‘The Long Paddock,’ Australia’s Travelling Stock Route Network - A distinctive cultural heritage

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Abstract

Pastoralism was a major impetus for the modern settlement of this continent. The challenges of sustaining a pastoral industry in Australia make a compelling history but this article is devoted to one aspect, the movement of livestock to markets along routes that developed a distinctively Australian management regime and associated cultural history.

Travelling stock routes (TSRs) known colloquially as ‘the long paddock’ developed from the 1860s in all States and Territories. In some districts they used Aboriginal routes linking water supplies and in others, they developed new routes due to the availability of artesian water supplies. They have survived in current use in more remote parts of Australia – Queensland, western NSW and the Northern Territory. They also have a shared heritage with Aboriginal people whose country they crossed and who were employed often as stockmen and drovers until the 1970s.

The culture of droving and drovers featured large in the late nineteenth century development of a national identity through nascent Australian literature by writers such as Banjo Paterson and Adam Gordon Lindsay and through art. Today the rich cultural resource of the TSR is still used for its original purpose in some states, and as four wheel drive routes for tourists especially the ‘grey nomads.’ A coalition of groups formed to save the TSRs through Queensland and new legislation and management rules have given them new life as cultural routes.

Introduction

Pastoral landscapes, and particularly transhumant routes, are still one of the most important heritage landscapes in many countries around the world. They constitute a complex heritage system of tangible and intangible values forming the basis of the society that sustains them but they are undervalued and their attributes not well understood. In Spain, for example, sheep trails were legally protected as ‘Cañadas Reales’ from the mid twelfth century and these droving roads still exist carrying one million animals annually but are threatened by housing and transport development (Luengo 2013).

Pastoralism was a major impetus for the modern settlement of the Australian continent. It had widespread implications for the landscape while playing a key role in establishing a national economy and national psyche as well as many national myths. Most Australians now live in urban areas and close to the coast and the pastoral story is often forgotten or obscured. The rural way of life that saw Australia ‘ride on the sheep’s back’ until the 1960s no longer defines us; yet it is largely our life as a pastoral nation that has endured in heritage places and which is carried into the mythology of what it means to be Australian, our intangible cultural heritage.
In ecological terms it is not long since the first livestock were introduced to Australia but their impact has been profound in transforming many landscapes. Breeding livestock able to prosper in the Australian environment led to Australia quickly becoming, and remaining, the leading producer of fine fibre wool in the world. The countryside still bears the traces of the many droving routes to railheads and to metropolitan sale yards, wool stores, abattoirs, wharf facilities, railways, roads, and river and ocean transport systems. They were developed to link the pastoral interior, ‘over the ranges and far away’, with the urban and market infrastructure needed to distribute the pastoral products of sheep, cattle, wool, meat, skins and hides. They also served to take stock to pastures to improve the general condition of herds for breeding. Windmills, fences, homesteads, shearing sheds, bores, stock yards, travelling stock routes, bush tracks, roads and railheads all changed the look of the country. These features of our landscape, as much as the vast outback, are part of our heritage (Pearson and Lennon 2010: vi-vii). But they are poorly represented on heritage registers and local planning scheme overlays.

The term ‘TSR’ is used for travelling stock routes but the term is also commonly applied to ‘travelling stock reserves’. Stock routes are pathways for travelling stock on foot on roads, reserves, unallocated state land and pastoral leases. Every stock route is a road but not every road is a stock route. A ‘reserve for travelling stock’ is a reserve under the Land Act [1994] designated for travelling stock purposes and may include camping and water reserves, pasture reserves and trucking reserves, with most under the trusteeship of local government. Australia’s national dictionary, The Macquarie, defines ‘Long Paddock’ as ‘a stock route or open road, regarded as a place where people, often too poor to own their own paddocks or pay for agistment, can graze their cattle, sheep horses etc.’ These TSRs become very important in times when drought returns to the driest inhabited continent and stock owners poor or otherwise have no feed hence they go droving out in ‘the long paddock.’

Genesis, 1788 –1830

Sheep numbers grew from the First Fleet’s cargo of 28 to well over a million by 1830, while cattle numbered about 370,000 by 1830. Because cattle were robust, mobile and adaptable to new environments, as shown by their early spread into the Cowpastures in the 1790s, they were ideal as the stock-of-choice for new settlements. Their spread accelerated in the 1830s and subsequent decades.

Pastoral expansion drew along with it the trappings of settlement. Pioneer tracks soon became roads (the main ones built by convict gangs), and many are today’s highways. Villages were set up to service the local pastoral population and these became towns that still exist, such as Bathurst, Wellington, Goulburn, Braidwood, and Queanbeyan. The Limits of Location established in 1829 as the boundary of the Nineteen Counties was the official edge of the settled districts but this was an expedient move and did not stop pastoral expansion encouraged by the constant flow of explorers’ reports that good grazing land existed beyond the Limits (Perry 1963). The search for grass by pastoralists became the most important impulse for exploration across the continent for the rest of the century until the Kimberley and Cape York were ‘occupied.’ This pastoral frontier expanded and contracted with the seasons.

Cattle were mobile food, ‘the walking larder,’ not an export commodity, and the market was small, so by the 1830s the cattle industry did not develop in the same way as the wool industry. Nor did it leave many remains; one of the few sites from this era is the cattle watering tank (1832) at Campbelltown. Conversely, the wool industry developed to such a degree that it transformed the economy from one based on convictism to one with a broad mercantile base; its infrastructure snaked inland in tenuous threads linking squatting stations to shipping ports (Pearson & Lennon 2010: 18).

The Overlanders

‘Overlanding’ refers to the long-distance movement of stock in a pioneering context, often soon after exploration (or as part of it), and across unsettled areas. The overland traffic in stock began in 1836 and continued for many years. In one three-month period during 1836 it was
reported that 100,000 sheep had crossed the Murrumbidgee River on their way south, and in August 1840 an estimated 20,000 cattle were on the track between Yass and Melbourne (Farwell 1958: 427-428).

Joseph Hawdon led the first overlanding party to Adelaide from Howlong on the Murray River with 300 cattle in 1838, naming Lake Victoria and Lake Bonney along the way. Alternate routes were followed by Edward John Eyre travelling via Port Phillip and naming Lake Hindmarsh on the way, John Hart who reached Adelaide from Portland Bay in March 1839 with 400 cattle, and Charles Sturt who arrived from Albury in May with a mob of cattle. Eyre pioneered a new route in 1838–39, travelling from Limestone Plain (near Canberra) with 1000 sheep (the first to be overlanded to South Australia) and 600 cattle, and following the Murrumbidgee downstream to the Murray and thence to Adelaide.

Patrick and Walter Leslie drove sheep from the New England area to Moreton Bay in 1840, and in August 1847 David Perrier reached the Darling Downs with 10,000 sheep from Bathurst. Frank and Alexander Jardine and party drove a mob of horses and cattle from Rockhampton to Somerset on Cape York, where they established a station in October 1864.

The gold rushes created a huge demand for meat to feed the Australian population which doubled from 1851 to over a million in 1861. A pattern of droving store cattle from New South Wales and southern Queensland to the Riverina and Victoria for fattening was soon established (Pearson & Lennon 2010: 39).

Later overlanding expeditions led by Ralph Millner took sheep from Port Augusta north to the Roper River in 1870, and in 1873 and 1874 Alfred Giles drove sheep from Beltana along the overland telegraph line to Yarn Creek (Bauer 1962). Nat Buchanan opened up much of central and western Queensland, and in 1878 he took cattle from Aramac in Queensland 1,600 km to Adelaide River in the Northern Territory. In the 1880s Buchanan took cattle into the Kimberley (O’Neill 1969). In 1882 Patrick Durack took 7,200 head of cattle 4,828 km from western Queensland to the Ord River, losing half the stock on the way (Durack 1972).

The term ‘overlander’ was later applied to all stockmen droving cattle long distance across colonial boundaries to railheads, and famously celebrated in song:

There’s a trade you all know well; it’s bringing cattle over.
On every track, to the Gulf and back, men know the Queensland drover.
Pass the billy round, my boys; don’t let the pintpot stand there;
For tonight we drink the health of every overlander.
I come from the Northern plains where the girls and the grass are scanty;
Where the creeks run dry or ten foot high and its either drought or plenty.
There are men from every land, from Spain and France and Flanders,
They’re a well mixed pack, both white and black, the Queensland overlanders
(Edwards 1990).

Droving

Droving involved riders on horseback driving mobs of cattle or flocks of sheep to fresh pastures or to market saleyards or railheads. Invariably droving was a man’s job involving isolation, long hours in the saddle and absence from family. In the Top End, Aboriginal women known as ‘drovers’ boys’ accompanied the stockmen and their role has been recorded in the celebrated folk song of the same name by Ted Egan, a revered Australian balladeer and former administrator of the Northern Territory.

Figure 1: Droving, Toorak TSR, Queensland, June 2006. (Source: Steve O’Connor)
After World War Two, families became more common as droving teams. In the recent great Millenium drought there were all-women teams.

Typically a droving team consisted of a boss drover in charge of the whole operation, a cook, a horse tailer in charge of horses accompanying the team and also serving as cook’s assistant, and ringers who ride along with the mob keeping them out of trouble. Aborigines were frequently part of cattle droving teams but uncommon in sheep droving. Three men can manage 2-3,000 sheep with several dogs. For a mob of 1,000 cattle, six or seven men are required and more horses and fewer dogs than for sheep droving. ‘The Plant’ is a vehicle of some sort (pack horses in the nineteenth century, then motorised trucks) carrying the camping gear, food, cooking gear and supplies like hay, water and non-working dogs (McKnight 1977:11-14).

Droving sheep and cattle required quite different techniques. Sheep were best driven from behind, but with cattle an extra man rides in front to lead the mob while others ‘tail’ from behind. Even then, stockwhips and dogs were in frequent use to drive ‘breakaways’ back into the mob. At night, with horses hobbled, some stockmen would soothe their herds by singing traditional ballads around the camp-fire. Droving itself gave rise to many bush ballads and poems, especially those celebrating the daring feats of cattle drives to marginal lands (Cannon 1973:110-111).

**Stock Horses**

The Australian stock horse, an essential component of the cattleman’s life, evolved from imported English breeds and large profits were made supplying the increasing numbers of squatters and overlanders. Kirk’s Bazaar and horse sale yards opened in Melbourne in 1840. Natural selection of the initial breeds took place in the outer settlements and station breeding ensured hardy survivors. The largest individual horse breeder was probably Edward Crooke of Holey Plains near Rosedale, a Gippsland squatter who was grazing more than 2,000 horses by the 1870s (Peck 1972).

Australian stock horses were renowned for their stamina and also their surefootedness in rough ground and gullies as celebrated by Banjo Paterson:

> He sent the flint-stones flying, but the pony kept his feet,  
> He cleared the fallen timber in his stride,  
> And the man from Snowy River never shifted in his seat-  
> It was grand to see that mountain horseman ride (Paterson 1961:1-3).

Stock horses were rarely shod or stabled and existed by foraging off the country. Many slipped their hobbles or escaped through weak fences becoming the foundation for herds of wild ‘brumbies’. These were rounded up annually in trap yards and the best were kept and ‘broken in’ for later riding (Cannon 1973:119-121; 199-201). While Australia rode to prosperity on the sheep’s back, Australians rode horses, of which there were 430,000 in 1860 rising to 1,600,000 in 1900, that is about one horse for every two people.

**Stock Routes**

Travelling stock routes (TSRs) are a distinctively Australian feature, government-owned land forming a veritable maze through many pastoral districts. The TSR networks are most extensive...
in Queensland and New South Wales and least prominent in Western Australia, where there are long distance cattle tracks, and South Australia. In Victoria the TSR network has been superimposed with roads, except for some routes to the high country of the Alps for summer grazing. The Tasmanian Central Plateau has had summer grazing since the 1840s and small holders moved their stock along established routes mainly from the north (Lennon 2002). In the Northern Territory a basic framework of TSRs is still maintained (McKnight 1977: 22).

The first droving tracks to new pastoral lands or back to markets followed the path of least resistance through the topography where feed and water were available often following the routes of Aboriginal people, explorers and squatters, and overlanders. The network expanded and intensified from the 1860s with laws in NSW governing the movement of mobs along stock routes, permit requirements for travelling sheep and the first legally established TSRs excised from runs. In more remote regions intensification was slower, for example, no stock routes were gazetted in the Northern Territory until 1920, although the ‘Queensland Road’ had been operating around the Gulf and into the Top End since 1878, the Murrani Track to Newcastle Waters from 1886 and the Tanami Track to Tennant Creek from 1896 (McKnight 1977: 35-41).

During the latter half of the nineteenth century four long north-south corridors were prominent as market-directed stock routes:

1. The most dispersed easterly route.
2. From the Gulf country to Hungerford, Bourke, Wilcannia and Echuca.
3. The Birdsville Track to Oodnadatta – after the 1880s rail head.
4. The principal north-south stock route following the Overland Telegraph Line.

The last of the long distance stock routes developed was the Canning in Western Australia but it differed from all the others in that it was designed by the government in 1906 in anticipation rather than in response to demand.

Heritage features along stock routes include water facilities of various kinds, such as tanks, wells and artesian bores, often associated with larger stock reserves where stock could be camped overnight. Some features are now rarely found such as brush breaks, enclosures made of brush and fallen timber to form yards in which sheep could be held at night thus avoiding the need for drovers’ night watches. River crossing places, being bottlenecks on stock routes, were often important points. Bullock cueing pens, where cattle were held to be shod with cues to make it possible for them to walk over hard and stony ground, can be distinguished at some sites. Stock routes, being frequented by stockmen and travellers, also attracted business enterprises. Stores were established on stock routes to capture the trade of passing drovers.

In 1892 at the start of the great Federation drought, readers of the Bulletin witnessed a contest between the two leading bush poets, Banjo Paterson, championing the romantic view of the man on horseback, and Henry Lawson’s more sardonic view of the man with his swag. Lawson and his fellow realists like Joseph Furphy and Barbara Baynton probably had a more lasting
influence as the ‘Australian legend’. Paterson was more popular with his contemporaries, had more extensive knowledge of the outback and his ballads enjoyed far wider readership in the bush where they gradually merged with the folk traditions that inspired them as classic expressions of the ‘pioneer legend’ (Davison 2001). Among the painters of the Heidelberg School, the conflict between realists and romantics was more subdued. Fred McCubbin, closest to the realists, painted sentimental scenes of bush life rather than the bleached inland of the post war painters, Russell Drysdale and Sidney Nolan, while Tom Robert’s painting The Breakaway (1890) expresses the sheer hard work in stock droving.

A shared heritage with Aboriginal people ‘born in the cattle’ has been variously recorded at places ranging from the Kimberley (McGrath 1987) to the Oxley Wild Rivers of NSW (Harrison 2004). It was preceded by sacred associations of the rivers, springs, lakes and water holes which have been widely documented. Ceremonial and ancestral values associated with the Warrego, Paroo, Maranoa, Bulloo and Wilson River system were recorded by Hazel MacKellar (1984), while Alice Duncan-Kemp (1952) described Aboriginal story places of the Channel Country. In North Queensland the creation stories and lines of travel of the Rainbow Serpent are associated with water holes and rivers (Roughsey 1975). Defending these sacred places from invading stockmen and their herds was often a source of conflict and death.

Extensive networks of communication, trade and travel covered the drainage systems of the Gulf, Lake Eyre and the Darling River basins (Donovan & Wall 2002). As many of these routes were associated with the tracks of Ancestral beings of the Dreaming, the exchange of goods along these routes involved ritual and social significance as well as economic benefits (McBryde 1997).

Droving on a large scale continued along these into the twentieth century, as large pastoral companies bred cattle in the north far from southern markets, especially on the rich natural pastures of the Channel country. Herb Wharton (1994: 159) noted the remarkable achievements of the drovers who moved stock to the railheads at Quilpie, Winton, Bourke or Broken Hill, and down the Birdsville track to Maree in South Australia. Edna Jessop, Australia’s first female boss drover, drove cattle in the 1940s and 1950s from Northern Territory to the railhead at Dajarra (www.abc.net.au/northwest/stories). Aboriginal drovers including Ruby de Satge and Alice and Peggy Gorringe have recounted their experiences on stock routes from the Gulf to the Channel country and interstate. Travelling stock routes provided Aboriginal pastoral workers with rights to camp, travel and socialise outside of their own culture (Wharton 1994).

Although the use of stock routes was similar all over Australia, the administrative infrastructure evolved differently in the various colonies, as can be seen in the following State histories.

New South Wales:

The oldest colony pioneered formalised stock route management with the Occupation Act of 1861 stipulating that travelling stock were not permitted to stray more than half a mile (0.8 km) from the recognised stock route traversing unfenced pastoral leasehold land and had to move on at least four miles (6.4 kms) per day. By 1864 specific TSRs and camping places were being established (McKnight 1977:42). The first charges of twopence per head per mile were made for travelling stock in the 1870s payable to district Pastures Protection (PP) Boards, unique to New South Wales. By the mid-1890s about 1300 miles of TSRs were surveyed in NSW. In the western and northern districts development of artesian bores went hand in hand with the establishment of TSRs, to provide reliable watering points across otherwise unpassable dry country (Pearson 2003). Despite declining usage, most PP Boards were improving their TSRs until the 1970s. In 1967-9 the PP Boards of NSW issued 503,171 permits for movements on TSRs. (McKnight 1977: 50).

Many TSRs on the Eastern Slopes are now regarded as prime conservation reserves protecting threatened native grass and woodland species and have been recognised in heritage registers. This century there have been reviews of the management of TSRs; farmers are objecting to loss of local control as ‘stock routes are our national haystack’ for feed relief with floods following 13 years of drought (Luke 2012) and now another drought.
South Australia:

The 1878 Forest Reserves Act gave the first legal recognition of TSRs, but within four years they were administered by the Department of Crown Lands which was busy alienating them for farming or pastoral leases. In 1889 stock agents estimated an annual use of 824,000 sheep and 32,000 cattle (McKnight 1977: 97). In 1889 a Select Committee was appointed to report on TSRs ‘within the hundreds’ (100 square miles of cadastral survey units) of the settled districts. Although pastoralists favoured them, TSRs were negatively viewed as used by ‘loafing stock’ and as breeding grounds for vermin; opponents argued that railways could be used to move stock more efficiently. However, alienation was significantly reduced and administration reverted back to the Department of Crown lands where it has remained ever since (McKnight 1977: 98).

Western Australia:

TSRs were low priority for the Western Australian government despite the notable exception of establishing the Canning route. A.W. Canning surveyed the route in 1906-7 and in 1908-10 established 52 watering points along the 952 mile route, which was designed as an overland route through the Great Sandy Desert to Wiluna for marketing East Kimberley cattle but it was little used (McKnight 1977: 41).
Regions developed unevenly and the only important connection between the principal regions was along the coastal road from the West Kimberleys to Perth. By 1902 there were only eight officially declared stock routes, although some routes in use for decades were never declared or remained unofficial, such as that down the Ord Valley to Wyndham (McKnight 1977: 106). By the 1970s there were 48 gazetted stock routes and about a dozen camping reserves. In 1961 two-thirds of the cattle reaching Wyndham abattoirs travelled along stock routes in the East Kimberley. However, by 1963 only one-third of the cattle slaughtered there had been walked there and the proportion has continued to decline with the expansion of the Beef Roads program (McKnight 1977: 109-110). Compared to the eastern states TSRs have had limited usage.

Northern Territory:

Northern Territory stock routes were unofficial until 1920 when the first was gazetted – the Barkly route from Newcastle Waters to Lake Nash. Four other stock routes were also gazetted later that year: the main north-south, the Murranji, Wave Hill to Dry River and Mistake Creek to Katherine. These five routes totalled over 2,000 miles and established a trunk route system which remained in place for decades. Windmills were installed at bores and wells and more dips were required on the Barkly and north-south routes to combat the continuing tick problems (McKnight 1977: 115).

In the late 1930s a number of camping reserves were proclaimed and new stock routes established in the Centre, notable the Arltunga, Huckitta and Sandover routes and one from Alice, north-west beyond Napperby station; 75 new watering points had been constructed and over 600 miles of new stock routes opened mostly in the dry Centre. The 1954 Stock Routes and Travelling Stock Ordinance provided the first legal basis for custody and control of routes and travelling stock moving over them and revenue raised from fees went into maintenance of the routes and facilities (McKnight 1977: 116-117). In 1956 Territory legislation was amended to allow road trains to operate on a permanent basis particularly on the principal highways. In the latter half of the 1950s the use of road trains increased phenomenally.

Queensland:

Queensland has the most complex and extensive stock route network in Australia but its development was haphazard (Pullar 1995: 31). Because of distance many areas in the west looked away from Brisbane in the south-east; Birdsville and Boulia took the camel track to South Australia, while Thargomindah, Windorah, Charleville and Cunnamulla turned to Bourke and Sydney.

Stock routes developed as pastoralists had to get stock to markets and walking them overland was the only option. Tracks ran between stations and were often the main roads and mail routes, rarely labelled as ‘stock routes’ on early maps. Stations provided water and resting places for drovers, but in sparsely populated areas campsites were established along waterholes. Condamine, Goondiwindi, Hughenden and Winton began as drovers’ camps as did many Queensland towns. McKinlay on the Diamantina waterhole was initially a store and hotel catering for drovers (Fysh 1933). Many of the early routes crossed into other colonies at border gates. The Paroo track followed chains of waterholes which mark the ephemeral flow of the Paroo and Warrego Rivers, retracing the original Aboriginal routes (Pearson 2003).

The Crown Lands Act of 1863 was the first to regulate stock route use by permitting travelling stock to depasture within half a mile (0.8 km) of any road but stock and horses had to be moved at least seven miles (11 kms) in the same direction and sheep four miles (6.4 kms) every twenty four hours. Water and camping reserves for travelling stock were gazetted by government. By the 1880s stock routes were used extensively in the dry western areas where there was intense demand for natural water. The first government artesian bore at Barcaldine in 1887 heralded changes to the pastoral industry but bore construction was slow and expensive (Blake & Cook 2006). Charges for watering stock were incurred at government artesian bores but the system was inadequate.
Cole (2010) described the evolution of ten main trunk routes in Queensland. By 1934 three trunk stock routes were popular: far western with rail connections at Quilpie, Longreach, Winton and Dajarra; mid western from Charleville to Normanton; and near western from Clermont to Georgetown and the Gulf. Despite World War Two, 163 watering facilities were constructed between 1940 and 1945, when stock route management was transferred to shire councils collecting fees for stock movement along the routes. Improvements to main stock routes in the Channel Country were the priority in the late 1940s to encourage meat production. In the 1950s improvements were made on routes to railheads north of the Townsville-Cloncurry railway and in the south of Cape York Peninsula (Pullar 1995: 38).

By the early 1960s Queensland’s stock routes reached their greatest extent – 45,000 miles (72,000 kms) with 1,100 artificial watering facilities and several hundred adjacent camping and water reserves especially in central and eastern Queensland (McKnight 1977: 86-89).

The heaviest reported usage of stock routes was in the south-east where north-south routes into NSW were in demand, especially in the Goondiwindi district. Stock routes in the central west (Longreach, Ilfracombe, Barcaldine) were busiest with sheep. But from 1959 to 1969 the number of permits for overlanding stock fell by half to 1,157. Use of TSRs was dominated by transfer of store cattle; walking of cattle from the Gulf to rail shipping points at Mt Isa, Cloncurry, Julia Creek, Richmond, Hughenden, Forsayth and Einsleigh; border crossings of store cattle from Northern Territory; short distance movements particularly one day journeys and those between properties under the same ownership; and searching for grass in drought times, although officially disallowed (McKnight 1977: 93).
The death knell for many stock routes was the development of beef roads and trucks which offered quick and cheaper transport. Many old stock routes became the new development roads or highways such as the Mitchell, Flinders and Leichardt Highways or walking tracks like the Dalrymple Gap track through Lumholz National Park.

**Development since 1980s**

Despite the development of road trains, short term grazing and movement of travelling stock on the stock route network were still provided for under *The Rural Lands Protection Act 1985*. Recognising the rise of non-pastoral interests in stock routes, the Queensland Department of Natural Resources published a guidebook on stock route management. It included an historical section noting the association of stock routes with river systems, Aboriginal pathways and explorers’ routes, and a cultural heritage conservation section with examples of types of cultural heritage found on stock routes – Aboriginal archaeological sites, historical sites and Aboriginal sites of significance (Edwards 1998). The Indigenous Cultural Site Database describes some 220 sites of nine types located on or near stock routes, while 229 of the cultural places recorded on the EPA (CHIEF) database are located on or near stock routes (Cole 2010: 29-37).

Recent droughts (1980s, 1990s and 2002/2003, 2013) and high fuel prices led to increased use of stock routes for droving stock but as the facilities had been allowed to deteriorate the government had to instigate programmes to upgrade water facilities. In 2008 the stock route network still had approximately 72,000 kilometres (2.6 million hectares) of routes, 762 reserves (395,879 ha), and over 700 operational watering facilities, bridges, crossings, fences, loading ramps and holding yards.

In July 2008 the Stock Route Assessment Panel released a review for public comment. Submissions emphasised the importance of the stock route network for the following shared values:

- provision of vital infrastructure for the transport of grazing stock;
- provision of critical habitat for species adaptation to climate change because of the landscape connectivity allowing species to move to emerging suitable climatic areas;
- important Aboriginal archaeological sites including scarred and carved trees, rock shelters, camp sites as well as Aboriginal sites of significance;
- important historical sites including government survey trees, fences, dams, old campsites, abandoned town sites built on stock route crossroads, river crossings and waterholes, old mining sites, lone graves and border crossings;
- threatened sites of high conservation and cultural significance such as mound springs (from the Great Artesian basin);
- amenity values for travellers (*The Long Paddock Scientists’ Statement 16/8/2008*).
A coalition of groups formed to oppose government land asset sales, downgrading the needs of travelling stock and lack of management of all the identified values on the network. Over 6000 ‘Save Our Stockroutes’ postcards were sent by Queenslanders to the Premier of Queensland and an open letter signed by 400 scientists was sent to the premiers of both Queensland and NSW urging them to protect the stock routes (Boyland 2009).

The Queensland government responded saying no part of the network would be sold. New arrangements were outlined including introduction of Grazing Authorities – managed grazing of stock routes by adjoining landholders – with increased revenue for local government to better manage stock routes including conservation of their identified heritage values, which can be protected as Areas of Special Management. As individual local governments are required under the Queensland Heritage Act to establish a local cultural heritage register, sites identified on stock routes are eligible for recording. However, the Government-preferred rent of five percent of the land’s unimproved capital value, which would generate about $110m a year, is seen as a tax on communal land following massive increases in leasehold land rents, new federal quarantine and meat inspection charges, and the proposed carbon tax (Anon. 2012).

Currently, with the widespread drought there is little discussion about changes to pastoral lands rents following the Government announcement in August 2013 that rural lessees will enjoy 60 years of ‘rolling’ tenure, allowing them to make long term investment decisions.

Increases in fuel prices and continuing drought have made the stock route network a cost-effective alternative for moving stock and a vital source of pasture for emergency grazing. In 2013 Tom Brinkworth organised a 2,500 km drive of 18,000 cattle in nine mobs using 25 horses and 25 dogs moving 10 km daily from parched north western Queensland to better watered lands in southern New South Wales emulating historic feats but on a larger scale. Metropolitan media reported regularly on the progress of this ‘epic odyssey’.

**Heritage Values**

Knowledge of pastoral places of heritage significance is strangely limited. The Queensland Heritage Register and those in other States show a concentration on early colonial structures due to lack of knowledge of the heritage resource of rural homestead complexes. The earliest survivors seem to have been adequately documented (through property histories, measured drawings, historic and contemporary photographs, oral histories) but not the representative or biggest at different periods (Lennon 2011).

There is no dedicated list of stock route heritage places. Identification of sites on or near routes relies on the accuracy of the various heritage databases, where records vary in age, veracity and details provided. The Australia ICOMOS study of Pastoral Technology and the National Estate in 1995 recognised that ‘many structures and evidence of technology that influenced the spread of pastoralism and the character of operations and landscapes produced’ were not recorded (Walker 1995: 8). As well as the main homestead building, 73 types of structures/places associated with the rural property complex were identified in the study.

Existing records do not reflect rich cross cultural associations and multiple values – Indigenous, historical and natural – all found along stock routes. Yet article 5 of the Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance (1999) advises that conservation should consider all aspects of cultural and natural significance without unwarranted emphasis on any one value at the expense of others.

Lennon (2007) noted that road networks tend to be overlooked in heritage surveys. This is evident in Queensland where there is limited recognition of the heritage values of stock routes, although features along them are sometimes recorded as with Dalrymple Gap bridge on the Valley of Lagoons road, later a TSR. The Northern Territory has listed the Murrani stock route on its heritage register and Bonney Well (1860) and Ryan’s Well (1889). NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service has researched the pastoral history of many of its reserves but the TSR through the historic Long Plain section of Kosciuszko National Park (listed as a cultural landscape in the Alpine National Parks NHL) was recently closed by regulation.
Threats to remote rural and stock route heritage include inadequate records, everyday activities conducted by those ignorant of the values, damage by animals, tourism with inappropriate camping or souveniring [theft], fire, development activities involving upgrading facilities and new alignments or road grading, abandonment and natural attrition and decay of the timber based material culture such as wooden structures, supports and scarred trees. Intangible heritage is lost when knowledge holders pass away without leaving records or recorded stories.

The history of stock routes extends from traditional Aboriginal pathways used by the earliest colonists to the contemporary period making its cultural heritage diverse, multi-cultural and layered. Cultural heritage includes:

- camp sites (Aboriginal camp sites, station camps, droving and stockman’s camps, police camps), dwellings (homesteads, houses and huts); story places; stories and songs; intangible values of routes, journeys and meetings; graves and burials; towns; artefact scatters; rock art; stone arrangements; conflict and massacre sites; fish traps; marked rocks (grinding grooves and depressions); culturally modified trees; stock yards; pubs; mail changes; waterholes; wells; Chinese stone pitching; windmills; dams and bores; furrows marking tracks; bridges, road cuttings and stream crossings; walls, fences, gates and grids (Cole 2010: 40).

This remarkable and complex heritage can be described, collectively, as a ‘cultural landscape.’ While noting that Lennon (2007) applied the concept of cultural landscape in discussing the heritage of some Australian roads, Cole believes that ‘as stock routes history involves much more than pastoral triumphs and bush folklore we need revised paradigms to interpret the cross-cultural layers’ (Cole 2010: 40). The concept of cultural routes is suitable for this interpretation.

Conclusion

After making global comparisons, Tom McKnight (1977: 124) decided that the Australian system of TSRs is ‘clearly a pastoral institution of unusual scope and significance’ with its origins in the early stage of the settlement history of the continent, its notable longevity and the magnitude of its development persisting to the present day.

While the process of construction and physical development was roughly the same in each of the colonies, there was considerable variation in the administrative infrastructure and legal framework under which the system was regulated, with the most formalised and extensive systems established in NSW and Queensland. The TSR system reached its zenith in the early 1960s with the greatest length and heaviest usage.

Although layers of material and intangible values are distributed across many bio-regions, common threads, patterns and attributes survive providing basic principles for identifying Australian stock routes as cultural routes, and sometimes cultural landscapes:

- stock routes have both Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural heritage values complexly interconnected;
- cultural materials of stock routes are unlikely to occur in isolation;
- stock routes tend to follow water courses which are important cultural landscapes of long connection to Indigenous people;
- stock routes have intangible values such as stories and knowledge attached to journeys and cultural practices;
- stock routes contain industrial heritage.

The ‘long paddock’ is a uniquely Australian cultural route.
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