



The Australian Rangeland Society

RANGE MANAGEMENT NEWSLETTER
An official publication of The Australian Rangeland Society
ISSN 0812-4930

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If cited it should be in the form:

Bastin, G. and Allan, G. (2012). After the smoke has cleared: 2011 fire in Central Australia. In: Range Management Newsletter (Ed. N Duckett). 12/2:3-6. (Australian Rangeland Society: Australia).

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Range Management Newsletter

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81

Australian Rangeland Society

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No. 81/3
July 1981

EDITORIAL

The top of the bill in this newsletter is taken by David Fitzgerald who makes a timely plea for better record keeping in pastoral management. He'd like some feedback on this one; so could anyone with a gem of wisdom please put pen to paper. Someone from the technology side may like to comment on the use of small computers for station record keeping - many farmers in the wheat sheep belt are beginning to use them and there is no reason they are not just as applicable "where the mulga and spinifex grows". Last year I saw an ABC program on Jim Maple-Brown of Economic Wool Producers: he has a terminal from a small mini computer at the crutching pen and uses the information instantly available in his sheep selection program. Any comments?

There's just been an AGM and we have a new committee - all from Alice Springs. You'll probably meet them all when you arrive in the Alice for the 3rd Biennial Conference in September. I hope you've sent your papers into the editorial mob - it's pretty hard to run a conference with no points of view to discuss.

We've got a new system for subscriptions starting soon so it's just about the end of the free subscriptions time. Get the cheques in or you won't hear from us again.

And now just to finish off the page I'll put in an extract from a Bush Ballad which proves beyond all reasonable doubt that Rangeland Science is perhaps nearly one hundred years old in Australia:

*Store cattle from Nelanjie! Their breath is on the breeze,
You hear them tread, a thousand head, in blue-grass to the knees;
The lead is on the netting-fence, the wings are spreading wide,
The lame and laggard scarcely move, so slow the drovers ride!
But let them stay and feed to-day, for sake of Auld Lang Syne;
They'll never get a chance like this below the Border Line;
And if they tread our frontage down, what's that to me or you?
What's ours to fare, by God they'll share, for we've been droving too!*

Extract: "From the Gulf"
by Will Olgivie

Will Olgivie, a quiet Scotsman, was out here in the 1890's. He ranks along with Lawson and Paterson as one of our better balladeers. We've got everything we want to know about range management in that stanza: where the cattle come from, the size of the mobs and the fact that at the moment they are eating Blue Grass (probably *Dicanthium* and *Bothriochloa* spp.). Below the 'Border Line' refers to New South Wales - even then they knew of the cockies and the 'government men' in N.S.W. The reference to 'tread our frontage down' perhaps refers to river frontage country, the best type of rangeland country that there is, and which is just about totally degraded in all states.

GOOD RECORDS MAKE GOOD PASTORALISTS

From: David Fitzgerald, Nambi Station, Leonora, W.A.

FAST WOMEN AND SLOW HORSES HAVE TAKEN MANY A GOOD MAN DOWN

In talking to a large number of people connected with the Pastoral Industry, it always amazes me that there seem to be many managers who do not keep good stock records, if they keep any. These days, apart from knowing where your stock are, well kept accurate records are more essential than ever. Since we put in our photographic range monitoring sites I have been working out and writing in the stocking rate for each paddock for each year. These figures, coupled with Dept. of Agriculture advisers pasture species counts, will in the future be extremely valuable and rewarding. Already, and the monitoring sites were only put in in 1977, they are most revealing.

I enclose a copy from a page of my Shearing Tally Book, as this is probably where the system starts. Maybe other pastoralists may send in their better ideas. I must confess that I have never seen anyone else's system of stock record keeping.

YEAR'S PROGRAMME:

Shearing date - March
 Lambing date - June, July
 Lamb marking - August, September

Most sales are "off shears", about May-June. Reconciling figures can be difficult if sale sheep are held over till the following financial year and not shorn in that year.

ELDER SMITH GOLDSBROUGH MORT LIMITED

		Daily Memoranda		
B/F	Days	Totals	Totals to Date	
E	1327	+	391	= 1718
E. WNR	468	+	291	= 759
W. WNR	667	+	151	= 818
Rams	41	+	6	= 47
Totals			839	3342

Paddock Name	B/F	Days	Totals	Totals to Date
Killers	3	+	-	= 3
70 P Lake* Irwins & Ram	680	+	-	= 680
Diggers	673E	+	206E	= 879E
Heads	(41 Rs 651 OE +		6 Rs 185	= 47 Rs = 836 OE
Lignum	(70 Mks + 184 EW +		25 Mks 291 EW	= 95 Mks = 475
Tails	201 WW	+	126 WW	= 327
Totals			839	3342

* These 3 Paddocks together for space reasons

OE = Old Ewe

Mks = Horny Wether Weaners inc. Long Tails

Long Tails 29 + 10 = 39

Date 18 March 81

Paddock J.D.7

Description of Sheep Ewes & Wnrs

Pen	Name	Rams	COUNTS								Day's Total	Total Brought Forward	Total to Date
			1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th			
1	1	1	23	11	37	15	16	8	25				
2			27	14	47	19	20	10	28				
3			15	8	25	10	11	6	16				
4		1	23	11	35	17	14	9	22				
5	1		30	34	30	21	21	11	35				
6		1	24	10	37	16	16	9	23				
7		Rs 6											
8													
9													
10													
TOTALS			142	88	211	98	98	53	149				

Day's Total 839

Previous Total 2503

Total to Date 3342

RATION SHEEP KILLED

	STATION	SHEARERS
Previous Total	1	3
Today	-	-
Total to Date	1	3

SUCCESSFUL STATION MANAGEMENT IN THE FUTURE

A paper presented by David Fitzgerald at a seminar "Pathways for Pastoralists in the 80's" organised by the W.A. Department of Agriculture.

When I was first asked if I would present a paper at this Seminar I felt like running for cover, but having expressed my enthusiasm for the Seminar to Jack Ripley when he first mentioned it some 12 months or more ago, I agreed.

I want to say at the beginning that I think there are many ways to run a successful pastoral operation. Some work well on one property and not on others. The method used could be influenced by the area and type of country, the location, the financial position and other factors. Therefore my ideas are particularly applicable to the area I operate in. There is a large part of the pastoral area where I would be quite happy to use the same methods. There are also properties where I am sure these ideas would work much better.

One thing that strikes me is that it is dangerous to become too rigid in our thinking. We should try to be as flexible as possible because in my time in the industry I have yet to see two consecutive years turn out exactly the same. Perhaps that elusive average year may be next year. Apart from the climatic changes one year it may be bushfires or blowflies, plagues of grasshoppers, grubs in the saltbush, plagues of miners or whatever. In the past decade we have sold goats and collected dead sandalwood to keep things going.

A successful pastoral operation in the future will depend, as in the past, on three main factors - good management, good country and some luck. The luck factor can be minimised or maximised by the degree of good or bad management.

In the goldfields drought of 1969-1973 Nambi was fortunate to receive enough rain to give us feed when not too many others seemed to have any. This of course was good luck. A friend of mine remarked at the time that he had always believed that those who worked the hardest had the most luck. I have never been too sure whether he meant that he, being a harder worker should have got the rain or if he was admitting that I was the harder worker.

However, it is not the area of good luck that I want to talk about. It is in the bad luck department that I believe good management can have the most effect.

If the weak, old fence around the holding paddock falls down and all the sheep get out the day the shearers arrive, this is not bad luck. If that old tank on an important water falls apart during shearing, this is not bad luck. If you haven't mulesed your ewes and you lose large numbers through blowflies, this is not bad luck - it is very bad management.

If after a run of good seasons you are carrying your maximum number of sheep and have failed to reduce the number of old sheep in your flock, it has been a light year and you still fail to reduce your numbers before the normally dry part of the year, they then die in large numbers from the common 'Hollow Gut Disease'. This is not bad luck. I received a very savage lesson in this in the years 1962-63. If we look at the figures of sales and losses for these years we can see that losses were high and sales low. In comparison, with the similar or worse rainfall pattern of 1969-1973 the position was reversed, the sale column accounting for the reduction in numbers and not the losses column.

The decision not to sell in 1961-62 was a deliberate one influenced by low stock prices at the time and inexperience. It would have been far better for the long term productivity of the country and the bank balance to have sold 2,000 or 3,000 even at \$1 to \$2.

While we are looking at these figures it can be seen that Nambi has been receiving a fair income from sale sheep in latter years particularly. I think that these figures can be improved and probably a lot of you have been getting more from this source than that.

This leads us to the effect management can have on the second part of the equation - the factor of good country in a successful pastoral operation in the future. If you have good country, be thankful and don't abuse it. If you haven't, you are going to have to be an even better manager.

We have all heard of stations that in the 1920's were shearing x thousand sheep and are now struggling to shear half that number. We have probably wondered what this figure will be by the year 2000. Hopefully it will be more than now. Certainly we hope not less.

In these times station managers should have learned from the mistakes of the past. Today we are able to muster and shift stock long distances to markets much quicker than in the past. Also, I am sure there are many more outlets for stock these days.

If for economic reasons you have to push your country to the limit of its carrying capacity in years of average at the lower figure of median rainfall, then I think that you should look closely at your operation and decide whether you stay in the industry and slowly fall behind, or try to enlarge your holding to give yourself more room for manouvring. I am hopeful that Governments will come to the industry's assistance and made money available to allow experienced people to stay.

These days we are much more fortunate than our earlier Pastoralists in that we have more accurate methods than our frail memories of assessing whether the resource base is being eroded or otherwise. The service that the Department of Agriculture offers of putting in monitoring sites using hand-held or aerial photography - in the future, perhaps a system of satellite photography. If we use this service in conjunction with our carefully-kept stock records, we will in time know positively which way we are heading. We will also be able to counter the uninformed instant expert environmentalist-type tourist who sees our country in a drought and runs back to the city yelling that we are turning the country into a desert. The fact that the same tourist has transplanted his empty cans and stubbies all the way along the edge of the bitumen is O.K., of course.

On a fully developed property from past records it should be easily established what the safe carrying capacity is under normal conditions. My figure for Nambi is 12,000 to 13,000 and only under very favourable conditions do I allow this to run up to 15,000, selling back to 10,000 in dry years. It would have been easy to shear 18,000 to 20,000 a few times in the last 24 years, but losses would have been astronomic a few times as well. I am hopeful that in the future these figures may be able to be increased slightly.

All of this is of no avail unless you manage your finances correctly, make out a budget and work to it, or better it. When I first started managing Nambi my training in this aspect was to say the least, lacking. I wasn't even dead sure how to write out a cheque and had never seen a budget. Fortunately at that time, the margins for error were much greater so mistakes were not so readily seen. I had had some very good training in frugality for which I have been very grateful many times since.

I see a great need for some form of training course for young station managers in the area of keeping records and books, and financial management. I know there are courses on farm management and for those that can wade through the crops, superphosphate, tractors and headers etc. there is probably a great deal of value. Many of our young people, I feel, are frightened off by the fact that they have to sift through information which they feel is going to be of no benefit to them.

In conclusion I would like to say that in the future, station managers will not only have to be good stockmen, mechanics, windmillmen and able to understand their country, they are going to have to be competent in financial matters, getting the best out of their employees and dealing with environmentalists and animal libbers. To assist in all this, I strongly suggest that you find yourselves a capable and understanding wife. Without one, I imagine the job would be many times more difficult. Good luck and good seasons.

NAMBI STATION

Figures are for year ended 30 June.

Year	Lambs Marked	Sales	Purchases	Killers	Losses	Shorn	Rainfall mm	
1957	3,017	1,007	25	105	1,117	11,056	176	
1958	905	1,200	50	108	651	10,006	238	
1959	3,502	Nil	50	106	1,100	12,350	231	
1960	3,716	2,838	50	105	1,157	15,100	288	
1961	3,512	704	50	106	1,061	14,395	181	
1962	900	396	40	72	3,665	11,107	57	
1963	Nil	555	36	54	2,931	7,179	245	
1964	3,594	110	50	120	325	10,189	180	
1965	3,744	2,334	50	125	863	13,091	126	
1966	2,000	2,114	50	151	677	11,783	206	
1967	3,911	1,705	50	130	580	12,932	234	
1968	3,537	1,697	40	127	534	13,653	306	
1969	2,800	4,411	1761	142	823	14,919	91	
1970	2,500	3,968	25	148	1,984	12,150	100	
1971	Nil	Nil	40	82	1,485	6,757	151	
1972	2,714	Nil	25	76	480	9,572	74	
		1600 sent to agistment						
1973	1,800	44	800	94	1,012	7,661	385	
		1600 returned from agistment						
1974	4,150	2,423	178	104	1,024	13,198	331	
1975	3,312	1,265	50	93	911	13,421	478	
1976	4,262	3,505	50	104	1,239	15,493	130	
1977	944	800	25	67	1,511	11,045	88	
1978	1,289	1,220	2,294	69	1,484	10,568	203	
	2294 wethers bought Mar. 1978 following good rain Jan/Feb. Sold May-Aug. 78							
1979	3,671	2,166	50	102	442	11,896	220	
1980	4,389	3,417	102	152	1,028	13,053	266	
Totals	64,156	37,872	3,246	2,533	28,084	282,574	4,985	

Not
shorn

FOWLERS GAP OPEN DAY - DIFFERENT THIS YEAR

From: Roger Stanley, Secretary, Broken Hill Branch, Australian Rangeland Society.

THEY'LL ALL HAVE CLEAN SHIRTS ON!

The annual open day at the Fowlers Gap Arid Zone Research Station will this year emphasise outside inspection and informal discussion of current research activities, according to officer-in-charge Dr. Charlie Carter. He said that this was a departure from the format of previous years when formal lectures took place in the woolshed.

The open day will be held on Thursday, 9th July 1981. Dr. Carter said that the varied and interesting programme would give district graziers the opportunity to see at first hand activities at "the Gap" and discuss management problems with experts from the University staff.

The Annual General Meeting of the Broken Hill Branch of the Australian Rangeland Society will again be held in conjunction with the open day. Business will include presentation of the President's and Treasurer's reports and election of office bearers. A good attendance and contribution from members will ensure that the branch maintains its position as the best in Australia.

DON'T KNOCK THE MESQUITE

From: Brendan Lay, Soils Branch, South Australian Department of Agriculture

AEROGARD KILLS THEM QUITE WELL!

Mesquite has been regarded by pastoralists as a problem weed wherever it occurs. It really depends on your point of view as the following information, extracted from Desert Plants (latest issue) reveals. Desert Plants is a journal produced by an arboretum in Arizona mainly for people interested in cultivating desert flora.

"Mesquite (*Prosopis velutina*) is an excellent food and energy resource of the desert. The beans are used as food by man and livestock and the flowers yield a copious nectar which the bees store as honey. It not only shades stock and buildings to make them cool in summer, but, being deciduous, it lets light and heat through in winter. In fact, the colder the winter, the more completely deciduous it becomes.

Mesquite also provides one of the very best firewoods of the entire world. Back at the turn of the century, Mesquite was considered valuable for fuel. With the advent of cheap oil, natural gas and electricity in this century, it became little used for energy and it took on a reputation of being a rangeland pest that was difficult to eradicate. With Mesquite wood now again commanding a high price, ranchers can sell cutting rights to it by the cord."

RABBITS AND YOUNG MULGAS DON'T MIX

From: Brendan Lay, Soils Branch, South Australian Department of Agriculture

BUT I MADE A RABBIT AND WOMBAT JUICE
EXTRACT IN MY KENWOOD THE OTHER DAY
AND WITH A SPRIG OF MINT - IT TASTED
BEAUT!

Over the past 8 years or so, we have been carrying out experiments (soon to be reported?) on the reasons for non-regeneration of Mulgas, Sand Mulgas and other perennials in various parts of S.A.'s pastoral zone.

Almost all of this work is rapidly and decisively indicating that it is the rabbit which is the main culprit in the prevention of seedlings of these species from establishing. This is the case even in areas where no high rabbit populations were observed.

For example, replicated exclosures were erected on a national park in the Northern Flinders Ranges where feral goat grazing appeared to be heavy and destructive to the vegetation. However after 4 years we found that plots fenced to exclude goats and euros were not significantly different from unfenced controls as regards regeneration, which was negligible. In the rabbit proof plots, on the other hand, various aged seedlings of several species were so thick as to make counting and mapping them almost impossible. Seedlings of one species (*Eremophila alternifolia*) were initially confused with Mulga as they had never been seen before and adult plants in the area were only a few very scattered old and degenerate individuals.

So I find myself in a dilemma: if rabbits are having a more severe impact on these important plants than domestic stock and there is no economic way of controlling their numbers significantly in this country then I may as well pack up and go home or campaign for more funds for rabbit control research.

Anyone else with a view on this matter?

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

QUESTION: WHAT DOES GREAT BRITAIN AND THE AUSTRALIAN RANGELAND SOCIETY HAVE IN COMMON?

ANSWER: THERE'S A LADY IN THE BOSS'S CHAIR!

The 6th AGM was held on Thursday 28th May in Adelaide. The President Vic Squires and Treasurer Keith Casperson presented their reports, and preparations were outlined for the 1981 Biennial Conference in Alice Springs and the 1984 International Rangelands Congress in Adelaide. The President's report (see this issue) covers all agenda items except the newly elected council. Our Council for the next two years is:

President:	Margaret Friedel, CSIRO, Alice Springs, N.T.
Vice President:	Bill Low, Conservation Commission, Alice Springs, N.T.
Past President:	Vic Squires, Roseworthy College, Roseworthy, S.A.
Secretary:	Ken Shaw, Dept. Primary Production, Alice Springs, N.T.
Treasurer:	Gary Bastin, Dept. Primary Production, Alice Springs, N.T.

And our permanent Subscription Secretary is Vanessa Chewings:

CSIRO,
P.O. Box 2111,
Alice Springs, N.T. 5750.

All subscription payments and inquiries should go to Vanessa, and she will redirect any monies to the Treasurer, Gary. General business should be sent to the Secretary, Ken. The postal address for Gary and Ken is:

Dept. Primary Production,
P.O. Box 2134,
Alice Springs, N.T. 5750.

3RD BIENNIAL CONFERENCE, ALICE SPRINGS, SEPTEMBER 1981

This is the last RMN before the Conference and by the time you are reading this, your applications and papers should be in. At the time of writing (pre-1st July deadline) we have received, or received notice of, enough papers to make a good conference, and we expect more. Participants have submitted papers appropriate to the four themes, as well as to the general sessions, and we should have a sizeable audience to hear the keynote address, the Chairmen's reviews of the submitted papers and the ensuing discussion. The pre- and post-conference tours, BBQ and dinner are also well supported. See you in Alice Springs! Any inquiries to:

Ockie Bosch,
Secretary, A.R.S. Conference Organising Committee,
P.O. Box 2111,
Alice Springs, N.T. 5750.
Phone: (089) 52 4255

THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT 1980-81

From: Vic Squires, Roseworthy College, South Australia.

This year has been a year of decision and consolidation. Your Council met on six occasions during the year under review. A quick review of some of Council's decisions which affect the future of the Society seems to be in order.

The big news is that Australia has agreed to host the 2nd International Rangeland Congress in 1984. Adelaide has been chosen as the venue for the May 1984 Congress. A Planning Committee, comprising about 12 members from each of the mainland states, except Victoria, has been formed under the Chairmanship of yours truly. We want this Congress to be a success. We realise that such a small Society will have a big job to stage a Congress of this sort. Through service on sub-committees or in some other way, each and every member of our Society will need to be involved.

Much sooner on our calendar of forthcoming events is the Biennial Conference which is to be held in Alice Springs in September. The Society should be grateful to the Alice Springs' team who have organised the Conference. This Conference should enable our Society to promote itself and create greater awareness in the community.

During the past year we have taken other steps to promote our Society. We have a logo design and new letterhead paper printed. It is our aim to get this logo as well known and easily recognised as Coca Cola!

Because our Society is now well established it seems important that the Society's records be well stored and well protected. We have investigated the cost and feasibility of putting our Society minutes on micro-fiche. In the meantime, we have arranged for our Society's records to be stored in a safe place. We have also accepted, as a policy, the notion of keeping 2 copies of each and every Society publication (journals, newsletters etc.)

Society membership records have been computerised, with the help of Robin Lamacraft, and we have now a better system for updating our records. Despite earlier foul ups and confusion about the financial status of an individual it is now likely that the membership list can be kept up to date. To further assist in this matter Council have resolved to appoint a Membership Secretary with a permanent address. This will greatly improve our record keeping. We are grateful to Vanessa Chewings of Alice Springs for taking on the job.

In addition to trying to get our membership records updated, we have also recommended a changed membership structure. This involves recognition of the different type of members. Council proposes five classes of membership. These are listed below:

- a) Ordinary member
- b) Institutions
- c) Institutions who subscribe to Journal only
- d) Individuals who subscribe to Newsletter only
- e) Sustaining (corporate or individual) members who wish to support the Society on a yearly basis.

Class (d) membership is aimed at Pastoralists and graziers who may be interested in the affairs of the Society but who do not wish to receive the Journal.

The subscription rates would be set to recognise the different needs and financial status of the classes of membership. For example, class (d) membership is set at only \$10 per year. Ordinary members pay \$20 and libraries, institutions etc. would pay more than double this subscription rate.

These proposals require endorsement by the membership at a General Meeting of the Society in September 1981.

The Society faces a dilemma. The Journal is a necessary vehicle for our members. We have a problem though in aiming the Journal at the scientist, the administrator and the layman. The Editorial Committee have clear directions as to the need to maintain standards, some pastoralist members complain about the scientific "clap-trap". If we "popularize" our Journal, scientists won't publish in it. If we reject the non-scientific articles and viewpoints we alienate a large and important section of our membership. If we have a mass movement of our membership from Ordinary Members, who pay more in subscriptions and get the Journal, to class (d) members who pay less and subscribe only to the Newsletter the Society loses revenue. So we are caught in a cost/price squeeze. Our costs are rising as printing, paper and postage charges increase. Council have supported the introduction of a page charge for the Journal. The Editorial Board has the power to implement the scheme and fix the charges. Where such charges would impose a burden on a potential author the Board may, at its discretion, waive the charges. The question of advertising in the Journal is also under review.

The Society has already implemented the proposal that Council remain in the one State (or Territory) for two years. The rationale for this is that the Secretary and Treasurer take a while to get familiar with the demands and scope of the job. Furthermore, the Council has so far been to every State which has enough members to support Council. There seems merit therefore to the suggestion that the Council rotate between the States more slowly.

Liaison has been maintained with the Society for Range Management and an invitation was received from the American Forage and Grassland Council, joint sponsor of the International Grassland Congress, to have a delegate from our Society present at the XIV International Grassland Congress in Lexington, Kentucky, U.S.A.

On the local front, my report would not be complete if I didn't take this opportunity to thank my fellow Councillors, Martin Willcocks (Secretary), Keith Casperson (Treasurer), Jim Vickery (Past President) and Margaret Friedel (Vice President). I congratulate Margaret Friedel on her election to the position of President of our Society. A Society like ours relies heavily on the personal efforts of a few dedicated people. Your Editorial Committee under the Chairmanship of Tony Pressland, the Editorial Board, our Society's Editor Malcolm Howes, and our Newsletter editors, Tim Fatchen and Barney Foran. To these, and other people not specifically acknowledge in my report, I offer my thanks. Our thanks, as a Society, should go too to our employers for their co-operation and support.