

Healesville, Victoria, Australia.
30 June 2014

Grave Digging Thoughts

The town policeman shot the injured kangaroo at point plank range by torchlight in the drizzling darkness.

Four shots, three from a rifle and one from his big handgun compounded, then ended the pain. Rifle sights out of adjustment.

We see roos in our paddock when they come down out of the ranges in winter.

This one seemed small for an eastern grey male. He stayed up near the house and didn't move around much.

Then we saw how thin he was.

Neighbour kids said his foot was broken; sticking out at right angles, perhaps caught jumping our wire stock fence in the dark.

Wildlife rescue people said they'd take the body, leave it by the road. Shire roadkill cleanup crews would take care of it.

I'll bury it here.

It's a big animal, you sure?

It's my job.

This hillside is a beautiful place to die, a feature perhaps lost on the roo.

Below to the north are paddock pond mirrors and beyond are the mist enveloped ridges of the Yarra Ranges.

Just uphill an acacia thicket sparkles with bursting yellow flower buds.

A flock of tiny yellow thornbills twitter and chatter in the acacia, happy to be out of the rain.

I cut the deep sod into neat squares, stack it nearby. Yellow clay subsoil slices like some earth cheese, wet and gritty.

Dried and fired, it would make good bricks.

Digging the second and third layers is worse.

Fine rain turns yellow clay to tenacious mud,

The fourth and fifth layers of clay are denser, with red rust streaks.

There's ironstone below.



The kangaroo during better times

I regard the roo for the last time, belly up, neck arched, broken.

Where was his family?

What caused that last terrible leap in the dark over a fence he has crossed so often before?

Was he driven, or simply careless?

I kneel, partly lifting him in a wrestler's embrace, turning him onto his belly.

He's stiff and very heavy.

Using a white cotton rope, now reddened, I drag him headfirst into the pit and tuck him in before it fills with rainwater.

We need this rain; drought is forecast.

We need roos too, reminding us of who and where we are.

They're "...other nations" as Henry Beston said, "...fellow prisoners of the splendour and travail of the earth."

Filling the grave with the now sodden clay is harder than digging it

Each spadeful sticks to the spade. Boots carry more clay than spades.

I replace the sod in not so neat patterns over the clay mound.

This roo was the loser, but the spreading acacia roots and yellow thornbills will be winners, for a while.

This afternoon we see four roos, perhaps part of his mob, healthy, alert and agile on the other side of the property.