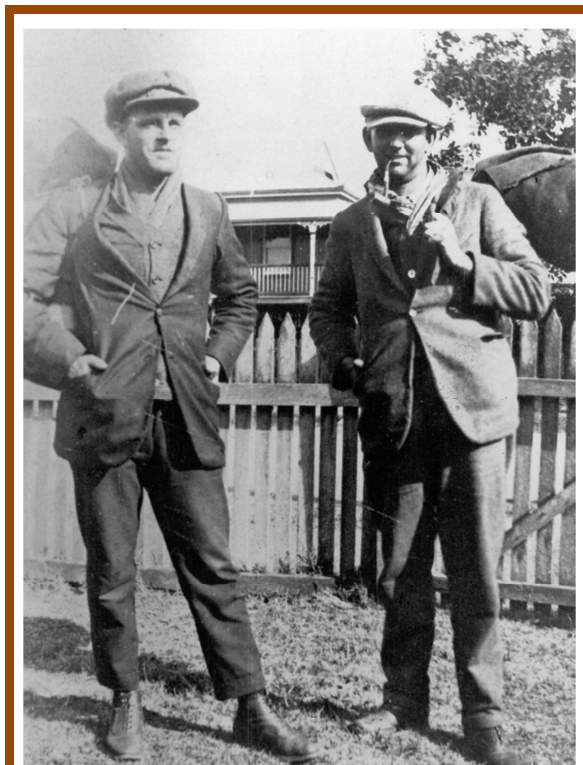


Jumping the Rattler

Throughout the early twentieth century, and not just at the time of the 1930s depression, police were called upon to act as relief agents for the unemployed and destitute. In some areas police acted as labour agents, where there was no clerk of petty sessions. From 1926 onwards police registered the unemployed and issued sustenance allowances. Police also issued train tickets to the destitute. Between 1905 and 1925 police gave rations only if the applicant worked – one day's rations for one day's work clearing noxious weeds from police paddocks, cutting wood and so on.

Through the 1930s the police continued these earlier tasks of issuing rations and travel cards and of helping to find relief work. If in the opinion of a policeman a person was destitute and in need of assistance ration relief could be immediately given to an unemployed person. A particular problem arose in the case of unemployed who in moving from one centre to another in search of work or rations 'jumped the rattler' (without paying the fare).

The vagrants legislation provided for the police to take action against these people, with the penalty of a fine or imprisonment. Such punishment aroused considerable comment, with calls being made for the police to have the right to issue free passes to people seeking work. The police were inclined not to be so liberal or tolerant in giving rations or work to known dissidents, such as Communists, anarchists or strike trouble-makers.



Two plain clothed police officers disguised as "hobos" so they could 'jump the rattler' to detect breaches of the railway laws, 1926.