

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE AUSTRALIAN RANGELAND SOCIETY
BIENNIAL CONFERENCE**

Official publication of The Australian Rangeland Society

Copyright and Photocopying

© The Australian Rangeland Society 2012. All rights reserved.

For non-personal use, no part of this item may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior permission of the Australian Rangeland Society and of the author (or the organisation they work or have worked for). Permission of the Australian Rangeland Society for photocopying of articles for non-personal use may be obtained from the Secretary who can be contacted at the email address, rangelands.exec@gmail.com

For personal use, temporary copies necessary to browse this site on screen may be made and a single copy of an article may be downloaded or printed for research or personal use, but no changes are to be made to any of the material. This copyright notice is not to be removed from the front of the article.

All efforts have been made by the Australian Rangeland Society to contact the authors. If you believe your copyright has been breached please notify us immediately and we will remove the offending material from our website.

Form of Reference

The reference for this article should be in this general form;
Author family name, initials (year). Title. *In*: Proceedings of the nth Australian Rangeland Society Biennial Conference. Pages. (Australian Rangeland Society: Australia).

For example:

Anderson, L., van Klinken, R. D., and Shepherd, D. (2008). Aerially surveying Mesquite (*Prosopis* spp.) in the Pilbara. *In*: 'A Climate of Change in the Rangelands. Proceedings of the 15th Australian Rangeland Society Biennial Conference'. (Ed. D. Orr) 4 pages. (Australian Rangeland Society: Australia).

Disclaimer

The Australian Rangeland Society and Editors cannot be held responsible for errors or any consequences arising from the use of information obtained in this article or in the Proceedings of the Australian Rangeland Society Biennial Conferences. The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Australian Rangeland Society and Editors, neither does the publication of advertisements constitute any endorsement by the Australian Rangeland Society and Editors of the products advertised.



The Australian Rangeland Society

LIVING IN THE RANGELANDS - SERVICING PEOPLE'S NEEDS

Robyn Tredwell

Birdwood Downs, PO Box 124, Derby WA 6728

Our present moment can be expanded by taking into consideration the history of the past, our vision of the future and the actuality of this moment in time.

Who lives in the rangelands?

The northern and western rangelands, including the small service towns, are sparsely populated, their population comprised of approximately 45% Aboriginal people and 55% non-Aboriginal people. If we exclude towns it changes to between 63% and 90% Aboriginal people, the higher percentage being more likely. In the eastern and southern rangelands the figures may vary, but the trend is the same.

The gender balance in the Aboriginal population is fairly equal, but in the non-Aboriginal population the number of males is far higher than the number of females.

The Aboriginal people primarily live on stations, in communities or at outstations, in numbers ranging from small family groups to communities of several hundred people. The population changes on a seasonal basis but people tend to stay within the region.

The non-Aboriginal groups living on stations, mines, etc. are small family groups to larger groups, usually resident on a seasonal basis, with many moving out of the region to be replaced by others the next season.

During the winter, thousands of tourists pass through.

COMMUNICATIONS

Language

By and large English is a second or third language in the Aboriginal population. There are few translators between the many Aboriginal languages, and between those languages and English. There are even fewer translators of the conceptual differences between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures.

Wireless Communication

Until 3 years ago wireless communication was an extremely valuable source of information to most of the bush communities and camps but this was cut by restructuring and can now be received only by the main communities and stations. The outstations and camps largely rely on bush telegraph (word-of-mouth) and the Flying Doctor radio service. This radio telephone service (HF) system conducts both a daily business service and an emergency service for isolated people. If regional radio services are further reduced, the only outside news will have to come either by satellite or phone or fax, and for those who cannot afford this, or are caught in the unreliable season for phones, they will have to go back to the bush telegraph. There is a widening gap between the haves and the have-nots in communications in the rangelands.

Telecommunications

The structure of telecommunications has changed since the Digital Radio Concentrator System became available in last decade, changing from primarily a radio, mail and bush telegraph system, to telephone, fax and mail, and bush telegraph. Most business now is done through fax or telephone (i.e.

approximately 75% of pastoralists have fax facilities, as do the larger Aboriginal communities). These systems are now fairly reliable for nine months of the year.

During the three months of unreliability, the Flying Doctor radio service has proved invaluable in filling the communications gap. With the remoting of this service there is a concern that the isolated communities and camps, stations and major communities will suffer a severe communications problem during the wet season. In the wet season, due to untrafficable roads, the bush telegraph is slow.

Telecommunications technicians are in short supply and can take from days to weeks to attend to a telecommunications problem. This is due to distance and workload.

In the towns, the communication and information services have improved dramatically, with improved telephone and television, and more recently, the cyber world and information services, although these also have problems during the wet season.

Roads

While roads between towns have generally improved in the rangelands, the lack of good roads in the remote rangelands is a serious impediment for the livelihood of the land users there. Shipping of products to market can be dependent not on demand for the product, but on the condition of the road. With the increase in tourism, the roads are experiencing an increase in traffic, and without improvement of them, degradation will be swifter. Very often local authorities are responsible for the upkeep of these roads, and because of the low population do not find the finances to maintain the roads adequately.

HEALTH

Health services should be affordable, accessible and acceptable. The basic requirements for environmental health are clean water and adequate waste disposal. On many Aboriginal communities this is not an option due to poorly designed systems, and/or a lack of expertise within the community to address plumbing problems. Plumbers have to come from the towns, at great cost to the community. These factors, combined with nutritional problems, lead to an increase in health problems. These problems are much less apparent in the non-indigenous population.

In the rangelands, health care is delivered from Base hospitals in the regional centres, which traditionally have general practitioners and nursing staff, dentists, physiotherapists and X-ray facilities. Several regions may have to share a surgeon and laboratory facilities, including X-ray diagnosis (e.g. in the Kimberley and Pilbara in the north-west of Australia the nearest surgeon and X-ray diagnosis are at Port Headland). Specialist doctors visit on a 3 to 6 monthly basis from the large metropolitan teaching hospitals. The hospitals in the smaller towns often have beds for uncomplicated health problems and a day clinic which is staffed by nurses, visiting doctors and dentists from the regional hospitals.

Outside the towns, the Royal Flying Doctor Service attends clinics in communities and deals with emergencies. They are also used to transport patients to the regional centres and in some cases to the large metropolitan centres in an emergency. Very often a seriously ill person is transported to the metropolitan centre, which can be 2000 km away from their home and culture base, for treatment.

On Aboriginal communities some women are being trained in health care in an attempt to make health care culturally acceptable and accessible. Once trained these women are paid from the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP), which means that they earn dole money for their work. If people are trained and work within their communities should they not be paid for their expertise in an equitable fashion with towns?

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Literacy in English language and a grounding in the three R's would be the most necessary beginning to be able to access the training opportunities available in the regional centres. Because of the large Aboriginal population in the non-urban rangeland areas, and because of their poor standard of literacy, access to this training is limited. This situation has improved over the last ten years in general, but there are now concerns that in the remote communities, the literacy rate is actually falling. The homeland movement is moving faster than the servicing of it.

The literacy level is quite variable within the non-Aboriginal population, but tends to be higher than that of the Aboriginal population.

There are numerous training programs available in the regional centres, and few in the isolated or remote areas. Many of these training programs require a Year 10 education standard to qualify for entry, which cuts out many Aboriginal people, and, in fact, many non-Aboriginal people.

Schools on the larger Aboriginal communities tend to have teachers of non-Aboriginal background.

The School of the Air services many of the rangeland children; others learn by correspondence. On stations these children's lessons are supervised by parents or nannies, and in the larger Aboriginal communities by Department of Education teachers.

In many rangeland towns, Year 10 is the highest level of schooling available - the children having to move away to complete secondary education. There is a high truancy rate.

Education and training need to be aimed at two levels; one at preparing people to be able to live at a basic level of competence in their human environment, then in extension, their natural environment, and the other at preparing people to be able to determine and manage their own destiny. Despite the many training initiatives and studies and consultations that are carried out in the rangelands, we are still a long way from these needs being met.

TRANSPORT

Air transport to regional towns very often is via a complex series of connections, which is very time consuming and expensive. Road transport is expensive, in many cases one-third to one-half of the cost of items being transported. Sea transport is limited to the eastern and southern coasts.

SOCIAL ISSUES

Crime rates and delinquency are spiralling - girls stealing cars, and being involved in high speed chases. Six- to ten-year-olds form gangs and break and enter to steal cigarettes, and set fire to cars and school rooms. Knives have been drawn on school buses - a new happening in the last three years.

On communities, gangs of men steal food and money from unprotected old people.

Domestic violence can be a problem. This rarely gets to court. Lawyers represent the defendant, but who is there to help the victim in the remote bush? If it gets to court in town, the station non-Aboriginal woman has little support - her family is probably 2000 km away.

The Aboriginal woman away from her cultural base may have the additional problem of a language barrier, resulting in her receiving no effective help.

THE GAP

Culturally, economically and philosophically there is a large difference between the towns and the remote rangelands. Decisions made in towns by town people often have very little relevance to people in the bush. Also, towns are serviced. Communities have few services. Outstations, stations and camps provide their own or go without.

THE LAND

People need to know about land tenure to be able to plan. Where will their children go? Security of land tenure or ownership is a fundamental need in the rangelands with all people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

CONCLUSION

Within the rangelands the resources for human development are limited. Many of the plans and initiatives are at an operational level rather than strategic and are therefore limited in their vision and effectiveness. Literacy, good health and access are fundamental to development of our society. Our vision for the future must take into consideration the actualities of the situations in the rangelands and address needs rather than wants.