

Reginald Hughes

Grew up in England

D.O.B. 1904

Bullock driver and drover in Australia, 1920s

I can remember when I was about three years old. My father was on the farm, and I was the baby, and he and I were very close. I'd leave home by myself, looking for him, crawl under the gates. I loved animals; they never hurt me. From then on I used to help with the horses and cows and feeding.

When I was eight years old, I was always thinking where I would emigrate to. We were in Shropshire, England. I wanted to see the world. I had two uncles in Canada, but I thought Canada was a bit too cold.

I was eighteen when I emigrated...you had to apply for immigration papers. It cost you 22 pounds, and three pounds landing money. They kept that. It had to be posted ahead.

We had to go to "Beroo". They give you the pick of two jobs, farm work at 25 shillings a week, seven days a week. However, I enjoyed it. Eventually I got the horse and cart, and that was wonderful. You could go anywhere. I was used to the bush work, fencing, clearing, mustering, a bit of shearing. We slept in harness rooms. I remember the first night. All I had was two blankets, a horse rug...there was an old mattress. It was cold.

I was mostly out in the western portion of New South Wales...the Broken Hill line wasn't built then, they were building it. The Victorians put one in from Euchuca to Balranald. The squatters out there had to sign up to support it for ten years.

There were mainly bullock teams and horse teams then. They were carting 118 miles from Manfred to Balranald...big wagons of wool. About 1926, cars and trucks came in...about 30 cwt trucks...you could put two tons on them. Driving bullocks was the turning point of my career. I drove the sixteen I had. I called them names...knock-kneed', 'wall-eyed', 'bumble-footed', 'tulip-eared'. I was looking for a job in 1926 down the Lachlan. Somebody said "They want a ploughman at Mundy's, about 6 miles out, they said. "They're ploughing rabbits out with bullocks.

I was on the plough, and the bullocky was on the bullocks...he could handle them too. There were two teams. Well, the other driver, he was always getting on the booze, so they put him off, and they said, "You're the bullock driver!" The bullocks used to look at me. They knew when you were learning. The blokes used to laugh at me. If there was a tree around, they'd lap around it. They knew I was a 'newchum'.

Eventually they got used to me, and I got used to them. Crickey, I could carve my initials with a whip. The bullocky made me a whip about twelve feet long. The damn thing nearly lifted me off the ground, but I learned to be very accurate with it. Sometimes a snake would poke its head up when you were ploughing rabbits out, and I could hit him with a whip, and chop his head off. You do get accurate.

emigration

driving bullocks

ploughing out rabbit burrows

bullocky's whip

My team was 16 bullocks (8 pairs), and the main jobs I did were ploughing out rabbits, tank sinking, log-hauling for telephone lines, and taking 15 ton loads of super phosphate out to farmers. I did a lot of log hauling for telephone lines...load them up and drop them off.

ploughing out rabbits

Ploughing out rabbits involved dogs hunting rabbits into their burrows; we would then go in with a heavy single furrow plough. It would go in about two foot, and then the bullocks walked in, treading burrows in, and the rabbits would never come out.

super phosphate

Up the Lachlan, within 20 miles of it, between Condobolin and Orange, we used to get an odd load of Super Phosphate...you'd put about 15 tons on a bullock wagon. We picked it up off the line 'Cookamidgerie', about 10 miles from Parkes; took it out to the farmers. It's very heavy, doesn't take much to make a ton. They didn't have the super phosphate they got today. I remember some of the fertiliser they had. Some were just iron scalings from the foundries. The farms over there were rented from the big land owners, and all the straw and that that you grew on the farm...it had to be put in a dung heap where it could rot, and that had to go back onto the land.

broken chains

To build the cattle up, I remember they used to open the skin up near the shoulder, and they'd put a couple of pellets in, and just press it down for it to heal up again. Whatever was in the pellets used to dissolve and get into the blood stream. I never had a broken axle. The only things that used to break were the heavy chains. Every chain went up between the eight pairs of bullocks to the lead bullocks. It would be about 20 yards up to the head of them.

We'd always have a spare chain or two, and you would repair the broken one in the evening. As long as you could get to a forge. Every farm had a forge, and some of the old bushmen....they were all blacksmiths. What they could do with a bit of iron!

wool

One of the longest trips I knew, was from a station called Manfred down to Balranald. Before they put the train into Balranald, they had to go to, Echuca. That was about 130 miles. Bullocks could only do about ten miles a day. The bullockies those trips, they were never in a hurry. They'd be singing and going along....no roads, just tracks.

If it rained it was nothing to see a load of wool tipped over. The chief thing was for two teams to travel together. One could help the other out. You had to do a lot of improvising, just the driver on his own.

dam sinking

The next job I had was tank-sinking. It was a bit heavy on the polers on the back, going up the bank of the dam. We had the plough and the scoops, 16 bullocks on it, pulling the dirt out.. You had to know how much to plough, to keep it on an even batter.

The old bullocks, they were company; they used to get to know you. You only had to speak to some of them, and they'd turn their heads towards you, and sort of nod. There was always an odd nasty one. You used to try to get rid of him. On the bullock wagons, you didn't need a night rider. The bullocks were educated. I think on an average they were more intelligent than a horse. See

bullocks, you never had reins on them, and you talked to them, and it's surprising how you did get used to that.

SHOEING
BULLOCKS

Sometimes we had to shoe the bullocks...well the blacksmiths in those days, they were good. They could make anything out of nothing. You used halves of a horse shoe to the foot, and you'd always get a blacksmith to make a heap of them so you'd have a heap on hand. There was only an odd one that used to break a hoof. It depended on the ground you were travelling on.

Speaking to the teamsters, I remember some years ago, and the bullocky said, what he earned he kept, whereas the truck driver never made anything. He was always paying out. By the time you paid for the truck, it was worn out and you had to get another. They never seemed to get ahead. With the horses and teamsters, you could drive a bullock team for 10 years.. The bullocks would be worth more then than when you bought them, for meat. You couldn't lose.

droving

In early days ,I did a bit of droving up the north-west. I had one trip from Cunnamulla to Bourke. I was young then and liked it. Nearly a thousand head of cattle. If there was a nasty one among them, we used to pick him out and eat him. You had to get rid of him.

first
aid

A teamster, whether it was horses or cattle, dogs or anything, you had to be a first-aid man. Animals, they'd get torn occasionally, the skin. You'd just put a rope on them, and begin to sew 'em up. Anything you had, string or anything. You always carried one or two bag needles with you. The dogs...we always had chasing dogs, hunting dogs. Kangaroos and emus used to rip (them) occasionally. You always carried cotton...good heavy thread. One would hold the dog down, and the dog seemed to know what you were doing. It was surprising how they used to heal up...a bit rough occasionally.

oil

Some of the carriers used to bring drums of oil up, and different things. There were always a few missing.

wool

Those axles were made to last. I can't recollect an axle breaking. To load them, (the only trouble was) the wheels were about six foot high. The wool was nothing because they could cut poles and slide it up. But the wheat, they had a special loader. It was bolted onto the side of the wagon, and then it came down. You put a bag on the end of it, and the horse pulling it, the horse would pull it and flip it over onto the wagon, and there'd be a man or two on the wagon, so that it wouldn't bust the bag.

You get used to your bullocks, and you know the ones that 'll go and hide...stray, so you put a bell on them. And sometimes in the morning, they'd keep as quiet as anything. Some were very cunning. You'd always have a 'night-horse' tied up, to go and muster in the morning. You had to get up early, but you got used to it.

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Bullockies were mean, hard, and sensible. They had to be. They were hard drinkers. Rum mostly. Didn't seem to hurt them either. In this particular place in the western division, the bullocky wanted a bottle of rum to go away with. The publican reckoned he'd drink it there, and be a nuisance at the pub, so he refused him. The next morning...the bullocky must have been up early. The pub was wood. The pub began to creak. The bullocky'd put a rope around it, and hooked the bullocks on to it. He gave him the bottle of rum.

The usual (carriage) price used to be one shilling per ton...ten tons on ten shillings a mile.

The stations, it was mostly wool. They were big, hardly any of them under a million acres in the west.

Carting barrels of rum, there's always a depression in the barrel that would hold water in. A kettle, or even a billy of boiling water, and that brings the fumes up through the wood. Scoop the water off, and it was rum. Some used to bore little holes in the end, and suck it up with a quill/straw.

In 1928, I bought a Chev, and I drove that for 14 years. I began in the shearing sheds in '29. Ofcourse the depression was on then, and there was no

money and very little work. The work was there, but the farmers didn't have any money to pay for it. I was shearing....the sheep had to be shorn.

There were three of us kicked off together in 1929. We commenced between Ivanhoe and Cobar. It was dingoes and blackfellows. Aboriginals used to spear the sheep. The squatters complained, and then they began to round them up, and put them into missions. Before that, I used to visit them in their camps. They were interesting.

The biggest mission was between Ivanhoe and Cobar. There were about 600 in that area.

Recorded by Rosemary Curry

shoeing bullocks

droving

rum

shearing

repeated