

Continuing the family tradition of cattle droving on Barap Country

Case Study garinga djimbayang

Russell Adcock reckons he's "the luckiest man in the world".

The Wamba Barapa man has ties to Yorta Yorta, Ngarrindjeri and Ngiyampaa Country and is "fortunate enough to have a couple of hundred acres on my own traditional Country, Barap." On his land, Russell continues a family heritage that revolves around cattle, horses, working dogs and droving.

An inspiring mentor and role model

Born in Griffith, Russell went to live with his grandparents in Balranald as a young teenager. His pop "was manager of the place called Yanga Station, the biggest freehold property in the Southern Hemisphere. Fantastic man. Bes Murray his name was. And that's who I learned a lot of stuff off."

Russell credits his pop not just with teaching him horse, cattle and other farming skills, but also teaching him about Country. "Being out bush with

Pop, a lot was distilled into me. You'd be mustering cattle out in river Country, and he'd say, oh, just watch up here, there's a burial ground up here. I started to respect the bush and read the bush. Once that comes, you start to respect yourself."

Coming home to work on Country

Russell's return to Country has been a journey with many twists and turns. After leaving school, Russell completed a butchery apprenticeship. As a young man, he learned whip cracking from his pop and went on to win three Australian titles. His skills took him around the world, including performing at the Calgary Stampede in Canada and in schools across the USA.

But soon Country was calling him back and he went "full time horse breaking and droving."

Today, Russell balances his work with cattle and horses and his work in Aboriginal Justice in the Loddon Mallee. He credits his pop for his passion for social justice, equity and developing opportunities for the community. "He was the first Koorie Court Elder appointed for Mildura Koorie Court."

Teaching the next generation

Just as his pop taught him, Russell is proud to pass on his love of Country, cattle and horses to his own kids and the people who work with him on the land. "Seeing my kids ride, you know, handle a mob of cattle on their own. That's the proudest moment as a father."

In times of drought, droving cattle along stock routes to find available feed is a time-honoured tradition. "It looks like a boring job, but it's pretty full on," Russell explains. "There's a big knack to it. A lot of





management around how far you walk your cattle. You don't want to get their bellies full and then walk twenty kilometres for a drink. And when you break, you need to make sure you're in a decent spot, your horses and cattle are settled and secure."

While motorbikes are usually part of the droving team, Russell says *"There's nothing like working cattle with the horse. And you want a good team of dogs too."*

Connecting to Country and culture

Caring for Country and Traditional Knowledge are fundamental to Russell's approach to agriculture. *"If you're not caring for Country, mate, you're not going to have a decent farm plan. Dry as it is, it's the native grasses keeping the cattle fat."*

On their own property, Russell and his family have significant cultural sites – canoe trees, scar trees and burial sites. *"I want my kids to feel proud about our culture. Learning to respect that and where they come from. And you know, look what a great bunch of people we are."*

Cultivating bushfoods

Russell has earmarked a paddock on his property to try his hand at growing traditional foods and medicines. *"I've got my aunties that are very keen to help, so I can see that being run as a family business. That's my hope. Stick together."*

"I'm a Barapa Traditional Owner, growing Barapa food on the land. It's a pretty good story to tell for them high market restaurants in Sydney."

Advocating for opportunity

Russell acknowledges that he was fortunate to have his pop to teach him the horse and cattle skills that he has used to build his career and a legacy for his children.

He is an advocate for building more culturally safe opportunities for First Nations people in the agriculture sector and has dedicated much time towards this end. His hope is that *"kids can get back out the bush, work with the horse, work with a young dog. Every kid needs that opportunity to connect back to Country and walk their own Country."*

"A lot of our mob were drovers, and they actually paved the way for all stock routes right across Australia. That's because we knew the niche water spots and how to read the bush."

For more about First Nations peoples' connection to agriculture, visit agriculture.vic.gov.au/garinga-djimbayang

