Dear Ian,

I am writing to you in relation to your wonderful book “Tracks of the Mountain”. This book is now out of print and the Timbertop teachers would like to use the material in this book for teaching purpose at the Timbertop campus.

Copyright is held jointly with J.C. Dillon and Geelong Grammar School.

I was wondering if you would give us permission to scan this book into a PDF format allowing students and staff on campus easy access.

We would be forever thankful if you allowed for this to happen.

Yours Sincerely

Frances Walsh
Head of Library Services
Re: TRACKS OF THE MORNING

Dear Frances,

Yes, of course I’d be delighted to give permission for scanning/reformatting etc leading to further use of the book.

I’m very pleased that there is still interest in it.

The original idea that I discussed with John Lewis was that my book would be a launching ramp for other Timbertop local historical studies. The idea was that Timbertop staff and students would work together to research, write and publish a series of “Timbertop History Monographs”. History staff would have a leading role but the nature of the research would mean that staff from many other disciplines might also get involved. The topic areas for the monographs discussed back then included: the local newspapers, the cemeteries, landscape/ecological change, notable locals, paintings and photographs, changing technology, buildings (huts, homesteads, churches etc). It would be easy to add to the list.

What I envisaged was the emergence of a significant archive of historical material relating to Timbertop, the local region, the alpine region. Staff and students would contribute via library and other archival research, by interviewing and doing field work. For example, original tracks and roads into stations in the early colonial period are still discoverable, especially in Autumn/Winter. A discovery and mapping exercise finding and mapping some of these roads could produce a very interesting monograph. This sort of work would also elevate classroom historical study to another level. Walking a track that was made in the 1840s and that’s still defined in the landscape is pure empathy and a great way to nourish young historians’ imaginations. There was no Internet in those days and nothing like the e.research resources that now exist and facilitate this sort of research.

I think the book has stood the test of time quite well. The one section that stands out as needing additional research and a rewrite is the prehistory section. A great deal has happened in this area since the ‘60s, ‘70s and ‘80s. Dr Josephine Flood read and proofed the Aboriginal chapters. She was, and still is, the doyen of alpine Aboriginal archaeology and anthropology. Notwithstanding her generosity and care some glitches slipped through. One was that in the final printing an earlier draft was referred to that had no Capital A for Aborigines. (I) This was an annoyance at the time. Many earlier and contemporary works did likewise, but scholarly conventions should be observed.

There are also a number of typos that slipped through – but not too many! Whenever I see my copy on my bookshelves I’m reminded that it was typed on my old Olympia portable. No auto-correct, no cut and paste - just “hammer, hammer, hammer”. Cut and paste on successive drafts was literally retype, cut and paste. The introduction for the Aboriginal section went through about twenty drafts. Aren’t computers wonderful?

I used the early Mansfield newspapers extensively. My reading of them was done in a rusty galvo shed in the yard behind the Mansfield Courier. Its priceless and unique collection going back to the 1860s was dumped on some old wooden shelves and protected by a cheaper than cheap padlock. At about the time I left Timbertop I was trying to get the original papers transferred to the State Library of Victoria. I subsequently heard that they’d found a more secure home at the SLV or perhaps the National Library of Australia in Canberra.

The book has probably had an interesting history of its own. At one stage it was on a Monash University History course reading list and for a few years I would get enquiries from enterprising
students. On other occasions it’s been used by newspapers and historical societies, usually without prior permission. Over the years I’ve had quite a few requests for copies, usually from people with an interest in alpine history who’ve come across it at places like the SLV. I’ve even found it in second hand bookshops and last year bought a copy in Canberra for $45. It was in pretty good condition, what the trade might call “Very Good” or even “Fine”.

Scanning does wonderful things these days and even seems to be able to make blurry old black and whites sharper than their originals. I have many of my originals, should they be of use further down the track. Many of the photos I used in the book should also be in the Timbertop Archives which I started while I was at the school.

The cover illustration for the book was supposed to be a beautiful painting showing the upper Delatite with Timbertop and Buller. It was painted from a hilltop on Delatite/Beolite. I came across it in the Pictorial Section at the NLA while doing research there during the Xmas holidays while at Timbertop. The section was in chaos at the time – understaffed, underfunded etc. The librarians pointed me in the general direction and said: “Try looking there; Good Luck!” I found a number of interesting things and this painting that was perfect for the cover. The NLA then proceeded to lose, find and lose it. It was still lost when the book was printed. Sometime later the NLA got in touch and said they’d found it. They waived reproduction fees and I had a number of copies made. I gave one to John Lewis and one to Geoffrey Ritchie. It might be a suitable cover this time. The NLA would need to be contacted re reproduction fees etc.

After leaving Timbertop I taught History at Canberra Grammar School. I’ve been retired for about five years and am now working on a number of projects, the main one being a sort of memoir of a renowned British soldier, explorer, mountaineer and sailor whom I got to know many years ago and with whom I travelled in Greenland in 1970, just in time to see early and very dramatic evidence of recent climate change.

Thank you very much for your letter. I hope the project gets legs.

Kind regards,

Ian Dillon