

Wednesday 29th July 2009

Del Cunningham taping Darryl McEvoy who is speaking about the history of Eungella Station.

Lease History: Barker Bros first took up the lease in 1880, it was transferred to DeBurgh Persee in 1906, then to John Shannon in 1907. John Norman McLennan & John Hamilton Dalrymple took up the lease in 1914, then Edward McEvoy Snr (Darryl's Grandfather) in 1916. Edward Christopher McEvoy died on 19.6.1943 and the lease was transferred to Johanna & Timothy on 24.4.1945. The lease was then transferred to Edward Francis McEvoy (Darryl's father) on 30.9.47 and after his untimely death, it was transferred to Hazel (Darryl's mother), Darryl & Michael in 1982. Darryl & Michael still have it.

Darryl: They started off with shorthorn cattle, then with shorthorn Hereford cross.

Del: This is your family we are talking about?

Darryl: Yes, in my time. My father mainly had hereford cattle, he did switch on to shorthorn Hereford, they were both good breeds of cattle, but they were really tick taxis to make the best of them. In the late 60's they started off breeding Brahmans and that more or less done away with the tick problem. There are still Brahmans here today, but they are a bit wilder, only because they don't get as much work as the old ballys because every month you were out chasing ticks.

Del: And they were a gentler sort of breed too though, weren't they?

Darryl: Yes, but I feel that if these Brahmans had the same amount of work they would probably be just as quiet. In those days everybody was riding around on horses and the cattle took no notice of the horses. Now if they see a bloke on a horse they know that there is only one thing on, they are going to get around and fetch them in. If the cows in the earlier days had run away every time they saw someone on a horse, they would have starved to death because they would never have stopped running. They got used to people on horses, but as the cars came in and the horses went out, they didn't see as much of the horses. Some of my old cows only see me two or three times a year, so they are going to be a little bit wild.

Del: But it must cut down on the expenses by not having to dip that much.

Darryl: It does and that was the big savior, or so we all thought. But then along came lantana and we spend more money trying to kill lantana than what you did trying to kill ticks. But it is just an ongoing job and it has taken all the enjoyment out of being a cow cocky because you spend every spare minute

you've got, either trying to spray a bit of lantana or looking for where you should be spraying. We spray it, but it has just taken over the whole country. It is just a hassle every time you go mustering because of the lantana.

Del: In the olden days, did you feel more isolated than you do now?

Darryl: Oh yes, but we won't call them the olden days, because I can remember them and I am not that old!

Del: Because the track from Eungella was quite a bit different wasn't it? Could you describe that to me?

Darryl: It used to take the old people a day to go to town, now if someone has a sniffly nose they run to town in an hour and a half, 30 minutes into the Pub. Like one of the biggest changes that we have had in my time is the building of the Dam. Most people think it is a great idea, but I think it is a shit of a thing because everybody likes a dam or a rubbish dump, as long as it is not in their back yard. Well the Dam happens to be right in my backyard. And it wouldn't have been too bad, it was just the place they built it was a hassle. They took up the best bit of country we had and pushed us back into the hills, took up the homestead, all the little holding paddocks, the cattle yards, the horse yards, everything had to be shifted. Whereas if it was up the creek a bit or down the creek a bit further, it wouldn't have done as much harm to us.

Del: That's true. There would have been suitable sites further upstream or downstream wouldn't there?

Darryl: Oh, not with the amount of flat country unless they went down to Urannah and once you get up the creek, I don't know if I would like to live below it anyway. The dam took up a lot of good grazing country, but it took up all the handy grazing country around the homestead. We've still got stacks of hills and mountains and Massey Creek, but it's a day's job to get to there. Whereas when we had cattle on the flat country, we could go out and muster and be home for lunch. It is a hassle that they have just pushed us back up into the hills. And it is not nearly as enjoyable up here as it was down on the riverbank. Up here most nights it would blow the hair off a hippie, blows a gale. And you try and put stock yards and that or drive on the side of a hill. You are forever chasing the hills. The wet season comes and where the cattle have been walking and the horses have been walking, everything gets washed away. Down on the flat, nothing got washed away. And when the Dam gets low, you are chasing your water all the time.

Del: Need a longer pipe to pump the water. Do you get all your water from the Dam or do you catch some rain water into tanks?

Darryl: I have a little rain water tank.

Del: Just a little one for drinking and use the Dam water for everything else. Do you drink the Dam water?

Darryl: I drink the Dam water.

Del: Nothing wrong with it. What about when the Algae was in it?

Darryl: I drank it then too. The house where Mike is, that is where the original house was built, but it was blown down in the 1918 Cyclone, so they rebuilt it down on the creek because it was easier to get water I presume.

Del: I remember visiting that house down on the creek. The other half of the house is in at the Top isn't it?

Darryl: But the positives to come out of the Dam were we have a good road, we got power and we have a good telephone service. Because I can remember when I was a kid, my old man used to love his race horses. He would get on the phone on a Friday night to your father because he had the paper and the fields and they talked for hours trying to pick winners and if the phone was not working on a Friday night or Saturday morning when he wanted to put his bets on, we'd be called out at daylight and sent on our pony to go and fix the telephone line. It had to be fixed by Saturday so he could ring up his bookie mate in town and put his bets on.

Del: Could you describe the telephone line to us, it was quite intricate wasn't it?

Darryl: It just went from tree to tree and it only took one bit of a branch to fall on it and it would earth it out, or a bit of bark off those big old flooded gum trees they'd hang on it and touch the ground and it wouldn't work. So you were on the pony and over the hill. Had to carry a little portable one with you so if you found a spot where you thought was the problem, you could ring back to the house and not have to go right over to Bells. All the big flooded gums were at the head of Andrews Creek and that is usually where you had to go to. I remember that as clear as a bell, the phone had to be working Friday evening! They were the big benefits of Dam, especially the decent road.

Del: Yes, but isn't it a shame they didn't bitumen it when it was all built up and ready for it?

Darryl: It was ready to put the tar on it. The engineers that were here said it only needs tar on it.

Del: Because the track prior to that was just two wheel ruts through the bush wasn't it?

Darryl: Oh yes. All the old fellows had packhorses, I'll show you some photos soon. The power was good.

Del: What about school days. Did you go away to school?

Darryl: I spent my entire school life at boarding school. When I was five I went to the convent at Walkerston, I was there for five years, and then I had 2 years at St Brendans, 1956/57 I think and then when Michael started school Mum bought a house in town and I spent the last three years at the Christian Brothers in Mackay. And I just went from there to home and been here ever since. I am the third generation here, Troy is fourth and Locklan and Tim are fifth. Old Timmy McEvoy is recycled.

Del: Do you reckon he is like him?

Darryl: I hope not. I don't think old Tim would have been like young Timmy. The old folks had to drive their cattle when they sold the bullocks. Dad used to only breed his cows here and he would send the bullocks to Weitalabah to fatten them. He would spey his cows and fatten them here and then send them to the butchers down the Valley. He had to walk them down. Old George Bosel used to take most of them. Hannan & Gee used to be at Mirani and Glen Cameron was at Finch Hatton and Billy Davis at Hatton and Petersen Brothers at Sarina. He used to often send them to Sarina as well. Used to walk them to Homevale and then on to Sarina.

Del: You mentioned Weitalabah, did your father have another block of ground out there?

Darryl: No he used to agist it off an old bloke named Syd Quinn and they used to send the bullocks over there to fatten them. It was a good fattening block, only three days away. We used to go to Blenheim the first day, Exmoor the second day and then to Weitalabah. And when they were fat they used to walk them into Collinsville and put them on the train and used to kill them at Merinda, near Bowen.

Del: And when you were walking these cattle, did you have to sleep with the cattle?

Darryl: No, we used to put them in the yards at Blenheim and Exmoor and when they went to Mt Christian, there were yards all the way. The stockroute was well set up. The biggest change that came to the place was in 1958 when they started pulling the scrub around the place, the Turkey Run. They started in 1959 I think and over the next three years Eungella went from a breeding place to a fattening place and it is still fattening, still as good as when it was first pulled.

When Comerfords were building Lizzy Creek Rd, they had a little old tractor with a log on front of it to start with. Joe Begozzi and Curl the Mow used to drive it. Since they have done Lizzy Creek Road up, we load the cattle onto trucks from the yards down near the scrub, straight to the Abattoir in Mackay. The Abattoirs in Mackay have been a blessing, as the cows do not have to go to Rockhampton or Bowen as they used to. Trucks were a big improvement for us as well. The downers were the banning of the tree clearing. The carrying capacity on Eungella was doubled when we could clear. Then they put the bans on the place so it will never get any better than it is now.

Del: Probably get worse, won't it, because the suckers will come up won't they?

Darryl: I'll chop them off as soon as they do. You have to keep on to them. That and the lantana, that is the biggest problem. The other big kick in the guts was taking the State Forest off us. That takes away a third of your income more or less. You still have to have the same amount of machinery, the same number of men and the outlay is the same, but you lose a third of your income, and that third is your profit margin. There are just costs you can't cut back on, the truck rego, Toyotas etc. It costs just as much to run 2 000 head as it does to run 3 000 because you have to have the same amount of gear to start with. Kicking us off the State Forest has just taken the cream off us. But we did expand 17 years ago now, by buying a little place at Clermont when they were talking about it, even though we thought it would never happen, we bought this little place at Clermont and it has been a big help. It is just a fattening block and we truck cattle from here to there.

Talking about droving cattle. Lots of drovers used to walk cattle down the Range. There is a story, a true story about Mick O'Loughlin sold some cattle to Charlie Frogatt, the butcher at Hatton then, and he used to pick up his cattle at Wire Yard and take them down the Range. Wire Yard is down Cocky's Creek Road. It started off they used to walk them from Exvale to here and go over the Range and then take them down to the bottom to the butcher shops at Hatton. Well when they opened up the roads around Crediton from Broken River. Frogatt wasn't going to take them that way any more. Taking them from Wire Yard was a lot shorter. Old Mick didn't agree, but he let Frogatt have his way. There used to be a Forestry camp just near the Sky Window. Frogatt was driving the Exvale cattle and came to the camp there and the cattle all stopped. Anyway there was an old fellow Burgess had an old rowdy truck and he started up the old truck and the cattle jumped into the scrub. I think it was old Norm Foster went in to hunt them out and they took fright at a man on foot and went straight over the edge. Killed 17 head, only 1 survived.

Del: Wow! Who had to pay for that?

Darryl: I think Frogatt had to pay for it, old Mick is not that kind hearted. Charlie Frogatt and Mick were pretty good mates, he was Mick's best man when he got married. He had the butcher shop at Hatton before Cameron & Davis.

Del: At school, you were away all the time, only coming home on holidays weren't you?

Darryl: Yes, came home three times a year. Christmas time, May holidays and August holidays.

Del: I would hate my kids to be doing that.

Darryl: But there was no choice. Delwyn did correspondence, but not us.

Del: She was probably easier to handle.

Darryl: Yes, probably. It wasn't until she was up in the higher grades and Michael was ready to start school that they went to town. Bought a house in Pinder Street in West Mackay. Mum sold that house, bought a little one in Stockbridge Street for a while and then built a house in Planlands close to the Racetrack, which Delwyn still owns.

Del: That's what we didn't get on to is the Races. You said they only had 2 or 3 meetings?

Darryl: Yes only 2 or 3 meetings.

Del: Why did they stop?

Darryl: Came in with corn fed horses and they had to be registered. Couldn't come in with any old stock horse, they went professional. The jockeys had to be registered and it cost a lot of money. The professionals took over and wiped out the amateurs.

Del: I'm pretty sure the last meeting was in 1957. We came up in 1956, but we didn't go to the ball that year, but we were allowed to go the next year and it was the last one.

Darryl: I'm pretty sure it was 1957 too.

Darryl: When they built the new house, they built the quarters out of the timber from the old house. When the Dam was built they auctioned it off and Ed Casey bought it and sold it to a cabinet maker in town, it was all red cedar.

Del: So it wasn't yours to sell, they had reimbursed you for it and they sold it.

Del: One other thing I was going to touch on. When you were kids, what did you do for entertainment. You know how the kids today have these games inside at the computer. There was none of that, no TV.

Darryl: We used to break our neck to get on the pony and go mustering.

Del: That was it, that's all you ever did. Because you never went to town much, I know we never did.

Darryl: There was a gulley just down from the house we made big roads around it and played with our trucks sometimes. Most of the time it was just mustering.

Del: What about Delwyn, did she ever go mustering?

Darryl: No she never went mustering. She had a nice pony that Dad bought for her at the Brisbane Exhibition, but she did not like the horses much. We have a collection of photos of Delwyn riding a pig, riding a bull and riding a pony.

Del: She would have had a fairly lonely life with all you boys off playing on the horses and she would have been at home playing with her dolls.

Darryl: Yes she played with her dolls a lot and you came out a few times, I remember that.

Del: Have the dogs played any different role from way back then to now?

Darryl: We still use the dogs. Never go out without my dogs. Helicopter mustering is not needed here, because I can get all my cows on horses. Helicopters are good in that they can put 3 000 or 4000 head in a heap real fast. It doesn't work out too dear either because you only need the helicopter about twice a year, whereas you need a team of men to muster all year round. Though now it is only family. Lots of people with lots of cattle don't have men any more and have to go to Moranbah looking for part time musterers, which are becoming very scarce.