pfeller mostly drop down dead;  
 Spos'n snake bite old goanna, then you watch a while you see,  
 Old goanna cure himself with eating little pfeller tree.'  
 'That's the cure,' said William Johnson, 'point me out this plant sublime,'  
 But King Billy, feeling lazy, said he'd go another time.  
 Thus it came to pass that Johnson, having got the tale by rote,  
 Followed every stray goanna, seeking for the antidote.

. . . . .

Loafing once beside the river, while he thought his heart would break,  
 There he saw a big goanna fighting with a tiger-snake,  
 In and out they rolled and wriggled, bit each other, heart and soul,  
 Till the valiant old goanna swallowed his opponent whole.  
 Breathless, Johnson sat and watched him, saw him struggle up the bank,  
 Saw him nibbling at the branches of some bushes, green and rank;  
 Saw him, happy and contented, lick his lips, as off he crept,  
 While the bulging in his stomach showed where his opponent slept.  
 Then a cheer of exultation burst aloud from Johnson's throat;  
 'Luck at last,' said he, 'I've struck it! 'tis the famous antidote.'

'Here it is, the Grand Elixir, greatest blessing ever known,  
 Twenty thousand men in India die each year of snakes alone.  
 Think of all the foreign nations, negro, chow, and blackamoor,  
 Saved from sudden expiration, by my wondrous snakebite cure.  
 It will bring me fame and fortune! In the happy days to be,  
 Men of every clime and nation will be round to gaze on me—  
 Scientific men in thousands, men of mark and men of note,  
 Rushing down the Mooki River, after Johnson's antidote.  
 It will cure Delirium Tremens, when the patient's eyeballs stare  
 At imaginary spiders, snakes which really are not there.  
 When he thinks he sees them wriggle, when he thinks he sees them bloat,  
 It will cure him just to think of Johnson's Snakebite Antidote.'

Then he rushed to the museum, found a scientific man—  
 'Trot me out a deadly serpent, just the deadliest you can;  
 I intend to let him bite me, all the risk I will endure,  
 Just to prove the sterling value of my wondrous snakebite cure.  
 Even though an adder bit me, back to life again I'd float;  
 Snakes are out of date, I tell you, since I've found the antidote.'

Said the scientific person, 'If you really want to die,  
 Go ahead—but, if you're doubtful, let your sheep-dog have a try.  
 Get a pair of dogs and try it, let the snake give both a nip;  
 Give your dog the snakebite mixture, let the other fellow rip;  
 If he dies and yours survives him, then it proves the thing is good.  
 Will you fetch your dog and try it?' Johnson rather thought he would.  
 So he went and fetched his canine, hauled him forward by the throat.  
 'Stump, old man,' says he, 'we'll show them we've the genwine antidote.'

Both the dogs were duly loaded with the poison-gland's contents;  
 Johnson gave his dog the mixture, then sat down to wait events.  
 'Mark,' he said, 'in twenty minutes Stump'll be a-rushing round,  
 While the other wretched creature lies a corpse upon the ground.'  
 But, alas for William Johnson! ere they'd watched a half-hour's spell  
 Stumpy was as dead as mutton, t'other dog was live and well.  
 And the scientific person hurried off with utmost speed,  
 Tested Johnson's drug and found it was a deadly poison-weed;  
 Half a tumbler killed an emu, half a spoonful killed a goat,

All the snakes on earth were harmless to that awful antidote.

. . . . .

Down along the Mooki River, on the overlanders' camp,  
Where the serpents are in millions, all of the most deadly stamp,  
Wanders, daily, William Johnson, down among those poisonous hordes,  
Shooting every stray goanna, calls them 'black and yaller frauds'.  
And King Billy, of the Mooki, cadging for the cast-off coat,  
Somehow seems to dodge the subject of the snake-bite antidote.



**#15**

*from The Sydney Mail, December 24, 1900  
& Rio Grande's Last Race and Other Verses, 1902*

## **Santa Claus**

Halt! Who goes there? The sentry's call  
Rose on the midnight air  
Above the noises of the camp,

The roll of wheels, the horses' tramp.  
 The challenge echoed over all—  
 Halt! Who goes there?

A quaint old figure clothed in white,  
 He bore a staff of pine,  
 An ivy-wreath was on his head.  
 'Advance, oh friend,' the sentry said,  
 Advance, for this is Christmas night,  
 And give the countersign.'

'No sign nor countersign have I,  
 Through many lands I roam  
 The whole world over far and wide,  
 To exiles all at Christmastide,  
 From those who love them tenderly  
 I bring a thought of home.

'From English brook and Scottish burn,  
 From cold Canadian snows,  
 From those far lands ye hold most dear  
 I bring you all a greeting here,  
 A frond of a New Zealand fern,  
 A bloom of English rose.

'From faithful wife and loving lass  
 I bring a wish divine,  
 For Christmas blessings on your head.'  
 'I wish you well,' the sentry said,  
 But here, alas! you may not pass  
 Without the countersign.'

He vanished—and the sentry's tramp  
 Re-echoed down the line.  
 It was not till the morning light  
 The soldiers knew that in the night  
 Old Santa Claus had come to camp  
 Without the countersign.

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## #14

*from The Bulletin, September 21, 1889*

& The Man from Snowy River and Other Verses, *October 20, 1895*

## How M’Ginnis Went Missing

Let us cease our idle chatter,  
Let the tears bedew our cheek,  
For a man from Tallangatta  
Has been missing for a week.

Where the roaring flooded Murray  
Covered all the lower land,  
There he started in a hurry,  
With a bottle in his hand.

And his fate is hid for ever,  
But the public seem to think  
That he slumbered by the river,  
‘Neath the influence of drink.

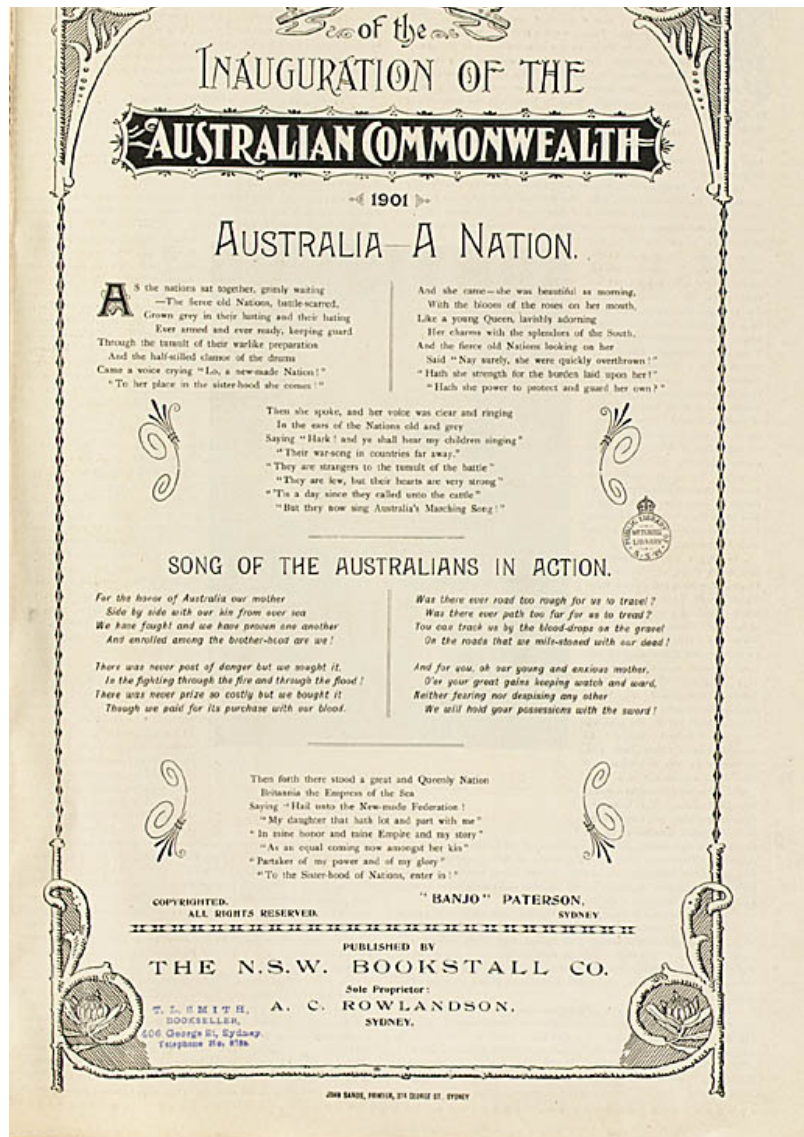
And they scarcely seem to wonder  
That the river, wide and deep,  
Never woke him with its thunder,  
Never stirred him in his sleep.

As the crashing logs came sweeping,  
And their tumult filled the air,  
Then M’Ginnis murmured, sleeping,  
”Tis a wake in ould Kildare.’

So the river rose and found him  
Sleeping softly by the stream,  
And the cruel waters drowned him  
Ere he wakened from his dream.

And the blossom-tufted wattle,  
Blooming brightly on the lea,  
Saw M’Ginnis and the bottle  
Going drifting out to sea.





#13

*The N.S.W. Bookstall Co. Souvenir, 1901,  
& from Rio Grande's Last Race and Other Verses, 1902*

## Song of the Federation

As the nations sat together, grimly waiting—  
The fierce old nations battle-scarred—  
Grown grey in their lusting and their hating,

Ever armed and ever ready keeping guard,  
 Through the tumult of their warlike preparation  
 And the half-stilled clamour of the drums  
 Came a voice crying, 'Lo! a new-made nation,  
 To her place in the sisterhood she comes!'

And she came—she was beautiful as morning,  
 With the bloom of the roses in her mouth,  
 Like a young queen lavishly adorning  
 Her charms with the splendours of the South.  
 And the fierce old nations, looking on her,  
 Said, 'Nay, surely she were quickly overthrown,  
 Hath she strength for the burden laid upon her,  
 Hath she power to protect and guard her own?'

Then she spoke, and her voice was clear and ringing  
 In the ears of the nations old and gray,  
 Saying, 'Hark, and ye shall hear my children singing  
 Their war-song in countries far away.  
 They are strangers to the tumult of the battle,  
 They are few but their hearts are very strong,  
 'Twas but yesterday they called unto the cattle,  
 But they now sing Australia's marching song.'

*Song of the Australians in Action*

*For the honour of Australia, our mother,  
 Side by side with our kin from over sea,  
 We have fought and we have tested one another,  
 And enrolled among the brotherhood are we.*

*There was never post of danger but we sought it  
 In the fighting, through the fire, and through the flood.  
 There was never prize so costly but we bought it,  
 Though we paid for its purchase with our blood.*

*Was there any road too rough for us to travel?  
 Was there any path too far for us to tread?  
 You can track us by the blood drops on the gravel  
 On the roads that we milestoned with our dead!*

*And for you, oh our young and anxious mother,  
 O'er your great gains keeping watch and ward,  
 Neither fearing nor despising any other,  
 We will hold your possessions with the sword.*

. . . . .



Then they passed to the place of world-long sleeping,  
 The grey-clad figures with their dead,  
 To the sound of their women softly weeping  
 And the Dead March moaning at their head:  
 And the Nations, as the grim procession ended,  
 Whispered, 'Child! But ye have seen the price we pay,  
 From War may we ever be defended,  
 Kneel ye down, new-made Sister—Let us Pray!'

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## #12

*from The Sydney Mail, February 26, 1887*  
 & *The Man from Snowy River and Other Verses, October 20, 1895*

### Over the Range

Little bush maiden, wondering-eyed,  
 Playing alone in the creek-bed dry,  
 In the small green flat on every side  
 Walled in by the Moonbi ranges high;  
 Tell us the tale of your lonely life,  
 'Mid the great grey forests that know no change.  
 'I never have left my home,' she said,  
 'I have never been over the Moonbi Range.

'Father and mother are both long dead,  
 And I live with granny in yon wee place.'  
 'Where are your father and mother?' we said.  
 She puzzled awhile with thoughtful face,  
 Then a light came into the shy brown eye,  
 And she smiled, for she thought the question strange  
 On a thing so certain—'When people die  
 They go to the country over the range.'

'And what is this country like, my lass?'  
 'There are blossoming trees and pretty flowers,  
 And shining creeks where the golden grass  
 Is fresh and sweet from the summer showers.  
 They never need work, nor want, nor weep;  
 No troubles can come their hearts to estrange.

Some summer night I shall fall asleep,  
And wake in the country over the range.'

Child, you are wise in your simple trust,  
For the wisest man knows no more than you  
Ashes to ashes, and dust to dust:  
Our views by a range are bounded too;  
But we know that God hath this gift in store,  
That when we come to the final change,  
We shall meet with our loved ones gone before  
To the beautiful country over the range.

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**#11**

*from The Animals Noah Forgot, 1933*

## **Old Man Platypus**

Far from the trouble and toil of town,  
Where the reed beds sweep and shiver,  
Look at a fragment of velvet brown—  
Old Man Platypus drifting down,  
Drifting along the river.

And he plays and dives in the river bends  
In a style that is most elusive;  
With few relations and fewer friends,  
For Old Man Platypus descends  
From a family most exclusive.

He shares his burrow beneath the bank  
With his wife and his son and daughter  
At the roots of the reeds and the grasses rank;  
And the bubbles show where our hero sank  
To its entrance under water.

Safe in their burrow below the falls  
They live in a world of wonder,  
Where no one visits and no one calls,  
They sleep like little brown billiard balls  
With their beaks tucked neatly under.

And he talks in a deep unfriendly growl  
As he goes on his journey lonely;  
For he's no relation to fish nor fowl,  
Nor to bird nor beast, nor to horned owl;  
In fact, he's the one and only!





## #10

*Open letter to the troops, 1915*

### “We’re All Australians Now”

Australia takes her pen in hand  
To write a line to you,  
To let you fellows understand  
How proud we are of you.

From shearing shed and cattle run,  
From Broome to Hobson’s Bay,  
Each native-born Australian son  
Stands straighter up today.

The man who used to “hump his drum”,  
On far-out Queensland runs  
Is fighting side by side with some  
Tasmanian farmer’s sons.

The fisher-boys dropped sail and oar  
To grimly stand the test,  
Along that storm-swept Turkish shore,  
With miners from the west.

The old state jealousies of yore  
Are dead as Pharaoh’s sow,  
We’re not State children any more—  
We’re all Australians now!

Our six-starred flag that used to fly  
Half-shyly to the breeze,  
Unknown where older nations ply  
Their trade on foreign seas,

Flies out to meet the morning blue  
With Vict'ry at the prow;  
For that's the flag the Sydney flew,  
The wide seas know it now!

The mettle that a race can show  
Is proved with shot and steel,  
And now we know what nations know  
And feel what nations feel.

The honoured graves beneath the crest  
Of Gaba Tepe hill  
May hold our bravest and our best,  
But we have brave men still.

With all our petty quarrels done,  
Dissensions overthrown,  
We have, through what you boys have done,  
A history of our own.

Our old world diff'rences are dead,  
Like weeds beneath the plough,  
For English, Scotch, and Irish-bred,  
They're all Australians now!

So now we'll toast the Third Brigade  
That led Australia's van,  
For never shall their glory fade  
In minds Australian.

Fight on, fight on, unflinchingly,  
Till right and justice reign.  
Fight on, fight on, till Victory  
Shall send you home again.

And with Australia's flag shall fly  
A spray of wattle-bough  
To symbolise our unity—  
We're all Australians now.

*from The Lone Hand, August 1, 1914  
& Saltbush Bill, J.P., and Other Verses, 1917*

## Sunrise on the Coast

Grey dawn on the sand-hills—the night wind has drifted  
All night from the rollers a scent of the sea;  
With the dawn the grey fog his battalions has lifted,  
At the call of the morning they scatter and flee.

Like mariners calling the roll of their number  
The sea-fowl put out to the infinite deep.  
And far over-head—sinking softly to slumber—  
Worn out by their watching, the stars fall asleep.

To eastward, where resteth the dome of the skies on  
The sea-line, stirs softly the curtain of night;  
And far from behind the enshrouded horizon  
Comes the voice of a God saying “Let there be light.”

And lo, there is light!    Evanescent and tender,  
It glows ruby-red where 'twas now ashen-grey;  
And purple and scarlet and gold in its splendour—  
Behold, 'tis that marvel, the birth of a day!

---

#8

*from The Kia-Ora Cooee, May 1918*

## Moving On

In this war we're always moving,  
Moving on;  
When we make a friend another friend has gone;  
Should a woman's kindly face  
Make us welcome for a space,  
Then it's boot and saddle, boys, we're  
Moving on.

In the hospitals they're moving,  
 Moving on;  
 They're here today, tomorrow they are gone;  
 When the bravest and the best  
 Of the boys you know "go west",  
 Then you're choking down your tears and  
 Moving on.

---

## #7

*from The Bulletin, 26 February 1887*  
 & *The Man from Snowy River and Other Verses, October 20, 1895*

*'Richard Bennison, a jockey, aged 14, while riding William Tell in his training, was thrown and killed. The horse is luckily uninjured.'*

*—Melbourne Wire.*

### **Only a Jockey**

Out in the grey cheerless chill of the morning light,  
 Out on the track where the night shades still lurk;  
 Ere the first gleam of the sun's returning light,  
 Round come the race-horses early at work.

Reefing and pulling and racing so readily,  
 Close sit the jockey-boys holding them hard,  
 'Steady the stallion there—canter him steadily,  
 Don't let him gallop so much as a yard.'

Fiercely he fights while the others run wide of him,  
 Reefs at the bit that would hold him in thrall,  
 Plunges and bucks till the boy that's astride of him  
 Goes to the ground with a terrible fall.

'Stop him there! Block him there! Drive him in carefully,  
 Lead him about till he's quiet and cool.  
 Sound as a bell! though he's blown himself fearfully,  
 Now let us pick up this poor little fool.

‘Stunned? Oh, by Jove, I’m afraid it’s a case with him;  
 Ride for the doctor! keep bathing his head!  
 Send for a cart to go down to our place with him’—  
 No use! One long sigh and the little chap’s dead.

Only a jockey-boy, foul-mouthed and bad you see,  
 Ignorant, heathenish, gone to his rest.  
 Parson or Presbyter, Pharisee, Sadducee,  
 What did you do for him?—bad was the best.

Negroes and foreigners, all have a claim on you;  
 Yearly you send your well-advertised hoard,  
 But the poor jockey-boy—shame on you, shame on you,  
 ‘Feed ye, my little ones’—what said the Lord?

Him ye held less than the outer barbarian,  
 Left him to die in his ignorant sin;  
 Have you no principles, humanitarian?  
 Have you no precept—’go gather them in?’

. . . . .

Knew he God’s name? In his brutal profanity,  
 That name was an oath—out of many but one—  
 What did he get from our famed Christianity?  
 Where has his soul—if he had any—gone?

Fourteen years old, and what was he taught of it?  
 What did he know of God’s infinite grace?  
 Draw the dark curtain of shame o’er the thought of it,  
 Draw the shroud over the jockey-boy’s face.

\_\_\_\_\_







## #6

*from The Bulletin, January 13, 1894  
& Saltbush Bill, J.P., and Other Verses, 1917*

*Brumby is the Aboriginal word for a wild horse. At a recent trial a N.S.W. Supreme Court Judge, hearing of Brumby horses, asked: "Who is Brumby, and where is his Run?"*

### Brumby's Run

It lies beyond the Western Pines  
Towards the sinking sun,  
And not a survey mark defines  
The bounds of "Brumby's Run".

On odds and ends of mountain land,  
On tracks of range and rock  
Where no one else can make a stand,  
Old Brumby rears his stock.

A wild, unhandled lot they are  
Of every shape and breed.  
They venture out 'neath moon and star  
Along the flats to feed;

But when the dawn makes pink the sky  
And steals along the plain,  
The Brumby horses turn and fly  
Towards the hills again.

The traveller by the mountain-track  
May hear their hoof-beats pass,  
And catch a glimpse of brown and black  
Dim shadows on the grass.

The eager stockhorse pricks his ears

And lifts his head on high  
In wild excitement when he hears  
The Brumby mob go by.

Old Brumby asks no price or fee  
O'er all his wide domains:  
The man who yards his stock is free  
To keep them for his pains.

So, off to scour the mountain-side  
With eager eyes aglow,  
To strongholds where the wild mobs hide  
The gully-rakers go.

A rush of horses through the trees,  
A red shirt making play;  
A sound of stockwhips on the breeze,  
They vanish far away!

. . . . .

Ah, me! before our day is done  
We long with bitter pain  
To ride once more on Brumby's Run  
And yard his mob again.





## #5

*from The Sydney Mail, July 22, 1893*  
 & *The Man from Snowy River and Other Verses, October 20, 1895*

### Black Swans

As I lie at rest on a patch of clover  
 In the Western Park when the day is done,  
 I watch as the wild black swans fly over  
 With their phalanx turned to the sinking sun;  
 And I hear the clang of their leader crying  
 To a lagging mate in the rearward flying,  
 And they fade away in the darkness dying,  
 Where the stars are mustering one by one.

Oh! ye wild black swans, 'twere a world of wonder  
 For a while to join in your westward flight,  
 With the stars above and the dim earth under,  
 Through the cooling air of the glorious night.  
 As we swept along on our pinions winging,  
 We should catch the chime of a church-bell ringing,  
 Or the distant note of a torrent singing,  
 Or the far-off flash of a station light.

From the northern lakes with the reeds and rushes,  
 Where the hills are clothed with a purple haze,  
 Where the bell-birds chime and the songs of thrushes  
 Make music sweet in the jungle maze,  
 They will hold their course to the westward ever,  
 Till they reach the banks of the old grey river,  
 Where the waters wash, and the reed-beds quiver

In the burning heat of the summer days.

Oh! ye strange wild birds, will ye bear a greeting  
 To the folk that live in that western land?  
 Then for every sweep of your pinions beating,  
 Ye shall bear a wish to the sunburnt band,  
 To the stalwart men who are stoutly fighting  
 With the heat and drought and the dust-storm smiting,  
 Yet whose life somehow has a strange inviting,  
 When once to the work they have put their hand.

Facing it yet! Oh, my friend stout-hearted,  
 What does it matter for rain or shine,  
 For the hopes deferred and the gain departed?  
 Nothing could conquer that heart of thine.  
 And thy health and strength are beyond confessing  
 As the only joys that are worth possessing.  
 May the days to come be as rich in blessing  
 As the days we spent in the auld lang syne.

I would fain go back to the old grey river,  
 To the old bush days when our hearts were light,  
 But, alas! those days they have fled for ever,  
 They are like the swans that have swept from sight.  
 And I know full well that the strangers' faces  
 Would meet us now in our dearest places;  
 For our day is dead and has left no traces  
 But the thoughts that live in my mind to-night.

There are folk long dead, and our hearts would sicken—  
 We would grieve for them with a bitter pain,  
 If the past could live and the dead could quicken,  
 We then might turn to that life again.  
 But on lonely nights we would hear them calling,  
 We should hear their steps on the pathways falling,  
 We should loathe the life with a hate appalling  
 In our lonely rides by the ridge and plain.

. . . . .

In the silent park is a scent of clover,  
 And the distant roar of the town is dead,  
 And I hear once more as the swans fly over  
 Their far-off clamour from overhead.  
 They are flying west, by their instinct guided,  
 And for man likewise is his fate decided,  
 And griefs apportioned and joys divided  
 By a mighty power with a purpose dread.

---

## #4

*from Rio Grande's Last Race and Other Verses, 1902*

### The Road to Gundagai

The mountain road goes up and down,  
From Gundagai to Tumut Town.

And branching off there runs a track,  
Across the foothills grim and black,

Across the plains and ranges grey  
To Sydney city far away.

. . . . .

It came by chance one day that I  
From Tumut rode to Gundagai.

And reached about the evening tide  
The crossing where the roads divide;

And, waiting at the crossing place,  
I saw a maiden fair of face,

With eyes of deepest violet blue,  
And cheeks to match the rose in hue—

The fairest maids Australia knows  
Are bred among the mountain snows.

Then, fearing I might go astray,  
I asked if she could show the way.

Her voice might well a man bewitch—  
Its tones so supple, deep, and rich.

'The tracks are clear,' she made reply,  
'And this goes down to Sydney town,  
And that one goes to Gundagai.'

Then slowly, looking coyly back,  
She went along the Sydney track.

And I for one was well content  
To go the road the lady went;

But round the turn a swain she met—  
The kiss she gave him haunts me yet!

. . . . .

I turned and travelled with a sigh  
The lonely road to Gundagai.

---

### #3

*from The Sydney Mail, March 19, 1887  
& The Man from Snowy River and Other Verses, October 20, 1895*

### Lost

‘He ought to be home,’ said the old man, ‘without there’s something amiss.  
He only went to the Two-mile—he ought to be back by this.  
He *would* ride the Reckless filly, he *would* have his wilful way;  
And, here, he’s not back at sundown—and what will his mother say?’

‘He was always his mother’s idol, since ever his father died;  
And there isn’t a horse on the station that he isn’t game to ride.  
But that Reckless mare is vicious, and if once she gets away  
He hasn’t got strength to hold her—and what will his mother say?’

The old man walked to the sliprail, and peered up the dark’ning track,  
And looked and longed for the rider that would never more come back;  
And the mother came and clutched him, with sudden, spasmodic fright:  
‘What has become of my Willie?—why isn’t he home to-night?’

Away in the gloomy ranges, at the foot of an ironbark,  
The bonnie, winsome laddie was lying stiff and stark;  
For the Reckless mare had smashed him against a leaning limb,  
And his comely face was battered, and his merry eyes were dim.

And the thoroughbred chestnut filly, the saddle beneath her flanks,  
Was away like fire through the ranges to join the wild mob's ranks;  
And a broken-hearted woman and an old man worn and grey  
Were searching all night in the ranges till the sunrise brought the day.

And the mother kept feebly calling, with a hope that would not die,  
'Willie! where are you, Willie?' But how can the dead reply;  
And hope died out with the daylight, and the darkness brought despair,  
God pity the stricken mother, and answer the widow's prayer!

Though far and wide they sought him, they found not where he fell;  
For the ranges held him precious, and guarded their treasure well.  
The wattle blooms above him, and the blue bells blow close by,  
And the brown bees buzz the secret, and the wild birds sing reply.

But the mother pined and faded, and cried, and took no rest,  
And rode each day to the ranges on her hopeless, weary quest.  
Seeking her loved one ever, she faded and pined away,  
But with strength of her great affection she still sought every day.

'I know that sooner or later I shall find my boy,' she said.  
But she came not home one evening, and they found her lying dead,  
And stamped on the poor pale features, as the spirit homeward pass'd,  
Was an angel smile of gladness—she had found the boy at last.



#2

*from The Bulletin, December 21, 1889*  
 & *The Man from Snowy River and Other Verses, October 20, 1895*

## Clancy of the Overflow

I had written him a letter which I had, for want of better  
 Knowledge, sent to where I met him down the Lachlan, years ago,  
 He was shearing when I knew him, so I sent the letter to him,  
 Just 'on spec', addressed as follows, 'Clancy, of The Overflow'.

And an answer came directed in a writing unexpected,  
 (And I think the same was written with a thumb-nail dipped in tar)  
 'Twas his shearing mate who wrote it, and verbatim I will quote it:  
 'Clancy's gone to Queensland droving, and we don't know where he are.'

. . . . .

In my wild erratic fancy visions come to me of Clancy  
 Gone a-droving 'down the Cooper' where the Western drovers go;  
 As the stock are slowly stringing, Clancy rides behind them singing,  
 For the drover's life has pleasures that the townsfolk never know.

And the bush hath friends to meet him, and their kindly voices greet him  
 In the murmur of the breezes and the river on its bars,  
 And he sees the vision splendid of the sunlit plains extended,  
 And at night the wond'rous glory of the everlasting stars.

. . . . .

I am sitting in my dingy little office, where a stingy  
 Ray of sunlight struggles feebly down between the houses tall,  
 And the foetid air and gritty of the dusty, dirty city  
 Through the open window floating, spreads its foulness over all

And in place of lowing cattle, I can hear the fiendish rattle  
 Of the tramways and the 'buses making hurry down the street,  
 And the language uninviting of the gutter children fighting,  
 Comes fitfully and faintly through the ceaseless tramp of feet.

And the hurrying people daunt me, and their pallid faces haunt me  
 As they shoulder one another in their rush and nervous haste,  
 With their eager eyes and greedy, and their stunted forms and weedy,  
 For townsfolk have no time to grow, they have no time to waste.

And I somehow rather fancy that I'd like to change with Clancy,  
 Like to take a turn at droving where the seasons come and go,



While he faced the round eternal of the cash-book and the journal—  
But I doubt he'd suit the office, Clancy, of 'The Overflow'.

---



**#1**

*from The Bulletin, April 26, 1890,*  
*& The Man from Snowy River and Other Verses, October 20, 1895*

### [The Man from Snowy River](#)

There was movement at the station, for the word had passed around  
That the colt from old Regret had got away,  
And had joined the wild bush horses—he was worth a thousand pound,  
So all the cracks had gathered to the fray.

All the tried and noted riders from the stations near and far  
Had mustered at the homestead overnight,  
For the bushmen love hard riding where the wild bush horses are,  
And the stock-horse snuffs the battle with delight.

There was Harrison, who made his pile when Pardon won the cup,  
The old man with his hair as white as snow;  
But few could ride beside him when his blood was fairly up—  
He would go wherever horse and man could go.  
And Clancy of the Overflow came down to lend a hand,  
No better horseman ever held the reins;  
For never horse could throw him while the saddle-girths would stand,  
He learnt to ride while droving on the plains.

And one was there, a stripling on a small and weedy beast,  
He was something like a racehorse undersized,  
With a touch of Timor pony—three parts thoroughbred at least—  
And such as are by mountain horsemen prized.  
He was hard and tough and wiry—just the sort that won't say die—  
There was courage in his quick impatient tread;  
And he bore the badge of gameness in his bright and fiery eye,  
And the proud and lofty carriage of his head.

But still so slight and weedy, one would doubt his power to stay,  
And the old man said, 'That horse will never do  
For a long and tiring gallop—lad, you'd better stop away,  
Those hills are far too rough for such as you.'  
So he waited sad and wistful—only Clancy stood his friend—  
'I think we ought to let him come,' he said;  
'I warrant he'll be with us when he's wanted at the end,  
For both his horse and he are mountain bred.

'He hails from Snowy River, up by Kosciusko's side,  
Where the hills are twice as steep and twice as rough,  
Where a horse's hoofs strike firelight from the flint stones every stride,  
The man that holds his own is good enough.  
And the Snowy River riders on the mountains make their home,  
Where the river runs those giant hills between;  
I have seen full many horsemen since I first commenced to roam,  
But nowhere yet such horsemen have I seen.'

So he went—they found the horses by the big mimosa clump—  
They raced away towards the mountain's brow,  
And the old man gave his orders, 'Boys, go at them from the jump,  
No use to try for fancy riding now.  
And, Clancy, you must wheel them, try and wheel them to the right.  
Ride boldly, lad, and never fear the spills,  
For never yet was rider that could keep the mob in sight,  
If once they gain the shelter of those hills.'

So Clancy rode to wheel them—he was racing on the wing  
Where the best and boldest riders take their place,  
And he raced his stock-horse past them, and he made the ranges ring  
With the stockwhip, as he met them face to face.  
Then they halted for a moment, while he swung the dreaded lash,  
But they saw their well-loved mountain full in view,  
And they charged beneath the stockwhip with a sharp and sudden dash,  
And off into the mountain scrub they flew.

Then fast the horsemen followed, where the gorges deep and black  
Resounded to the thunder of their tread,  
And the stockwhips woke the echoes, and they fiercely answered back  
From cliffs and crags that beetled overhead.  
And upward, ever upward, the wild horses held their way,  
Where mountain ash and kurrajong grew wide;  
And the old man muttered fiercely, 'We may bid the mob good day,  
NO man can hold them down the other side.'

When they reached the mountain's summit, even Clancy took a pull,  
It well might make the boldest hold their breath,  
The wild hop scrub grew thickly, and the hidden ground was full  
Of wombat holes, and any slip was death.  
But the man from Snowy River let the pony have his head,  
And he swung his stockwhip round and gave a cheer,  
And he raced him down the mountain like a torrent down its bed,  
While the others stood and watched in very fear.

He sent the flint stones flying, but the pony kept his feet,  
He cleared the fallen timber in his stride,  
And the man from Snowy River never shifted in his seat—  
It was grand to see that mountain horseman ride.  
Through the stringy barks and saplings, on the rough and broken ground,  
Down the hillside at a racing pace he went;  
And he never drew the bridle till he landed safe and sound,  
At the bottom of that terrible descent.

He was right among the horses as they climbed the further hill,  
And the watchers on the mountain standing mute,  
Saw him ply the stockwhip fiercely, he was right among them still,  
As he raced across the clearing in pursuit.  
Then they lost him for a moment, where two mountain gullies met  
In the ranges, but a final glimpse reveals  
On a dim and distant hillside the wild horses racing yet,  
With the man from Snowy River at their heels.

And he ran them single-handed till their sides were white with foam.  
He followed like a bloodhound on their track,  
Till they halted cowed and beaten, then he turned their heads for home,

And alone and unassisted brought them back.  
 But his hardy mountain pony he could scarcely raise a trot,  
 He was blood from hip to shoulder from the spur;  
 But his pluck was still undaunted, and his courage fiery hot,  
 For never yet was mountain horse a cur.

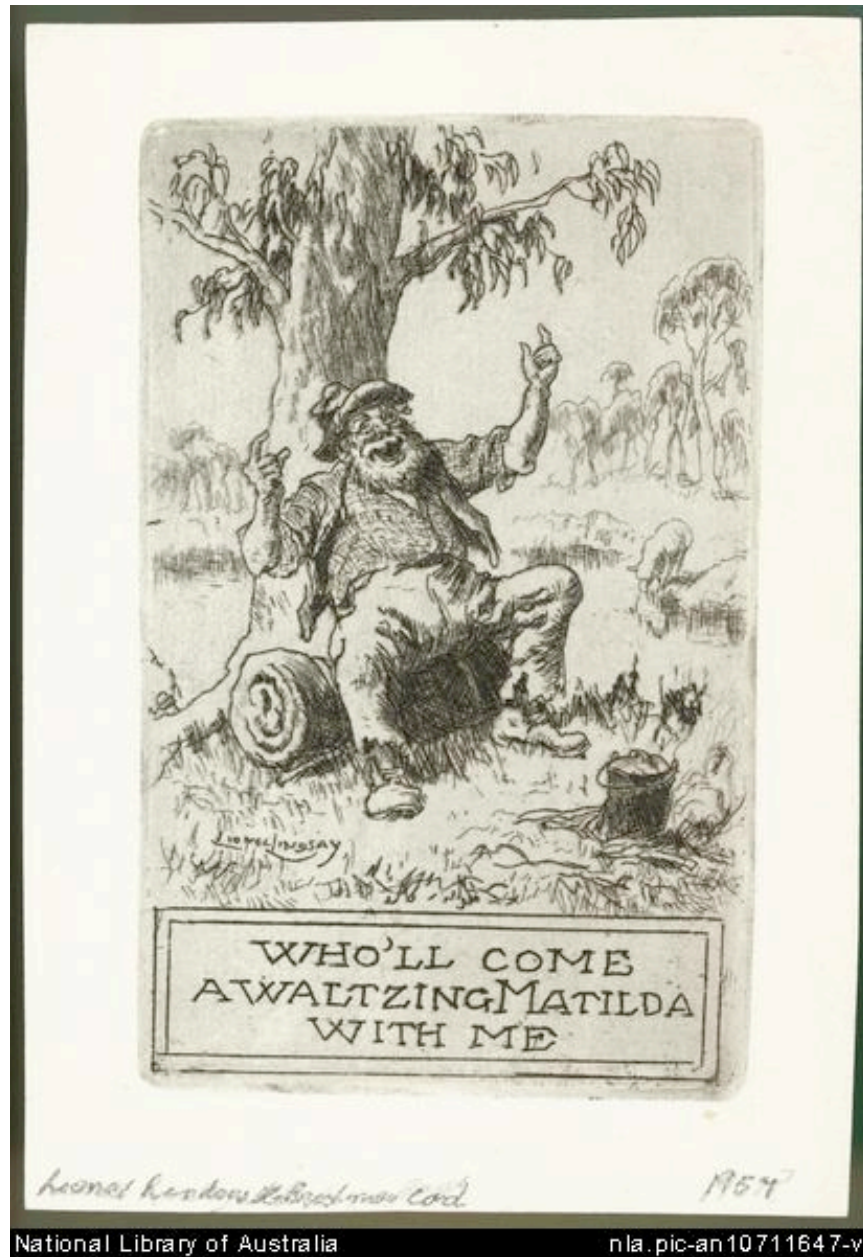
And down by Kosciusko, where the pine-clad ridges raise  
 Their torn and rugged battlements on high,  
 Where the air is clear as crystal, and the white stars fairly blaze  
 At midnight in the cold and frosty sky,  
 And where around the Overflow the reedbeds sweep and sway  
 To the breezes, and the rolling plains are wide,  
 The man from Snowy River is a household word to-day,  
 And the stockmen tell the story of his ride.

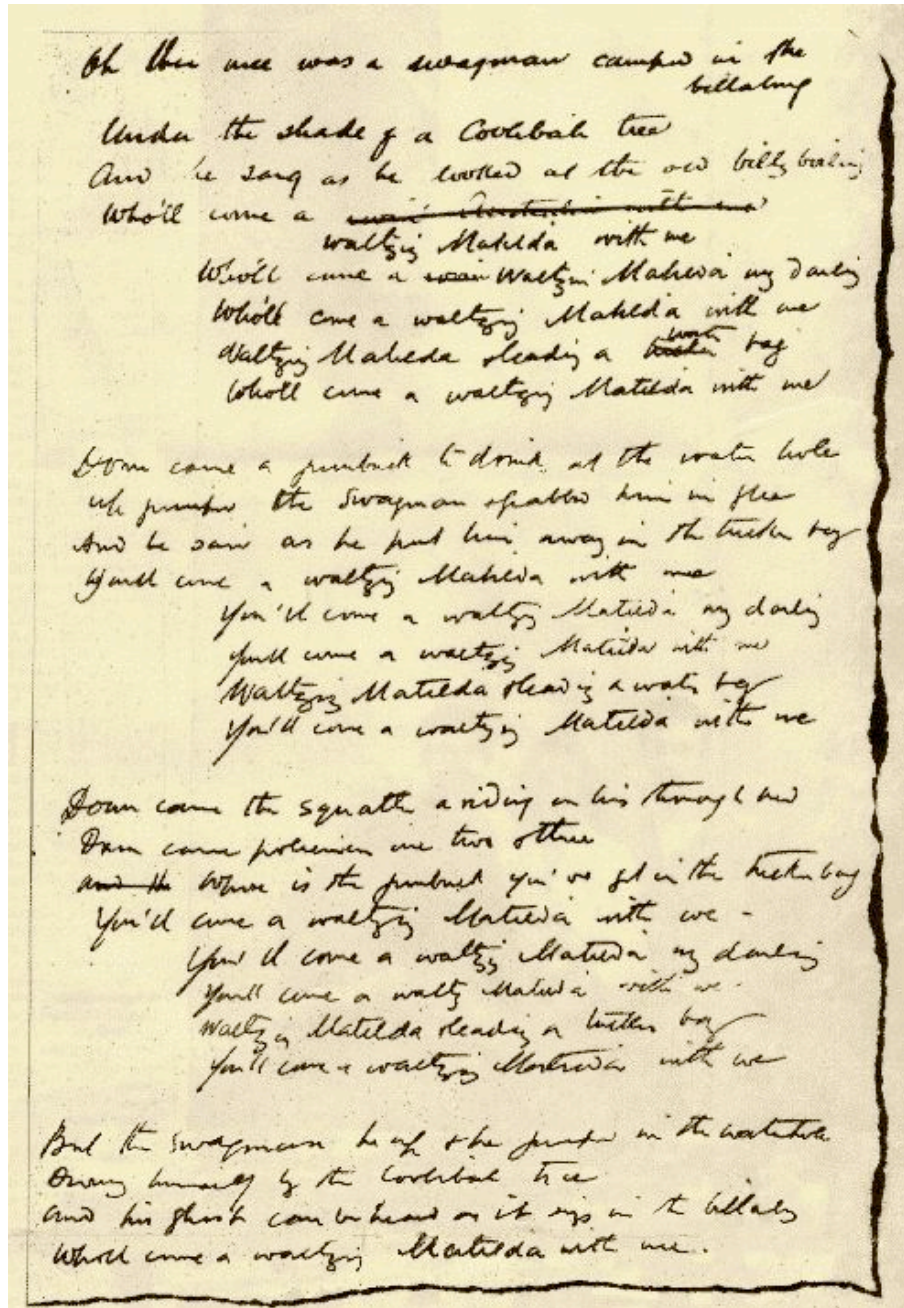


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## A song as an addendum

(Be sure to explore the links that follow)





Published as sheet music in 1903  
& from Saltbush Bill, J.P., and Other Verses, 1917

## Waltzing Matilda (Carrying a Swag)

Oh! there once was a swagman camped in the Billabong,

Under the shade of a Coolabah tree;  
And he sang as he looked at his old billy boiling,  
“Who’ll come a-waltzing Matilda with me.”

Who’ll come a-waltzing Matilda, my darling,  
Who’ll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?  
Waltzing Matilda and leading a water-bag—  
Who’ll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?

Down came a jumbuck to drink at the water-hole,  
Up jumped the swagman and grabbed him in glee;  
And he sang as he put him away in his tucker-bag,  
“You’ll come a-waltzing Matilda with me!”

Down came the Squatter a-riding his thorough-bred;  
Down came Policemen—one, two, and three.  
“Whose is the jumbuck you’ve got in the tucker-bag?  
You’ll come a-waltzing Matilda with me.”

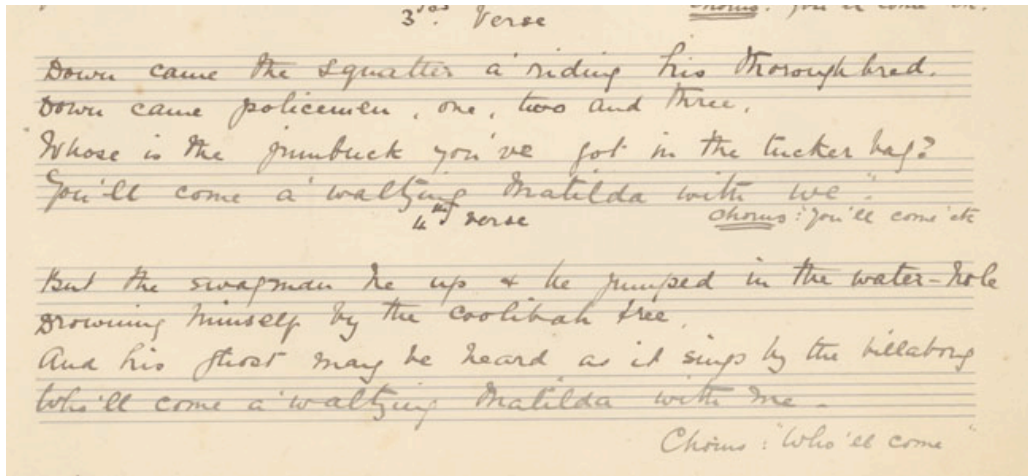
But the swagman, he up and he jumped in the water-hole,  
Drowning himself by the Coolabah tree;  
And his ghost may be heard as it sings in the Billabong,  
“Who’ll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?”

“Waltzing Matilda”

Oh then once was a swag-man camped in the bill-a-bong, Un-der the shade of a  
Cool-a-bah tree, And he sang as he looked at the old billy boil-ing, who'll come a' waltzing Ma-  
-tilda with me who'll come a' waltzing Matilda my dar-ling who'll come a' waltzing  
Ma-tilda with me waltzing Ma-tilda and lead-ing a water-bag who'll come a' waltzing Ma-  
-tilda with me

2<sup>nd</sup> Verse

Down came a jumbuck to drink at the billabong,  
Up jumped the Swagman & grabbed him with glee,  
And he said as he put him away in the tucker bag  
“You’ll come a’ waltzing Matilda with me!”



### Christine MacPherson transcription

Waltzing Matilda links:

[National Library of Australia: Waltzing Matilda—the original manuscript](#)

[National Library of Australia: Who'll come a waltzing Matilda with me?](#)

[Roger Clarke's Waltzing Matilda Home-Page](#)

[John Williamson's rendition of the original song \(ra\)](#)

[panoptacist: Best "Waltzing Matilda" Ever](#)

[Join Rolf Harris' rendition \(mp3\)](#)

[National Geographic: Australia's Bard](#)

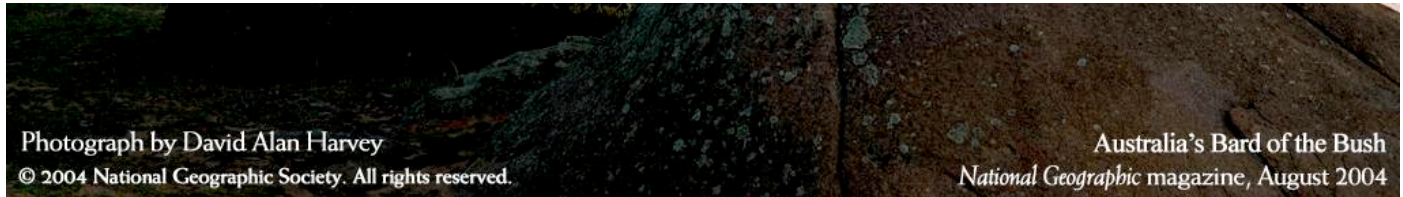
### another John Williamson rendition



**Duration 4:08**

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## 3 Comments »

1. That John Williamson rendition Matilda is a heck of a lot of fun. Peter would love that trombone line and the change in tempo really makes it.  
Lots of stuff to enjoy from Banjo Patterson here. Especially enjoyed “Johnson’s Antidote.”

*Comment by Micky — September 4, 2006 @ [2:10 pm](#)*

2. funny. i used “waltzing matilda” in one of my english classes about australia last summer, and came across most of the web resources you mention here - also read the NG article!

m

*Comment by michi — September 4, 2006 @ [4:11 pm](#)*

3. Hi [Micky](#),

Thanks for popping in. I am glad you enjoyed this. For me, part of the fun is the language down under, and the creatures like that goanna.

Bud

~~~~~

Hi [Michi](#),

**Thanks for your note. It's great to see you. Small world, and small wide web—or is it that our minds travel in the same direction?**

**Sounds like quite a good English class you had.**

**Bud**

*Comment by Bud Bloom — September 6, 2006 @ [10:23 am](#)*

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