

Lees Paddocks Diaries 1940 – 1971

Lees Paddocks

Lees Paddocks is a high country-grazing run set in a glacial valley on the upper reaches of the Mersey River in northern Tasmania. It is remote, currently accessible only on foot, typically after a two-hour walk upstream from the nearest road-head near Lake Rowallan. After toiling up a track through the close and densely forested valley, one suddenly emerges into a vast amphitheatre fringed by towering mountain peaks. Within that amphitheatre is an open grassy expanse through which the Mersey River meanders down in slow curves, its banks decorated with myrtle, sassafras and leatherwood trees. Walking further up the valley one finds more grassy plains, a few hectares in area, each enclosed within a meander of the river. To pragmatic stockmen, likely to be the first European visitors to the area in the 1850s, these plains resembled paddocks. From this origin, the area became prosaically known as 'The Paddocks', albeit those later responsible for naming many of the mountains around it felt compelled to resort to Greek and Roman mythology to express their sense of the majesty and beauty of the surrounding area.

The Lees

George Lee (1862-1932) of Mole Creek first selected land at the Paddocks in the late 1880s as a summer grazing run for his cattle. He added additional blocks over the decades until the run comprised several hundred acres. Lee had four sons: Basil, Oliver, Oxley and Lewis all of whom assisted in the family enterprise of driving cattle to the Paddocks every summer and in bringing them home again before winter. The sons also began hunting from the Paddocks during the winter from just after Federation. On his death in 1932 George Lee left the Paddocks to his two youngest sons Oxley and Lewis who divided the property between them. In 1970 Oxley sold the majority of his land at the Paddocks to Lewis' friend Reg Wadley. For information on the Lees, see Simon Cubit, *Snarers and Cattlemen of the Mersey High Country: the Lees of Lees Paddocks*, Regal Press, Launceston, 1987.

The diary

Lewis Lee kept a diary to record the number of cattle he brought to the Paddocks and where they were placed soon after he assumed ownership of part of it in 1932. The Paddocks was subdivided by natural and man-made barriers into a number of 'paddocks' such as 'horse plain', 'top plain', 'hut plain', 'over river', 'above wire' and 'below wire'. Diary notations recorded the number of cattle put on these runs so when it was time to bring the cattle home, the stockmen knew where to find them and the number they should expect to find.

These early records were written on scraps of paper and stored in a tin in the rafters of the skinshed Lewis built for himself around 1933. In 1940, he built a hut beside the skinshed and, from that time, wrote his records in Roberts Stewart farming diaries he kept in the hut. In the mid 1950s the skinshed burnt down destroying the early records from 1932/33 to 1940. Lewis regretted the loss of these records and thereafter ensured that each diary, when completed, was taken out to his home at Mole Creek. It was there, whilst visiting Lewis in the 1980's, and with his permission, that I copied the diaries. I used excerpts of the diaries in my *Snarers and Cattlemen of the Mersey High Country: the Lees of Lees Paddocks* published in 1987. The diaries, however, have a wider value. They document the transhumant use of a Tasmanian high country valley for over thirty years. They reveal the patterns of land use and activity, the frequency of visits, the familial relationships between participants and some of the activities undertaken. They show, for example, that Lewis Lee made, on average, the trips a year (and around 100 trips in total) back to the Paddocks from Mole Creek in the period 1940 to 1970. For this reason, the diaries need publishing in their own right.

The main characters in the diaries are brothers Lewis Lee (L. Lee), Oxley Lee (O. Lee and sometimes O.G. Lee), Basil Lee (B or BM Lee). In some cases O. Lee could be Oliver Lee. Others include Len Applebee, Bill James, Walter Chilcott, Alan O'Neil, Arch Wilson, Reg Wadley, Ted Byard, John Russell, Albert Gurr, Max R Lee, Reg Wadley, Oxley L Richards, Reg Cubit and Ron Lee.

The Diaries 1940 - 1971

Thursday 31 Oct 1940

O. and L. Lee brought to Paddocks 105 head

O. Lee 60 head

L. Lee 45 head

Thursday December 15 1940

Bought to run 88 head of cattle for L. Lee

Down river 17 head

Over river 42 head

Top end 16 steers

Top plain 14 head

Hut plain 104 head

Ted Byard, L. Lee, O. Lee, L. Applebee

25 February 1941

Leave here 25 Feb, took 57 cattle to Februaries

Leaving 76 on hut plain over river, 14 on top plain, 16 on next two plains

B. Lee, L. Lee, O. Lee, L. Applebee

10 May 1941

Left on top plain 24

Over river 21

Hut plain 20

B. James, Lewis Lee, B. Lee, O Lee

Feb 5, 1942

Bought to Paddocks 148 cattle including 1 of Field's from Howells

For O G Lee 49 head on top plain 21

Over river 28 + Field's steer

For Lewis Lee 104

On hut plain 41

Top end over fence 63

Bought to Basil's 10 head

April 7 1942

O + L Lee

Brought to Paddocks 13 cattle for O Lee and put them down on 90 acres. Took to top plain over river 11 head of cattle from plain just over river, leaving 18 head over river.

Jan 24 1943

Bought to run

L Lee 59 head

O Lee 50 head

B Lee 14 head

Over river 32 head

Top plain 18 head

Hut plain 24 head

Top end 35 head

W Chilcott, L Applebee, L Lee

March 9 1943

W Chilcott, O Lee, L Lee

Brought to run Chilcott 29 head

For O Lee 15 head

April 3 1943

W. Chilcott, L Lee

Shifted cattle

Horse plain, 10 yearlings, thru hut fence 45 head

Hut plain 33 head

May 26th 1942

O Lee, L Lee, W. Chilcott, A O'Neil

Took home for O Lee 28 head

For L Lee 33 head

O Lee downriver 35 head

L Lee 53 head

Oct 10 1943

Left here with skins, left in L Lee hut 74 L Lee traps

Left in O G Lee hut 49 BM Lee's traps

Jan 17 1944

L Lee, W Chilcott, Shirley Richardson, bought here 80 head

8 head on horse plain

49 head top end

25 hut plain

May 12 1945

O & L Lee

Top plain 21

Over river on top end 45

On 90 acre 29

Hut plain 14

Horse plain 9

June 16th 1945

O Lee, L Lee, L Applebee

Left over river 45 head

Hut plain 30

Took home for L Lee 14 head

For O Lee 29

Jan 1946

For L Lee 51 head cattle

For O G Lee 13 head

Signed B M Lee

W Chilcott, Joe Hardacre

Brought here for O Lee

25 head on **15 Dec 1945**

Brought from lake to here

54 head March 17 1946

W Chilcott, L Lee, Joe Nelson, Arch Wilson

18 March 1946

12 head above wire Oxley Lee

20 head L Lee above wire

first plain 22 head, one of them belongs to O Lee

18 March 1946

On top plain

64 head for Lewis Lee

8th April 1946

B M Lee + L Lee

Left 22 head on top end including top plain

Left 24 above wire fence, took balance home

May 10 1946

A Wilson, L Lee, took to top plain 28 for L Lee 12 cows for B M Lee

Leaving 18 head above wire fence

Oct 24 1946

O Lee, Bennie Howe, W Chilcott

Came here to burn ragwort and scrub

Rain and snow ever since we left Mole Creek on 20th Oct

11 December 1946

O Lee, E Byard, W. Chilcott landed here today with 60 head cattle for L Lee

27 head, O Lee

Road from Howells worst even here have had to encounter

feed here green and short

Frosty, lovely days, tried burn scrub

Ox + Ted repaired fence

12 December 1946

Put 27 head over river for O. Lee

30 head above wire L. Lee

30 head hut plain for L Lee

Signed W Chilcott

Feb 22 1947

B M + L Lee arrived here

Put 60 cattle for L Lee onto O Lee's top plain

Put 26 for O Lee on to top plain over river (1 missing) left here 23rd

May 18 1947

O Lee, L Lee arrived

Took home 32 head, leaving 28 head

19th Feb 1948

O Lee, L Lee, B Lee + W Chilcott bought to Paddocks 131 head

Over river from O Lee 64 head

On all this run for L Lee 67 head

Weather wet + cold, snow on tops

April 26th 1948

O, L + B Lee arrived here with 38 head for L Lee, left them on hut plain

Shifted 67 head to top plain

Shifted most of O Lees cattle to his top plain over river

2 head missing

Weather fine + mild. L Lee

June 16 1948

B, L + R (?) Lee arrived here

Moved the cattle from top plain, 1 missing

Drafted 40 to leave here, 64 to take home

Moved all O Lee to this side ready to take home

7 drowned in river, washed in by big flood in river

54 take home, leaving one cow

29 October 1948

Oxley Lee, put 38 steers on L Lees run at camp. River too high to cross. B. M. Lee + Chilcott came here with O Lee

Grass short, wet weather over

O Lee's 38 head steers went back to Howells, shifted them back to Paddocks, left one at Howell's. Fair amount of game about. Shot 2 roo to feed dogs.

9 December 1948

O Lee, L Lee + W Chilcott bought stock up to Paddocks today, put 37 steers over river for O Lee

Put 33 head up on the top plain for L Lee, feed short

Everywhere just nice + green. Burned a few tussocks.

Feb 22 1949

W Chilcott, B. Lee, O Lee, L Lee

Came here with 71 cattle for L Lee. Steer of B Lees from Howells followed cattle in.

Heifer off top plain, crossed river brought 2 cows top plain down to hut plain

Feb 22 1949

On hut plain 74 head
top end 30 head
grass grown since last trip, better than expected
weather cold, some snow on top

May 1 1949

L. Lee, Rodney Lee
Inspected all cattle, put steers back on top plain
Put cows upon Lotus Hill. Feed fair. Weather beautiful, burnt some tussocks.

May 30 1949

Ted Byard, Cyril Howe, B, O + L Lee brought here 19 cattle from Howells
Left here taking home 78 head
Weather nice, some frosts feed short cattle lost some condition
Leaving 45 head cattle here

August 17th 1949

Ted Byard, L Lee
Took all cattle home, 44 L Lee 3 O Lee total 47
been good winter, cattle done fairly well and home, had good weather from this trip

Dec. 20th 1949

O + L Lee brought 87 head cattle for L Lee
Shifted 15 steers for O Lee on to top plain
Leaving 14 on balance of O Lees run. Feed fair, too many game, no rabbits

9 March 1950

O Lee + W Chilcott came up to see stock, look fair, feed short, 21 head of O Lees down bottom over river, found 7 up river, take run all round, very poor feed. W Chilcott

April 13 1950

O, L, B Lee
Going to try part calves from cows + take them home
Frosty mornings, nice days, cattle fair, moved all O. G's cattle on to top plain
L Lee

24 Feb 1951

L Lee, W Chilcott put 50 cattle on Lake Eyre, 30 head, W Chilcott, 20 head, L Lee, C Lee (Lake fair feed).

24th Feb 1951

B M + O Lee brought 70 head here to Paddocks for L Lee, 10 head for O Lee or should of done. (Paddocks dry)

7 December 1951

O Lee, B Lee, Chilcott brought 40 head to Paddocks for O Lee

Feb 25 1951

O Lee, L Lee

Brought home 99 head for L Lee

On 26th B James, M & B Lee came and we dehorned O Lee cattle over river

Run short of feed for time of year

23rd Feb 1953

Ted Byard, Reg Wadley, L Lee arrived here with 74 head for L Lee. Put 16 on top plain leaving 58 here. Feed poor, very dry, been few caterpillars

20 June 1953

L Lee, R. Wadley, Max Lee + O Lee came and took black calves home.

2 Aug 1953

L Lee, A Gurr had trouble getting cattle over river. Left Lee with cattle Aug 3

37 head L Lee

47 head O Lee, 3 Gurr

Feb 5 1954

B + L Lee arrived here 48 head for L Lee

Feed poor for time of year, weather cold, wet.

June 18 1954

B + L Lee took 48 head home – been heavy snow

June 26 1956

O + L Lee

Gathered cattle, two missing took home 57 head L Lee

April 10 1956

Left Ponds April 8, 1956

L. Lee, J Russell, came over new road, had to ford Fisher and Mersey. The former well up, feet only got wet. Arrived at Arm hut Tues 8th. Left for Paddocks Wed am, lunched Howells, made the Paddocks 4pm. Quick look see.

April 17 1958

Promised earlier in the price
Weather fine and sunny. Following day looks like rain
Lee + Russell.

April 17 1958

Checked cattle, Lee + Russell full count OK
Checked O Lee's found 2 missing, one dead in ditch, one unable to find.

June 12 1958

W Chilcott, John How, L Lee 73 head

Next diary written in blue Roberts Stewart Book 1960

Mar 13 1960

arrived here with 51 cattle + 7 for Lee + Russell, feed good L Lee

May 2 1960

L Lee arrived here with 29 cattle including one for M R Lee. Left all cattle on this side of river

May 28 1960

L Lee, J. Russell, put 18 cattle on top plain
32 top plain over river, 24 over river bottom end
Leaving here with 7 Lee's Russell 6 for L Lee
(feed over river poor)

July 1 1960

Bruce Martin + L Lee came here, moved 18 head from this plain to next one. Also 32 from... (unreadable).

July 24 1960

Arrived here 24th, leaving 25th with 73 head, 1 missing, warm days, snow melting, rivers high, had trouble getting cattle over river L Lee, B Martin

Wed March 16 1961

R. Wadley, Arthur Farrell, L Lee arrived with 431 sheep

May 11 1961

R Wadley, L Lee
Started from here with sheep – 10 short

June 2 1961

R. Wadley, L. Lee, taking load of calves out 10 head

July 2 1960

R. Wadley, L Lee moved cattle from here to top plain
1 black heifer dead leaving 22 total, cold + wet, snow on top

Nov 15 1960

L Lee, R Wadley. Burning off, very dry, burned well

Nov 27 1961

L Lee, R Wadley
Set phosphorous, still fairly dry

June 8 1962

R Wadley, L Lee leaves here Thursday, home today.
Shifted cattle from top plain, cattle looked well
Left them next to top plain 68 head raining
River been very high.

Feb 20 1962

O Lee, Tony Wadley, L Lee
Arrived at Paddocks with 48 head cattle
2 missing on way up. L Lee 46 R Wadley 32
This entry was written from records at home a lot later

Apr 3 1962

R Wadley, L Lee
Shifted cattle to above wire fence
Wet but warm

April 16 1962

R. Wadley, L Lee arrived here
built stock yard, nice weather, frost, leaving here with 7 calved, 2 steers on 18th
Sxxxx one calf in hole 2nd plain.

May 10 1962

O Richards, L Lee, R Wadley
Cut ditch out on top plain + put corduroy over bog, cut some logs with chainsaw.
Weather calm, put 68 on top plain

July 24 1962

R Wadley, L Lee
Shifted 22 head to top plain leaving balance on hut plain, cattle melted since last trip but
still in good fettle. Weather fair, food short. Tussocks green, more burned off.

Nov 10 1962

Neville Wray, Scott Baker, L Lee

Been here inspecting timber, beautiful weather

Mar 24 1963

L Lee, R Wadley. Rex Stone left Howell's yard with 42 cattle. L Lee arrived here 40 head
2 missing

Stone + Wadley left at Pine, trouble truck

for R Wadley 16

R Wood 11

L Lee 15

42

Missing 2

40

Couldn't get good count, some silly jerseys in mob.

April 25 1963

R Wadley, L Lee

Brought in 8 cattle including 2 lost on previous trip

To top plains 22 for R Wadley above wire fence 14 L Lee.

hut plain 11 R Wadley and 1 L Lee

good trip, dry, streams very low, leaving here 26th

June 4 1963

Reg W., L Lee brought in 11 cattle for RW

Left 6 Pine Hut, 5 at Paddocks

Today we are going to try + take R Wadley's cattle out, very skittish have trouble

Weather dry, frosts.

Aug 14 1963

R. Wadley, L Lee taking all cattle home, look fairly well, 38 head 15 L Lee 23 RW

Oct 23rd 1963

L Lee, R Wadley

Burned run off, good burning, dry

Nov 13 1963

R Wadley, L Lee

Laying poison, good rain since here last.

Sat 11 Jan 1964

R Wadley, J. Wadley, L Lee

For L Lee 61 yearlings

For R Wadley 27 mixed cattle, feed short, frost. Had good rains, may grow now, been very dry

Mar 20th 1964

R Wadley, L Lee

Shifted 61 yearlings over river, one died during shifting, feed over river fair. Taking home bull, 2 cows, 13 calves, leaving 21 head here, weather good mild.

June 12 1964

L Lee, R Wadley

Taking home 8 head of cattle from R Wadley, leaving 14 on top plain

Took 60 from over river to top end over river

Fine weather, heavy frost

July 23rd 1964

L Lee, R Wadley

Snow 4 inches, brought 60 head cattle over River. Started snowing again + leaving now with all cattle.

Feb 28th 1965

Allan Smith, L Lee arrived here 22 head cattle

Feed good, streams + river very low

July 18 1965

R Wadley, L Lee light snow + frost. Taking 5 cows of R Wadley's home. Leaving today 20th

Nov 2 1965

L Lee + Wadley arrived to burn off. Snow today

Mon 3rd burnt off good burn, nice day Tuesday looks like rain, burnt a bit, going out today

Jan 25th 1966

L Lee, R Wadley, Judy Wadley 84 cattle

38 Lees hut plain

46 Wadley's top plain

Weather hot, caterpillars bad in places, rainbow trout sighted weighing up to 2lb, caught one, shot duck. Good feed, top plain hut plain J. Wadley

Feb 7 1966

R Cubit, L Lee brought to Howells by truck 14 steers

L Lee drove them to here 3 o'clock. Has rained good since here before, cattle now on hut plain, 52 head

L Lee brought Lee + turned over river on to 80 acres
18 heifers (these later came back over River) Very hot
feed good Then went back down river and met Kay... + Lee Richard, Camped there, had look at timber next day

April 2, 1966

R Wadley, L Lee

Brought here 6 cows, left on hut plain.

One head short on top plain, 2 in ditch on horse plain. One short on hut plain. Taking home 14 calves, two small steers. One cow to R Wadley. Leaving 63 on hut and 20 on top plain. Streams very low. Showers but warm.

May 4 1966

J Wadley, R Wadley

Put 16 Wadley cows over the river, rained during the night. 41 cattle on hut, 20 on top flat, 16 over the river, left on May 5 and took cattle home.

July 17 1966

R Wadley, L Lee

Took home 4 (Oxley Lee's heifers), 5 R Wadley. Left 41 hut plain, 11 top plain, 16 over river. Feed scarce, cattle fair.

August 6, 1966

L Lee, R Wadley

Took out 68 cattle + calf

Feb 5 1967

R Wadley, L Lee

8 head R Wadley, 41 L Lee. Hot weather, feed fair. Leaving here same day for Howells, go fishing.

19 March 1967

R Wadley, L Lee

Arrived with 11 cows and five heifers for R Wadley. Took same and 18 heifers from here over river. Weather perfect. Feed fair. One heifer dead in ditch on horse plain. Leaving here on 20th.

L Lee brought here and turned over river on to 90 acres 18 heifers (these later came back over river). Very hot, feed good. Then went back down river and met Kay..... and Lee Richards camped there. Had look at timber next day **Feb 23 1967**

June 4 1967

L Lee, R Wadley arrived.

Calm weather, frosty, feed good, cattle got mixed from over river to this side + from top of plain over other side. Two cattle dead + missing

Over river 31

Hut plain 39

Top of plain 10

Leaving here 6th, heavy frost, drank last of whisky. Hope to come back at end of month to shift cattle

Been a lovely day when frost goes off. Very dry for June.

8 July 1967

L Lee, R Wadley

Left Paddocks with 20 of Lee's cattle, 5 and calf of Wadley

Leaving Ray Miles here hunting

Leaving 37 steers hut plain

17 Wadley's top plain

River low, weather good.

Nov 2 1967

Lee Richards, L Lee

Came up to burn off, burned this end.

Rained that night, home next morning.

Nov 12 1967

Lee, Wadley

Here to burn off, burned well and am taking burns 'till' today 13th + home tonight

14 Jan 1968

L Lee, R Wadley, Julie Miles, Harold Riley, Judy Wadley

75 Lee's cattle

25 over river

20 above wire fence

30 on hut plain

35 Wadley's cattle

+ 15 calves on top plain

Feed alright, Judy photographed valley, shot 2lb rainbow, Shep lost 4 hours. Home 17 Jan.

May 22 1968

L Lee, R Wadley

Cattle + feed fair, snowing

Drafted off 22 cattle including 15 calves for RW + took them home. 4 cattle missing off top plain

Couldn't get over river to shift cattle - flood.

Left 8 RW cows on hut plain

June 11 1968

Lee + Wadley arrived

Put over river + took to top plain over river 8 cows RW

Took cattle from over river down onto 90 acres, 24 head one short. River has been very high + has been lot of snow. Cattle lost condition (feed fair a beautiful day). Both last trips walked (Lewis Leg played up – had to walk).

4 Aug 1968

L Lee, R Wadley arrived. Took home all cattle this side of river. Cattle very thin. River very high, not able to bring cattle over, been a lot of snow + rain. Leaving here Tuesday 6 had trouble getting cattle over Wurragarra.

Aug 19 1968

Reg Wadley, Jeff Weston?

Left Paddocks with 31 cattle

Jan 17 1969

L Lee, R Wadley, R Jones, I Walker, Julie Lee, Kerry + Judy Kilby
65 cattle (50 Lee's, 15 Wadley's)

Top plain 15, over river 16, above wire fence 13

Hut plain – 21. Wet weather, feed OK

May 18 1964

Lee, Wadley

Left 12 cattle over river, top plain

38 hut plain, took out 14 Wadley, departed Tuesday

20th cattle in ... nick, weather good

June 20 1969

L Lee, O L Lee arrived here

left 21st with 49 cattle one short

Very frosty, river very low

Oct 22 1969

L Lee, D Richardson, Ron Lee, John J(G)oss

To burn off, dry river low, burned fairly well

14 Jan 1970

Kath + Harold Riley, Tricia How, Julie Lee, Oxley Richards, Reg Wadley, L Lee, Judy Kilby
89 cattle – 18 Wadleys, 16 Fall's Creek, 28 hut plain, 27 over river. Feed best ever
Riley 4½ hours to L Ayr + back
Wadley broke in piebald pony
Rained, leeches plentiful

Feb 14 1970

L Lee, O Richards, wife + family
... morning over river and on to top plain. Two cattle missing over river 70
cattle.....
very dry, stock look well, stream very low, feed good.

Monday 27th 1970

R Wadley, L Lee
Arrived here with 29 cows for LL, 12 cows for RW
Left on hut plain 29 cows + 29 steers, could not get over River, very high – weather bad.
Leaving here 28th to meet L Richards at Pine Hut. RW took 12 cows to top plain, his
cattle look well.

2 June 1970

A Farrell + R Wadley
Came Tuesday 2, left 4th with 104 cattle, all present R Wadley

November 9 1970

O. L Richards, L Lee arrived here to burn off
Leaving here 21st to burn off down river on way home.
Fair burning weather, not much sign of game L Lee

Jan 15 1971

Patricia Howe, Julie Lee, R. Wadley, O. L Richards arrived here
R. Wadley to top of plain 17
L Lee over river 16
Hut plain 45 + 1 heifer R Wadley
Leave here 18th food fair, cool weather

Feb 14 1971

L Lee, O Richards. Very dry, no water in little creek, had to go to river. Cattle look fairly
well

14 June 1971

L Lee, Reg Wadley, O Lee and Craig Lee left Paddocks with 61 Lees and 16 Wadleys, left
10 cows Wadleys Top Plain. Weather good, frosty.

5 September 1971

R Wadley and M Burnie took it cattle, 10 cows left here

2 April 1972

L Lee, O Richards, Craig Richards

63 cattle very dry, had trouble, cattle went back xxxx xxxxx both nights.

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When Wurragarra [Creek] was in flood Lewis would hang on to the tail of Reg Wadley's horse to get across. When Lewis couldn't ride Reg would take horse and carry all gear and Lewis would walk]

1970 - Lewis couldn't ride horse because of hip