

# Pastoral Pioneers - *life in a dry land*

The 1870s ‘boom’ season that followed E. Warburton’s exploration of the north-eastern end of Kati Thanda–Lake Eyre in 1866 attracted pastoral pioneers to the Diamantina Channel Country and Georgina–Diamantina river system south of Birdsville. Grazing leases were taken up and Cowarie (1875), Kalamurina (1879), Clifton Hills (1876), Pandie Pandie (1876), Alton Downs (1878), Mona Downs (1938) and Mungeranie stations (1888) were established for sheep and wool.



Cattle heading to the waterhole



Cowarie Station marker



Seed drill, Mona Downs Station



Old Clifton Hills Station Ruin



Clifton Hills Homestead was relocated from the banks of the Yammakira Waterhole after drifting sandhills almost completely enclosed it on all sides.



Mirra Mitta Bore

“This route – now known as the Birdsville Track, became a legendary stock route from 1867 to 1960 – the great droving era of our pastoral history. Drovers living in swags walked sheep and cattle following the line of unreliable ephemeral waterholes of the Diamantina and Warburton Rivers and Goyder Lagoon from Queensland to Marree or Farina bound for markets in Adelaide and Melbourne.” (Peter Bell)



Camel train delivering goods



The Birdsville Track. Horse team with dray loaded with goods for the stations



Lush pastures for grazing cattle

## Lush pastures after the ‘boom’

Channel Country is legendary cattle fattening country. Floodwaters meander their way across the braided channels of the Diamantina and Goyder Lagoon, and later recede into waterholes or dry out, leaving behind vast tracts of nardoo, native clover, lignum and grasses for cattle.

## Why sheep and not cattle?

“Initially, most pastoralists preferred to raise sheep rather than cattle because wool growing was more profitable on land that was cheap. Homesteads like Etadunna built large and impressive stone woolsheds. Unlike beef, wool did not deteriorate on the long wagon trip to Port Augusta and the much longer sea voyage to London.

Cattle, however, were tougher and less labour-intensive than sheep, and they could defend themselves against dingoes. Eventually drought, rabbits, dingoes and The Great Depression all contributed to the amalgamation of small sheep properties and the shift from grazing sheep to cattle”. (Peter Bell)

## New ways to use the land

Oil and gas exploration followed pastoralism in the 1970s and 1980s. Gas and oil fields were established based at Moomba in the Cooper Basin.

Conservation was represented by the establishment of the Kati Thanda–Lake Eyre National Park and the Simpson Desert Regional Reserve. The Australian Wildlife Conservancy took up the Kalamurina lease, establishing it as a major wildlife sanctuary.

## Tourism

The romance of the Birdsville Track, Simpson Desert and Kati Thanda–Lake Eyre and the Channel Country, draw increasing numbers of tourists to the region.



Campers enjoying the Channel Country



Australian Government



Government of South Australia  
South Australian Arid Lands Natural  
Resources Management Board



Natural Resources  
SA Arid Lands

Photos courtesy of S.Bond, DEWNR, Lutheran Archives, P.Katnich and J.Schmiechen.