

SPARKY'S RIDE

Starvation Creek was a tough place in the drought of '98;
Grasshoppers slung their tuckerbags from gate to barren gate.
Three years in - no feed, no water - and the stock were slipping fast;
The only thing still growing was that awful overdraft!
But up Starvation Valley on a place called "Kori Gong"
On the slopes of Misery Mountain was an oat crop growing strong -
A thumping crop of feed oats shining green and two foot high,
Watered from a spring fed dam that no drought could ever dry.

A lonely patch of green it was, in country golden fried;
And Sparky was the overseer, he grew this crop with pride.
This year when fat young cattle meant a fat cheque in the mail,
If his weaners got the oat crop, they would top the local sale.
But first he had a battle 'cos all the critters heard the news -
Cockies, roos and wallabies and next door's first cross ewes.
They thought the oats were grown for them, they came from miles around,
But lots of wire and a little lead, those oats kept safe and sound.

Until.....

There was this mob of feral goats that roamed the hills about,
You couldn't fence the mongrels in - no way you'd fence them out.
They went just where they wanted to this mob of smelly goats;
After stripping every wattle tree they got a taste for oats!
They must have sniffed it on the breeze and swarmed in just like flies,
Straight through Sparky's bomb proof fence in dark of night like spies.
Come daylight they cleared right out, back to their rocky lair,
Just left behind black calling cards and tell-tale mangy hair.

The hills were alive with cussing when poor Sparky saw his crop;
He wasn't fattening billy goats so this was gonna stop.
As their not so pleasant odour wafted round the paddock still -
"By the Jeeesus" said old Sparky "I'll get the mongrels of this hill!"
But it wasn't all that easy keeping goats off Sparky's range,
Hot wires just knocked their lice off and barbwire just scratched their mange,
In and out like hungry blowflies like they'd never once been fed -
Too smart for taking poison, much too fast for catching lead.

They were man-shy, they were dog-shy, they were shy of bikes and utes,
They scattered to the wind when chased, but came straight back in - the brutes.
So mustering on horseback seemed the only way to go,
And take them to the stockyards in the valley far below.
But Kori-Gong in native tongue, it means "big fella steep hill";
If the drop-off slopes don't get you, then the hidden crab-holes will,
Or deep, dark, scrubby gullies where a man could lose his dog,
With a crow in every wattle and a snake on every log.

But Sparky was the best man 'round to muster-up this lease -
He'd cut his teeth on bridles, he'd been weaned on saddle grease;
So he grabbed his trusty stockhorse - in its paddock swishing flies -
Threw his brumby chasing saddle on with knee pads oversize.
It wasn't hard to find the goats (betrayed they were by smell)
Back they were with heads all down and giving the oat crop hell.
They barreled through that 'lectric fence just like it wasn't on
And like opening up a rat's nest in a scurry they were gone.

Round the side of Misery Mountain, nothing but goat poo and tails,
And Sparky took off after them, the wind was in his sails.
He chased those outlaw critters across the mountain pastures bare;
Three goats wide on one lane sheep tracks they high-tailed it out of there.
Through bracken fern and dogwood and ringbarked wattle clumps,
He stuck with 'em like a dingo, ducking limbs and jumping stumps.
And his horse was tough as crows' guts, it never dropped a stride,
While all the way big rocks went tumbling off that mountain side.

They were heading for the hilltop, highest ground for a mile,
With the remnants of a gold mine and its big old mullock pile.
That mullock heap was sanctuary, Mount Aarat for goats,
Surrounded by deep mine shafts as a castle girt by moats.
They bounced up it – almost playful – and mingled on the peak,
And they turned to stare at Sparky cos they had a bit of cheek.
He yelled in glee “you mob are going where all damn goats should go-
All down hill from here ya mongrels” - was an understatement though.

'Cos that mullock heap was rotten and it couldn't carry ants,
When Sparky rode toward those goats defiant in their stance,
They went slipping on the loose rocks right down the other side
Dropping straight into the mine shaft (like Aussie dollars on the slide).
Sparky would have liked to stop when he saw where the goats had gone,
But his horse was still in third gear and the brakes just weren't switched on.
He back pedalled in that saddle but his horse kept losing height
And yodelling like a magpie, Sparky disappeared from sight.

One thousand foot of mine shaft right down through that big old hill,
Sparky leaned way back and braced up for a real old fashion spill;
Good thing his horse was back in charge and it didn't wanna fall;
Legs jammed out front and nostrils flared, it slid down that mine shaft wall.
Steel shoes clashed with quartz reef and sparks lit up that mine;
Sparky praying like a bushman it would somehow work out fine.
But the bottom of that hole arrived plenty soon enough,
After falling all that way down there, it's good that goats are tough!

Big tangle of goats, horse and rider, all wanting out of there,
Mad scramble down a tunnel and then out into fresh air.
Old Horse just stood there dumbstruck shaking mine dust from its mane,
Sparky pale with fear and cobwebs, white-knuckle grip on the rein.
But he recovered the quickest, rubbing cobwebs from his face,
He mustered up those muddled goats which stayed right in their place.
And this time fate dealt Sparky all the aces from the pack;
Cos the yards were just a short way down the fenced-in homestead track.

Those goats walked to the stockyards staring far off in the sky,
Wondering how the hell they came down from their mountain range so high.
Sparky shut six gates behind them leaving not a thing to luck,
Then got onto his mobile phone to find a cattle truck.
Peace settled in the valley like dust on the mountain side
And the drought kept right on spreading like the tale of Sparky's ride.
But those oats were safe and Sparky's steers were gonna top that sale,
Until grasshoppers came to town – but – that's another tale!