



**135 YEARS** **BIRDSVILLE**<sup>®</sup>  
**RACES**

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ON BEHALF OF THE TOWN OF BIRDSVILLE AND DIAMANTINA SHIRE COMMUNITY, HERE'S CHEERS TO ANOTHER 135 YEARS OF THE BIRDSVILLE RACES.

The Birdsville Race Club



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The Birdsville Race Club would like to sincerely thank the following people for contributing their stories and photos to this program:

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# WELCOME

In late September 1882, after the first races were held in Birdsville, 42 people sat down in the Burt & Co iron store to establish the 'Border Jockey Club'.

I'm sure they had no idea they were starting a 135-year legacy, which would grow into one of Australia's (if not the world's) most iconic race meetings, the Birdsville Races.

We're humbled by the ongoing support of the community who spend the other 363 days of the year gearing up to host 6000 people in their backyard over one weekend.

A lot of blood, sweat and tears goes into making this race happen every year.

This event simply couldn't go ahead without a small army of volunteers rolling up their sleeves to help out.

Whether it's manning the gate, running the race meet, or cleaning up once the party finishes, their efforts make this all possible.

As we blow out 135 candles this year, on behalf of the Birdsville Race Club, I'd like to thank each and every person who has contributed in some way to the ongoing success of this race meet.

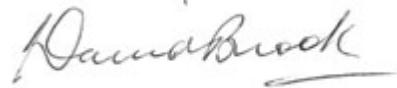
I'd like to thank Tourism & Events Queensland, Carlton United Brewery, Diamantina Shire Council and all of our partners for their support.

A big thanks to the local community for their continued contribution to keep the races going. Together, the races are an opportunity to show the rest of Australia how Outback Queensland throws an event.

Whether you haven't missed the races for 30 years, or you're here for the first time, coming to Birdsville means you're part of the family.

I encourage everyone to enjoy themselves and take in what this beautiful part of the world has to offer.

I wish you a great time here in Birdsville and a safe journey home, wherever you've come from.



David Brook OAM  
Birdsville Race Club President





# CELEBRATING 135 YEARS OF RACING AT BIRDSVILLE

### How it all began

The Birdsville Races had an auspicious start for a horse race that now tops so many people's bucket-list.

In Spring 1882, a group of 150 owners, managers and stockmen came together on the South Australian and Queensland border, and the first 'unofficial' Birdsville Races was run.

A far cry from the \$200,000 prize money up for grabs now, back then, nearly 200 pounds was raised by public subscription, which was enough to draw a crowd.

Instead of bookies standing trackside, bets were settled at 'Tucker's Hotel' – a dignified affair after the last race was called.

What happened next reads like a movie script and the first iteration of the Birdsville Race Club was born.

The community gathered at Burt and Co.'s large iron store and the 'Border Jockey Club' was formed, 42 members strong.

Stewards were appointed, a working committee elected and the next race meeting was fixed for July, 1883.

135 years later, the rest, as they say in Birdsville... is history.

**'THE RESULTS OF THE RACES WERE CLOSE AND EXCITING'**

*The Queenslander, 1882*

### On the right track

The race track that you see today isn't exactly how things began in Birdsville.

Turn back the clock 135 years, and the track was a straight line marked out with posts 200m apart – more of a fence-line than anything else.

Forget barriers and a starting gun, races started with a flag or cable raise to the applause of a crowd 150 people strong – hardly the thunderous sound of clapping and hooves that you hear today.

In the 1930s, the track was moved to its current location, but it wasn't until the early 1960s that it really took shape. Extra rails were added to the inside – becoming the Outback's answer to Flemington.

The track is 2000m in circumference with the longest race, the 1600m Birdsville Cup, starting in the back straight. Birdsville is still one of only four tracks in Queensland that runs anti-clockwise.

### What's in a name?

For almost 30 years, the central body responsible for the races has been called the Birdsville Race Club Incorporated, but it didn't always go by that moniker.

Over its 135 years, the club has had more name changes than historians can count, usually with a clue pointing to the town's interests of the time.

For example, it was once known as the 'Diamantina Amateur Race Club'. Then in 1990 the Birdsville Race Club took its present name – a name they hope to continue long into the future.

## THE KEY MILESTONES OVER 135 YEARS AT BIRDSVILLE

**1882** First race meet held at Birdsville (Bedouin wins the Border Handicap)

**1882** Border Jockey Club established

**1930s** Track relocated from the western side of town to current location

**1978** Sitting Prime Minister Hon. Malcolm Fraser attends the Birdsville Races

**1982** Brashleigh wins the Centenary Birdsville Cup

**1990** Club name changed to Birdsville Race Club

**1990s** Outside rail introduced

**1995** First and only live TV broadcast of the Birdsville Races

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### Yes, Prime Minister!

In the 50s and 60s, the Birdsville Races pulled an estimated crowd of around 1000 people, not bad considering the roadtrip to Birdsville took a lot longer with road conditions back then.

In the late 70s a Birdsville-boost came from the most unlikely of sources.

In 1978, the then sitting Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser made the pilgrimage to Birdsville and thrust the carnival into the national psyche.

The crowd grew exponentially over the next 15 years, cementing its reputation as a right of passage for Australians wanting to experience a true outback event.

These days, more than 6000 people attend the race and the event has achieved an unparalleled level of notoriety by remaining true to its roots.

For the past 135 years guests are guaranteed an unforgettable Outback experience in the western corner of Queensland.

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### Legends are made

In the early days you wouldn't have seen horses with country codes from Hong Kong, USA or New Zealand in the form guide. In fact, interstate entrants seemed unfathomable.

Most horses were born and bred in Outback Queensland, ridden by station jackaroos.

Former owner of the neighbouring property to Birdsville, Pandie Pandie Station, the late George Morton, trained five cup winners whilst local names such as Brunkhurst, Tully, Prow and Monaghan, appear regularly in the record books.

The most successful trainer of all time undoubtedly is the late George Dawson (see page 17) who took out seven titles between 1982 and 2000.

As the profile of the races has grown, the trainers and jockeys have come from further afield.

In 2013, all records were broken with over 249 nominations for the 13-race program (243 in 2010 was the previous record).

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### 'THE COMPETITION IN THE VARIOUS EVENTS WERE OF A HIGH STANDARD'

The Queenslander, 1882

### Birdsville today and tomorrow

Since the first race meet, this iconic day at the track has grown more than 4000 percent to what you see today.

The carnival now includes a 13-race program and boasts prize money of \$200,000.

The focus for the future is improving the facilities both trackside and in town, while still keeping the quintessential Birdsville Races atmosphere alive.

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### IMAGES

From Left to Right

1. Men drinking at the refreshment shed, 1920
2. Horse drawn vehicles and automobiles at the Race Meeting, 1920
3. The running of a race on Race Day at Birdsville, 1920
4. Race Day at Birdsville, 1926
5. A line of 'Returned Soldiers saluting the flag' at Birdsville
6. Malcolm Fraser having a beer in Birdsville, 1978
7. A jockey on board 'Silverton' winner of the 1939 Birdsville Cup
8. Horses gallop past the finishing post during the Birdsville Cup, 1990
9. Birdsville Cup, 1939

Images: National Library of Australia

### INTERESTING FACTS OF YESTERYEAR

- Professional riders carried a 7lb penalty.
- Special races were held for horses bred within 250 miles of Birdsville.
- Steeplechase races were programmed when racing was conducted on the old course three miles to the west of town.
- A bell was rung as horses left the enclosure and connections fined 10 shillings for horses not at the starting post within five minutes.
- Separate races were programmed for corn fed and grass fed horses.
- Due to the absence of a horse float, Star Ace, the 1970 winner, was trotted up the Birdsville Track beside the trainer's vehicle.
- Races were once started by the drop of a hat, later by strand barriers and now with barrier stalls.
- Unregistered horses were only allowed to start in Hack races.
- Prior to 1954, with exception of the cup, prize money was only paid for first and second placegetters.
- The cup distance has remained one mile or 1600 meters since the first race meet in 1882. In 1949 and 1950 the 'Hospital Handicap' (one mile) was run in lieu of the Cup. Meetings were held then to raise funds for the construction of the Birdsville Hospital.
- The annual race meeting now raises vital funds for the Royal Flying Doctor Service (read more page 24).

**2000** Trainer George Dawson wins his seventh Birdsville Cup

**2001** Tanya Parry becomes first female trainer to win the cup

**2003** Rebecca Kerwin becomes first female jockey to win the cup

**2007** Races called off for equine influenza

**2010** Birdsville Cup not run due to rain

**2016** Races postponed to Sunday due to rain

**2017** 135 year anniversary of the Birdsville Races

"PEOPLE ARE FRIENDLY HERE,  
PARLIAMENT IS LIKE A ZOO."

Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser at Birdsville, 1978.



Two female racegoers walking through the main street of Birdsville prior to race day, 1990



Benny Mitchell

## ARE YOU IN IT TO WIN IT?

*What the judges are looking for...*

### FOR THE LADIES

1. Style and originality.
2. Fashion with an edge – a 'stand-alone' look!
3. Being on 'trend', displaying this season's fashion statements.
4. Clever use of accessory coordination.
5. Appropriateness of outfit for a day at the races.  
Keeping in mind the spring racing season and colour will be key.
6. Attention to detail of hat, bag, jewellery, shoes.
7. Underwear showing or as part of an outfit is not correct race attire.
8. Impeccable grooming and deportment.

### FOR THE FELLAS

1. Style and originality.
2. Appropriateness of outfit for a day at the races.
3. Attention to detail of accessories.  
Accessories such as cufflinks, lapel flower, hat, and handkerchief should be considered.
4. Jacket optional, tie essential.

# STAYING ON TREND: BIRDSVILLE'S FASHIONS ON THE FIELD

In years gone by, Fashions on the Field were a somewhat secret affair in Birdsville, with undercover judges scouring the crowd for something that took their fancy.

These days it's as much about fascinators as it is form guides, and you'll need to do more than just dust off your RM's, Akubra and best flannel shirt to be crowned Birdsville's best dressed.

It's hotly contended and at times, draws a bigger crowd than the one gravitating towards the track.

Birdsville Race Club Secretary and Fashions on the Field Coordinator Olivia O'Neill, says each year the quality of entrants is improving.

"What the judges are looking for is a little city inspiration with some outback class," says Olivia.

"It's a unique time of year to host races, and while it's so warm, we're usually looking for a spring look."

For those keen to make more of a statement with their attire, there's always the novelty prize.

"It's for those who might come in a group and dress up for fun. Some folks have a theme for their whole trip and drive from Brisbane, Sydney or Melbourne in their get up" Olivia says.

Sally Dingo



# KEEPING IT IN THE FAMILY

**D**avid Brook and his family are a cornerstone of not just the Birdsville Races, but the town of Birdsville itself.

As long-time cattle farmers and owners of the iconic Birdsville pub, their connection to the western corner of Queensland is as deep as the channels you find here, and goes back generations.

“On my mum’s side, our connection to Birdsville goes all the way back to the 1880s,” says David.

“The first race meeting I remember attending at Birdsville though was in 1957. My dad had a horse called Mookadee, which ran third.

“That was my last year at school in Birdsville and in those days there were probably only 150-200 people at the races.”

David has acted as either Birdsville Race Club President or Secretary for almost 40 years, but his pathway into the role wasn’t entirely by choice.

“My uncle Bob was the president of the Birdsville Race Club for many years and one day I remember he was leaving town and handed me a leather bag with all the Race Club documents in it.

“He said “you’d better hold onto this” – and that’s how I got the job.

“I’ve since tried to hand the bag onto my son Gary, but he wouldn’t take it,” laughs David.

Gary Brook is currently Vice-President of the Birdsville Race Club, and says putting on the event is truly a family affair.

“Grandad, Dad, Mum and of course my brothers and sisters have all been involved over the years and I think it’s something we would always like to be involved with.

“Dad has been President of the Race Club for quite a few years, but my mum Nell also held the position for about 5 years, and still continues to play a big role to this day.

“The races don’t just play an important role in our (The Brook Family) lives, they’re important for the community as well” says Gary.

The next generation of help has also arrived, with Gary and his wife Sherri giving birth to their first child Henry in January 2017.

While he’s too small to hold the bag just yet, he has a promising future.

“He’s already got the horse racing blood in him. He’s only six months old and he’s been to six or seven different race tracks. This year will be his first time at Birdsville, so he doesn’t have much chance not being involved in it” Gary says.

While the Brook family have played a key role in growing the quality and profile of the races at Birdsville, they say the races would never happen without the rest of the community chipping in.

“This event truly couldn’t happen without the amazing people who turn up every year without fail and help out.”

“In my time, the BRC has been fortunate to have families such as Morton, Gaffney, Evans and many others as long standing committee members. It really has been a team effort.”

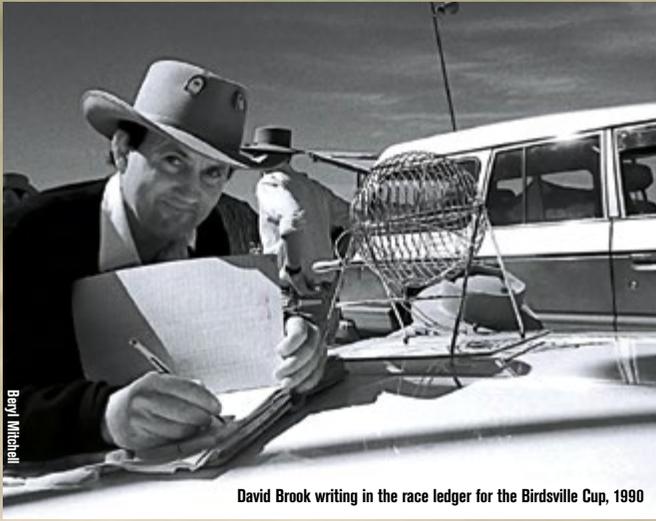
“In Birdsville, we’re all a big family. Every year is a reunion. Everyone is welcome and we try to make them as comfortable as possible,” says David.

“We spend most of the year preparing for the races. So do the other towns around Birdsville because the event has a big flow on effect with those towns, and many have events to coincide with the weekend.”

When asked about the future of racing in Birdsville, David says there’s more change to come.

“As time goes on, I think we’ll see the bush trainers slowly fade away. Not everyone is comfortable camping out in a swag.

“Our focus is looking after the people who make the effort to come out every year and keep improving the facilities bit by bit every year.”



David Brook writing in the race ledger for the Birdsville Cup, 1990



Gary, Nell and David in 2016

Sally Dunlop

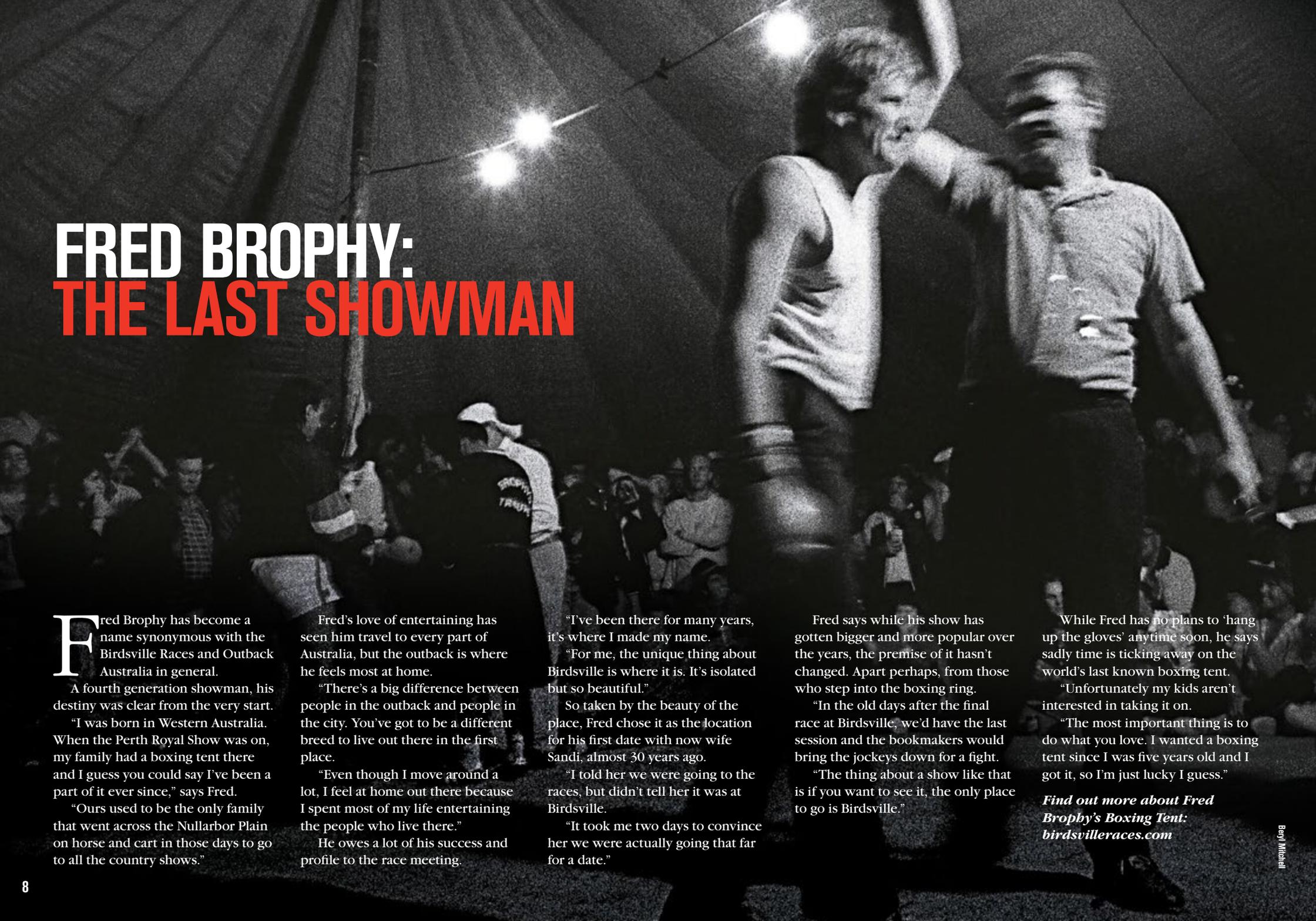




"EVEN THOUGH WE STARTED FROM SUCH HUMBLE BEGINNINGS, TODAY PEOPLE COME FROM FAR AND WIDE FOR THE RACES. IN RECENT YEARS WE'VE HAD INTEREST FROM AS FAR AS INDIA, CHINA AND THE MIDDLE EAST FOR OUR RACE, WHICH BODES WELL FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR RACES"

Birdsville Race Club





# FRED BROPHY: THE LAST SHOWMAN

**F**red Brophy has become a name synonymous with the Birdsville Races and Outback Australia in general.

A fourth generation showman, his destiny was clear from the very start.

“I was born in Western Australia. When the Perth Royal Show was on, my family had a boxing tent there and I guess you could say I’ve been a part of it ever since,” says Fred.

“Ours used to be the only family that went across the Nullarbor Plain on horse and cart in those days to go to all the country shows.”

Fred’s love of entertaining has seen him travel to every part of Australia, but the outback is where he feels most at home.

“There’s a big difference between people in the outback and people in the city. You’ve got to be a different breed to live out there in the first place.

“Even though I move around a lot, I feel at home out there because I spent most of my life entertaining the people who live there.”

He owes a lot of his success and profile to the race meeting.

“I’ve been there for many years, it’s where I made my name.

“For me, the unique thing about Birdsville is where it is. It’s isolated but so beautiful.”

So taken by the beauty of the place, Fred chose it as the location for his first date with now wife Sandi, almost 30 years ago.

“I told her we were going to the races, but didn’t tell her it was at Birdsville.

“It took me two days to convince her we were actually going that far for a date.”

Fred says while his show has gotten bigger and more popular over the years, the premise of it hasn’t changed. Apart perhaps, from those who step into the boxing ring.

“In the old days after the final race at Birdsville, we’d have the last session and the bookmakers would bring the jockeys down for a fight.

“The thing about a show like that is if you want to see it, the only place to go is Birdsville.”

While Fred has no plans to ‘hang up the gloves’ anytime soon, he says sadly time is ticking away on the world’s last known boxing tent.

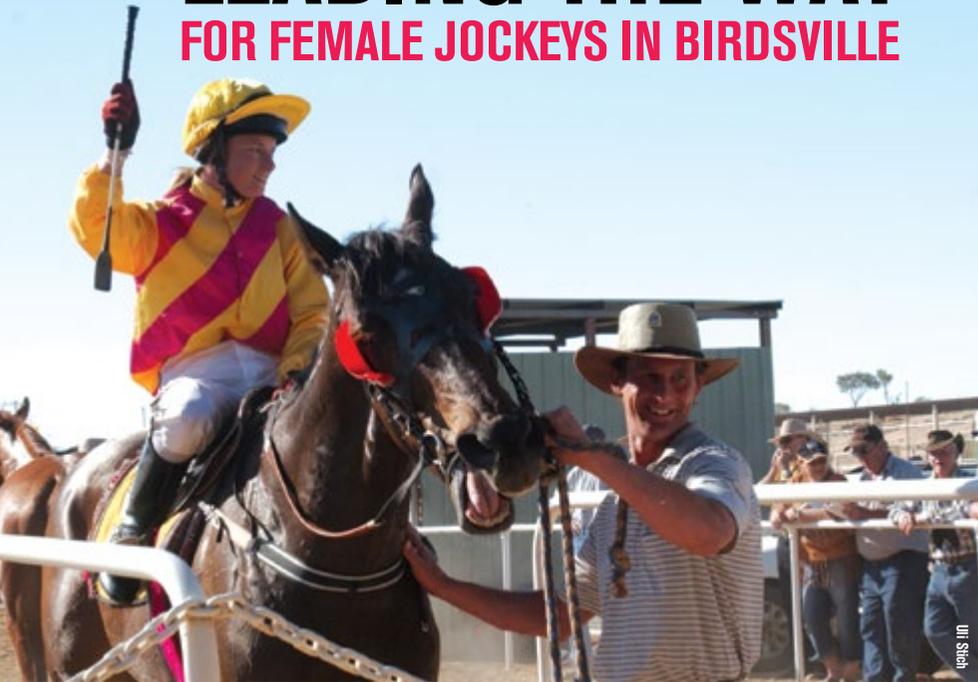
“Unfortunately my kids aren’t interested in taking it on.

“The most important thing is to do what you love. I wanted a boxing tent since I was five years old and I got it, so I’m just lucky I guess.”

**Find out more about Fred Brophy’s Boxing Tent:**  
[birdsvillerraces.com](http://birdsvillerraces.com)

# LEADING THE WAY

## FOR FEMALE JOCKEYS IN BIRDSVILLE



If you want to know how tough winning a Birdsville Cup can be, just ask Rebecca (Bec) Kerwin.

She rates her winning ride on Marauding Lass in 2003 as one of the toughest in her career.

"I always wanted to try and win the Birdsville Cup and I never thought I'd actually get it," says Bec.

"I just remember the other riders being really tough, it was quite dry out there that weekend, but I'd had some success with the horse in Toowoomba.

"I think she was the oldest mare in the race, she was tough, a bigger horse, and I knew I had to go early, as it can get quite tough on the way out."

Despite becoming the first female jockey to win the Birdsville Cup, she didn't know about her historic effort until well after the race.

"Birdsville Race Club President David Brook told me well after the race was finished, until then I had no idea."

"It means a lot because it created history. It wasn't the reason I went to race there, but it's nice" she said.

### TOP TIPS FOR RIDING A WINNER AT BIRDSVILLE

1. Be prepared for anything
2. Walk the track
3. Stick to your routine
4. Stay strong and don't get intimidated
5. Get to the front early



# THE WINNERS CIRCLE IN BIRDSVILLE OVER 135 YEARS



Jockey Rick Carter places the winner's rug over the Birdsville Cup winning horse 'Autorotate', 1990

Beryl Mitchell

YEAR	HORSE NAME	JOCKEY	TRAINER
1882	<i>Bedouin</i>	J.Williams	W & W Hood
1938	<i>Bulka Blue</i>	Not known	Not known
1939	<i>Silverton</i>	Not known	Not known
1940	<i>Scholar Sands</i>	Not known	Not known
1942	<i>Cazna Queen</i>	W.E.Brook	Not known
1948	<i>Silent March</i>	Not known	Not known
1949	<i>Shadow</i>	Not known	Not known
1950	<i>Moon Gem</i>	Not known	Not known
1957	<i>Estacardo</i>	Not known	Not known
1966	<i>Rifle</i>	N.Smith	G.V.Morton
1967	<i>Taiipo</i>	N.Smith	G.V.Morton
1968	<i>Nizams Trouble</i>	N.Smith	H.S.Weston
1969	<i>Dusty Kaa</i>	J.Kavanagh	G.V.Morton
1970	<i>Star Ace</i>	I.Bright	H.Grantham
1971	<i>Felix Star</i>	R.Baker	H.Grantham
1972	<i>Compositor</i>	N.Richards	A.E. Richards
1973	<i>Goddess of Flame</i>	N.Richards	R.J. McCullagh
1974	<i>Todland</i>	B.Green	B.Green
1975	<i>Lord Action</i>	N.Richards	A.E. Richards
1976	<i>Landbridge</i>	R.Henger	R.Gage

YEAR	HORSE NAME	JOCKEY	TRAINER
1977	<i>Januant</i>	J.Kavanagh	E.F.Brunkhurst
1978	<i>Val Jobn</i>	R.Bathcelor	C.G.Tully
1979	<i>Horaney</i>	J.Cornwell	R.Hawkswell
1980	<i>Hong Kong Flyer</i>	D.Brady	J.E. Officen
1981	<i>Rough Osier</i>	N.Richards	R.J. MacCrae
1982	<i>Brasbleigh</i>	R.Barone	G.Dawson
1983	<i>Brasbleigh</i>	R.Barone	G.Dawson
1984	<i>Bob 'N' Bob</i>	S.Sestich	G.Dawson
1985	<i>Regent Court</i>	I.Collie	G.V. Morton
1986	<i>Young Aloe</i>	C.Prow	C.Prow
1987	<i>Pegunny Road</i>	D.Welch	R.J. MacCrae
1988	<i>Lord Kildare</i>	L.Richards	G.W. Schrader
1989	<i>The Grinder</i>	R.Locke	D.J. Lawlor
1990	<i>Autorotate</i>	E.Carter	G.V. Morton
1991	<i>Boucher Boy</i>	R.Godfrey	G.Dawson
1992	<i>Top Master</i>	R.Graveson	G.Dawson
1993	<i>Engrossing</i>	B.Johnstone	S.M. Clarke
1994	<i>Salluc</i>	S.Hetherington	H.M. McGuckin
1995	<i>Snedden</i>	D.Williams	N.Peoples
1996	<i>Snedden</i>	D.Adam	N.Peoples

YEAR	HORSE NAME	JOCKEY	TRAINER
1997	<i>Pensami</i>	D.Monaghan	G.Dawson
1998	<i>Dry 'N' Sober</i>	P.Denton	K.Rogerson
1999	<i>Amirreb</i>	D.Monaghan	R.Robb
2000	<i>Dimurta</i>	T.Norton	G.Dawson
2001	<i>You Call Me</i>	R.Hammond	T.Parry
2002	<i>Boyarin</i>	W.Orbell	R.Simpson
2003	<i>Marauding Lass</i>	R.Kerwin	M.Flanigan
2004	<i>Vain Joe</i>	L.Critoph	R.Herman
2005	<i>Monee Lane</i>	C.Maund	J.Dixon
2006	<i>Monee Lane</i>	M.Tarrant	J.Dixon
2007	<i>Races cancelled due to equine influenza</i>		
2008	<i>Evading</i>	D.Rewald	C.Prow
2009	<i>Equitant</i>	K.Ballard	R.Simpson
2010	<i>Birdsville Cup not run due to overnight rain and state of track</i>		
2011	<i>Just a Touch</i>	G.Geran	J.Morris
2012	<i>Dancefloor Prodigy</i>	G.Geran	C.Smith
2013	<i>Primed</i>	S.Egan	T.Austin
2014	<i>Lucasam</i>	R.Sue-San	R.Simpson
2015	<i>Iron Meteorite</i>	K.Nestor	J.Morris
2016	<i>Moore Alpha</i>	K.Cross	H.Lehmann

## FROM ROYAL ASCOT TO BIRDSVILLE: RACING ROYALTY CALLS OUTBACK QUEENSLAND HOME

Peter Moody has trained Group One winners all over the world, but for the legendary former trainer of Black Caviar, Birdsville feels like home.

“Having grown up in western Queensland, I’d always known how iconic it was. I’d listened to the stories for almost 30 years but never actually got to experience the Birdsville Races,” says Peter.

“The first time I went there, the experience was just overwhelming. It was a homecoming of sorts.”

Peter has been back a few times since and says it’s the people that make the event so special.

“I think the fact the Birdsville Races draws folks from all walks of life is unique, but everyone feels welcome. I mean, the people from the bush are what makes it.

“It’s not just a race meeting, it’s a full-blown event. For me it was a real bucket list to come out here for it.”

Having left training last year, the full-time horse owner has his eye on a Birdsville Cup race win.

“I might have a couple runners this year, but I’m still looking for the right horse to win a Cup here,” says Peter.

“It’s got to be a hard, tough campaigner that can cope with the challenging conditions.”

Keep an eye on his famous blue and white colours around the Birdsville track.



# INSIDER'S GUIDE: HOW TO WIN THE BIRDSVILLE CUP

**W**inning a race that's 1600m long, defined by a hard track, and more than 2,100km away from the hallowed turf of Flemington involves so much more than just racing a horse in circles.

We sat down with three-time Birdsville Cup winning trainer Richard Simpson to find out what it takes to race a winner at the 'race that stops the outback'.

**Q: What's the first thing you think about when planning to race a horse in the Birdsville Cup?**

**A:** The first thing is getting there. When I first went in 2000, I thought it'd be a lot easier to get there than it actually was. I didn't realise how much preparation would be required.

**Q: What else do people underestimate about running at Birdsville?**

**A:** Just how bloody tough it is to race there. I've always heard it was the ultimate outback race track. When I turned up for the first time I was in for a shock. The horses came from South Australia, the Northern Territory and Victoria, good horses. I had to go away and come back, better prepared.

**Q: What kind of horse is best at Birdsville?**

**A:** It needs to be tough as nails. Mentally tough, physically tough and it probably helps to have an experienced jockey (who is also tough) riding as well. I bought a horse out from Hong Kong one year and it just got flogged. A fly landed on him and he almost had a heart attack.

**Q: What's your most memorable win at Birdsville?**

**A:** It would have to be Equitant in 2009. I think I had the oldest horse and the oldest jockey in that race, but it was the craftiest ride. He never left the fence and it was brilliant. It's easily one of the most unforgettable wins I've ever had.

**Q: What makes the Birdsville Races unique for you?**

**A:** I think it's the process of what you have to go through to get there. I think it's the pain that you go through. It's a place you just can't go in underdone because you'll get wasted away.

# MEET THE CHARACTERS WHO BRING THE RACES TO LIFE



## **The Bookie, Graham Saunders**

Mt Isa Bookie Graham Saunders hasn't missed a Birdsville Cup since 1985.

"It's my 32nd berth this year. I'll never forget the first time I came to the Birdsville Races until I turn 100," says Graham.

"It was mind blowing, planes everywhere, buses, people all over the place, you had to see it to believe it.

"It's just a good old fashioned country carnival."

Graham says betting at Birdsville has certainly changed over the years, as technology and infrastructure at the track improves.

"I remember in the old days; they used to have one payphone and you'd cue up with your 20 cents to get information on a horse and form a market.

"When I first started, we'd all be flipping through the Australian racing calendar. You'd all sit around for a couple of weeks, going through the books."

When Graham and his family aren't taking bets on a Cup winner, they're running one of their own.

"Everyone wants to win the Birdsville Cup, it's iconic. We've been lucky enough to win a couple.

"We've also won at the Magic Millions, but we got a bigger thrill out of winning the Birdsville Cup" he says.

## **The Caller, Josh Fleming**

Josh Fleming spent his spare time as a kid in the backyard calling phantom race meets into a tape recorder; and at just 14 years of age he got a chance to call his first Birdsville Cup.

"I remember people looking up thinking, is this a gimmick? But for a 14-year-old kid, I did ok. I'd be in trouble if I hadn't improved since then though," laughs Josh.

Josh says he owes his career as a race caller to steward John Wallis.

"I wouldn't have what I have today without him."

Josh has been coming back to call the races at Birdsville for years and says it can present some unique challenges.

"If it's a still day and the dust then decides to pick up, it can be very hard to see the horses.

"You just have to learn the colours, concentrate and work hard. The more races you call, the better you do.

"I'm aiming to call my 15th Birdsville Cup this year and barring absolute catastrophe, I'll be there."

## **The Starter, Larry Lewis**

A firefighter from Dalby walks into Birdsville and becomes the starter at the Birdsville Races.

It's not the start of a joke, but the story of Larry Lewis who's been starting the races for a quarter of a century.

"Birdsville Race Club President David Brook was asking the senior steward at the time who he'd recommend, and I'd started one or two country meets, so got the nod," says Larry.

"I've been coming back ever since - haven't missed one for 26 years."

Larry says he always has to be on the ball, because at Birdsville, trainers and owners have often travelled more than a 1000kms to get there.

Larry says the racing has improved a lot over the years, which makes his job a little easier.

"My main concern is just keeping everyone safe. That can mean our own racing club volunteers, the jockeys and the horses too" he says.



"THOUGH THE DIVIDEND  
YOU DREAM OF IS A  
FIGMENT OF YOUR ZEAL  
NO - YOU'LL LOSE MORE  
THAN YOU WIN IN THAT  
ENDEAVOUR

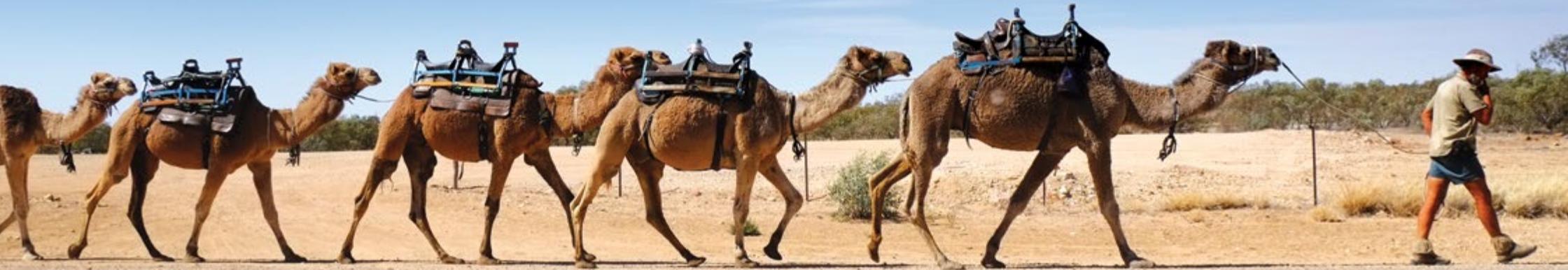
THE SPIRIT OF THIS  
SPECIAL RACE IS  
SOMETHING VERY REAL  
AND THE PRIDE OF  
BIRDSVILLE STAYS  
WITH YOU FOREVER"

- 'The Pride of Birdsville'  
by Rupert McCall

# AFTER THE LAST CALL

The Birdsville Cup might be Outback Queensland's most coveted race meet, but when it comes to choosing other things to do, this region is no one-trick pony.

There're plenty of ways to make the most of your drive through the dust to get here and add more action to your race weekend.



## 1. TAKE PART IN THE BIRDSVILLE RACES RFDS FUN RUN

HELD THE WEDNESDAY BEFORE THE BIRDSVILLE RACES

Throw your support behind the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) by lacing up your runners in the annual RFDS Birdsville Races Fun Run. Up for grabs is a sizeable prize pool for runners who tackle the 6.1km course. Don't worry if you're more interested in a leisurely stroll, novices are welcome too.

## 2. GET YOUR NIPPERS ON A WINNER AT THE WINDORAH YABBY RACES

HELD THE WEDNESDAY BEFORE THE BIRDSVILLE RACES

If you're heading out to Birdsville early, why not have a flutter of a different kind by backing a winner in the Windorah International Yabby Races. You can even buy and name your own crafty crustacean at auction on your way to winning 'The Cooper Cup.' The Windorah Yabby Races are held on the main street in front of the Western Star Hotel.

## 3. TRY A CURRIED CAMEL PIE

Let the Birdsville Bakery prove that they bake things better in the outback. Their signature pastry parcel is the curried camel pie, but for those with less adventurous taste buds, classics like pepper steak and kangaroo and claret also pack a punch. Over race weekend, the bakery will be open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Oh, and did we mention it's the only licenced bakery in the outback?

## 4. COME OUT SWINGING AT THE WORLD'S LAST BOXING TENT

FROM THURSDAY NIGHT OF RACE WEEK

Fred Brophy is the last boxing tent showman in the world and he lights up the night at the Birdsville Races with fights of all levels. Fred is truly one of Australia's greatest entertainers and his nightly shows, opposite the Birdsville Hotel, are a must for all visitors.

## 5. VISIT THE PIPPAGITTA WATERHOLE

If you thought Birdsville was just red dirt, think again. Experience the Pippagitta Waterhole, a natural oasis in the Diamantina Shire. Take a day trip to this refreshing swimming hole, when you want to escape the cloud of dust for a dip. We guarantee your only company will be the prolific birdlife.

## 6. KNOCK BACK A COLDIE AT AN ICON

It wouldn't be a trip to Birdsville without stopping for a beer at the iconic Birdsville Hotel (read more page 21). This pub draws all types – and has hats on the ceiling to prove it. It's the kind of place you could rub shoulders with a millionaire or a jackaroo, and you wouldn't know the difference. It's been Queensland's most south-western pub since 1884, so grab a spot on the verandah and take in the scenery. Did we mention you can park your plane right out the front?

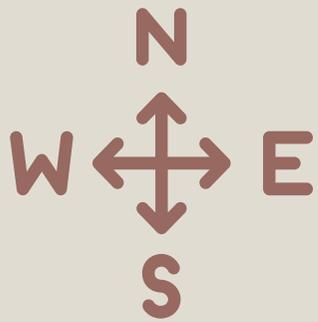
## 7. VISIT BIG RED

Big Red is an unmissable landmark in the Diamantina Shire, located about 35kms out of Birdsville. Standing at 40 metres high, this world famous sand dune makes the perfect spot for a champagne at sunset or a mighty challenge for budding 4wd enthusiasts. Bring your camera!

## 8. NOT DONE WITH THE RACES? HEAD TO BEDOURIE

THE WEEKEND AFTER THE BIRDSVILLE RACES

If your weekend of racing at Birdsville has finished, but you aren't done with the Simpson Desert Racing Carnival, then head to Bedourie for the famed Bedourie Races. The event includes a Friday evening rodeo, Saturday races and guaranteed entertainment all weekend.



ALICE SPRINGS 1852 KM  
MT ISA 685 KM  
BRISBANE 1579 KM  
ADELAIDE 1168 KM  
SYDNEY 1937 KM  
MELBOURNE 2159 KM

# A TASTE OF THE OUTBACK

Enjoy the flavours of Birdsville long after you head home with these family favourites – tried, tested and much loved by Birdsville locals.

## MULLIGAN STEAK

*Courtesy of Rhonda Heslin*

### What you need:

- 2 kg topside steak (sliced and fat removed)
- 3 tbs mustard
- 3 tbs brown sugar
- 2 tbs plain flour
- Salt and pepper
- 2 small or 1 large onion (sliced thinly)

### SAUCE:

- 1 cup tomato sauce
- 1/4 cup soy sauce
- 2 tbs tomato paste
- 2 tsp beef stock powder
- 1 cup hot water

### How to make it:

1. Throw the mustard and brown sugar into a freezer bag.
2. Add steak to the bag, give it a good shake to rub in the seasoning.
3. In a second bag, whack in the flour, salt and pepper.
4. Pour the steak from first bag into second bag. Toss it around to dust with flour.
5. Throw together all the sauce ingredients in a medium size camp oven, and give it a good stir.
6. Lay the steak into the camp oven with the onion.
7. Put the lid on the campoven, and fire up the coals.
8. Stir every 20 to 30 minutes, keeping it on a steady heat for about 2 hours.
9. Serve your Mulligan Steak with some veggies and a nice warm damper.

## OBE SPECIAL SPARE RIBS

*Courtesy of Olivia O'Neill*

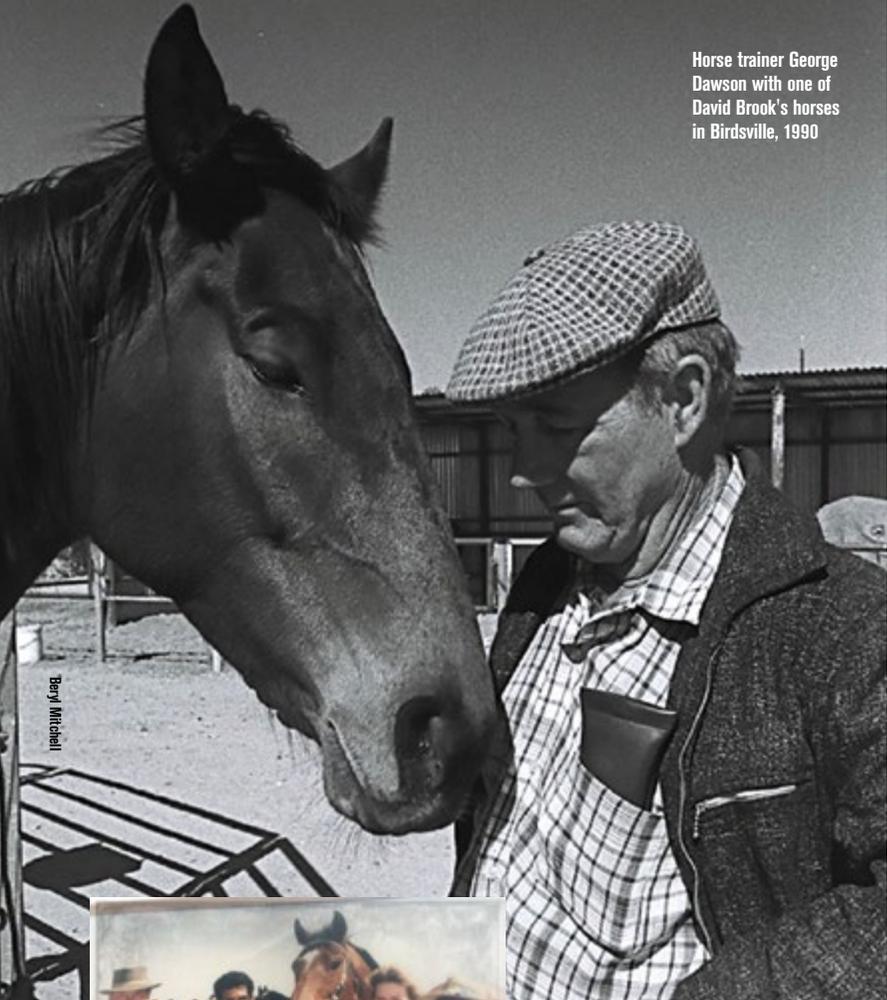
### What you need:

- 1 packet of OBE spare ribs (to make 6-8 ribs)
- 1 cup of Worcestershire Sauce
- 1 cup of Tomato Sauce
- 1 cup of Barbeque Sauce
- 2 tbs of Sweet Chilli Sauce
- 1 cup of water

### How to make it:

1. Chop the ribs into individual pieces.
2. Mix all the sauces in a bowl.
3. Use your hands to rub the sauce all over the ribs.
4. Marinate the ribs for as long as you can, a minimum of 40 minutes will produce tasty results – but the longer the better!
5. Pour ribs and sauce into a pressure cooker and add a cup of water.
6. Bring ribs to pressure, once reached, turn the cooker down to a medium heat for 40 minutes.
7. Once 40 minutes is up, release pressure and check your ribs. Ribs should be very tender and falling off the bone.
8. If they are still a bit tough put them back on pressure for another 10 minutes.
9. Serve with mash and vege, adding some of the leftover sauce as a dressing.

**Enjoy!**

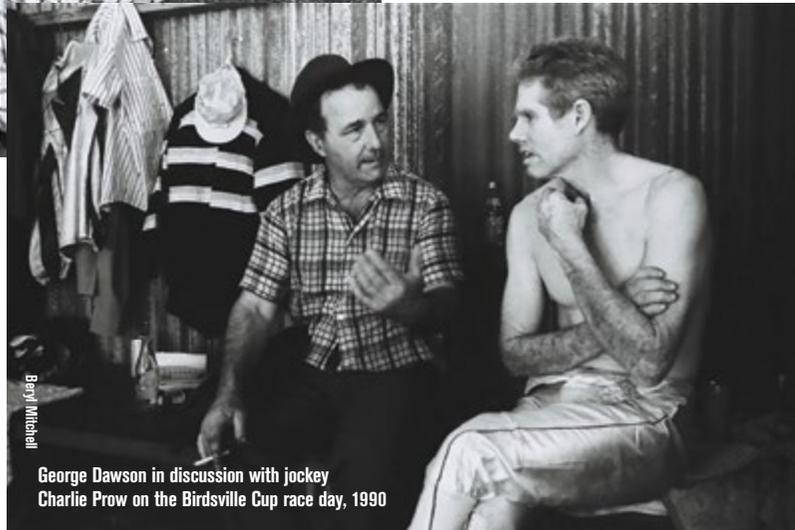


Horse trainer George Dawson with one of David Brook's horses in Birdsville, 1990

Beryl Mitchell



Dawson Family



Beryl Mitchell

George Dawson in discussion with jockey Charlie Prow on the Birdsville Cup race day, 1990

# HUMBLE GEORGE:

## THE LEGACY OF A BIRDSVILLE RACES LEGEND

Birdsville remembers George 'Grumpy' Dawson (1934-2012)

When you have a yarn to people about the most successful horse trainer in Birdsville Race Club history, one name stands above them all – George 'Grumpy' Dawson.

Not that he would have wanted it to be that way, says daughter Cindy Monaghan.

"He didn't like to be in the limelight, he was a bit of a bushie, always pushed someone else to do the interviews," says Cindy.

"I know he got a bigger thrill out of seeing the owners happy than actually winning the race for himself."

Despite his humble nature, his success at the track is undeniable. George Dawson holds the record for the most wins in the Birdsville Cup with seven (1982, 1983, 1984, 1991, 1992, 1997, 2000) titles.

"Dad always said you can't take any horse to Birdsville. The ideal horse is tough, relaxed, can travel in testing conditions and is a good eater.

"It has to run a good strong 1600 metres and also be able to handle the dirt track, not get bothered when there's dirt flying in its face."

Cindy says travelling to Birdsville with her parents became a rite of passage in their family.

"We'd go up there a couple of weeks prior, so the horses could settle after the trip up to Birdsville from South Australia.

"I remember staying with friends along the way and the long haul up the Birdsville Track. They were great memories."

Cindy remembers her dad as a quiet guy, who was very direct.

"Everyone used to call him Grumpy, he had that on the front of his truck. But he also had a great sense of humour and loved to play jokes on people.

"Dad wasn't much of a sleeper, so he'd wait up and put a bucket of water on top of people's bedroom door, so when they opened it they'd get soaked," laughs Cindy.

While Cindy is a horse trainer in her own right, there's a new generation hoping to keep the Dawson name among the winners circle in Birdsville.

George's grandson Ryan aims to have his first runner in the Birdsville Cup this year with Eye The World.

"I've taken on his colours as mine now, they're royal blue and gold hoops with pink sleeves," says Ryan.

"It would really make me proud if I was able to go up there and do something that Pop has done."

Regardless of whether Ryan secures a win in 2017, Birdsville will always have a special place for the Dawson family.

"After Pop passed away in 2012, we spread his and Nanna's ashes on the track at Birdsville so he'll always be there, where he loved racing."

### Grumpy's winning streak:

YEAR	HORSE NAME	JOCKEY	TRAINER
1982	<i>Brasbleigh</i>	R.Barone	G.Dawson
1983	<i>Brasbleigh</i>	R.Barone	G.Dawson
1984	<i>Bob 'N' Bob</i>	S.Sestich	G.Dawson
1991	<i>Topcher Boy</i>	R.Godfrey	G.Dawson
1992	<i>Top Master</i>	R.Graveson	G.Dawson
1997	<i>Pensami</i>	D.Monaghan	G.Dawson
2000	<i>Dimurta</i>	T.Norton	G.Dawson



Fast Track Photography

**PHOTO 1:  
OUT OF THE GATE**  
**THE SPECS:** Nikon D700.  
 24-70mm lens. Aperture  
 F11, Shutter Speed  
 1/2500, ISO 640  
**SHARON'S TIP:** Focus  
 the lens a few metres  
 from the gate so you  
 catch the horses in time!  
 Oh, and you'll want a  
 shutter speed faster than  
 Makybe Diva.

## SHARON'S TOP 5 PHOTO TIPS

1. Avoid the pack (if you see everyone together, go somewhere else)
2. Take a risk (try shots you've never tried before, out of every 10 you might get 1 pearly)
3. Capture the iconic elements (signage, no rail, outback landscapes)
4. Make every image tell a story (think about the story before you press the shutter)
5. Use different lenses to capture different stories (tight shot might work for the jockey, wide shot shows the context and the landscape)

**PHOTO 2:  
AROUND THE BEND**  
**THE SPECS:** Nikon  
 D3s. 300mm fixed lens.  
 Aperture 1/2500, ISO 500  
**SHARON'S TIP:** Keep the  
 camera nice and still by  
 using a tripod. There is  
 lots of movement as the  
 dust mushrooms, so you'll  
 need to be steady to  
 capture it.



Fast Track Photography

# CAPTURING HISTORY:

## YOUR GUIDE TO PHOTOGRAPHING THE ICONIC BIRDSVILLE RACES

**E**ver wondered how those iconic photos of the Birdsville Races are taken? We sat down with one of the world's best racing photographers, Sharon Chapman, to find out why photographing Birdsville is so special.

Sharon Chapman has been taking photos for most of her life, but says nothing compares to capturing the atmosphere at Birdsville Races.

"It's Disneyland for racing enthusiasts and anyone who likes adventure and the outback,' she says.

Sharon would know, she's photographed prestigious races around the globe and some of her images (inset) have been featured in Sports Illustrated magazine.

She says taking a photo at Birdsville is always special.

"Every time you press the shutter you don't want to waste a single shot, as you've travelled so far to get there.

"For me it's been a life changing experience heading out there."

## PHOTO 3: COMING HOME QUICK

**THE SPECS:** Nikon  
 D3s. 300mm fixed lens.  
 Aperture 1/2500. ISO 500.  
**SHARON'S TIP:** Try and  
 get as close to the action  
 as possible to take this  
 shot. Everyone will be  
 focussing on the start of  
 the race, so you'll be able  
 to secure a spot near the  
 finish line.



Fast Track Photography



ON BEHALF OF THE  
TOWN OF BIRDSVILLE,  
WE HOPE YOU ENJOY  
YOUR STAY

Birdsville Race Club

# WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO RUN THE RACES?



The sign as you arrive into Birdsville says it all.

**'BIRDSVILLE POPULATION 100,  
EXCEPT FOR ONE WEEKEND OF THE YEAR.'**

All it takes is an outback race meet for the tiny town of Birdsville, which usually sits around 100 people to swell to more than 6000 people for one weekend in September.

But a transformation of these proportions, wouldn't be possible to run an event that size without outside help.

It's Callum Boase's job to organise the volunteers at Birdsville.

"We have a big range of volunteers from 18 to 80 years of age, and they come from everywhere, including overseas," says Callum.

"It's a great opportunity to get behind the scenes access to one of Australia's most iconic race events."

"In general, for quite a big job, it's quite relaxed. You've got your shifts, and everyone is just so friendly and having a good time."

Malcolm Pridham and his team of volunteers from National Australia Bank have been lending a helping hand for 12 years.

"At NAB we get two days volunteer leave a year, to help in the community, and coming to Birdsville to help is a popular way to use it," says Malcolm.

"It usually varies between 16 and 18 volunteers, we start canvassing about June/July and then pack up in late August and head off.

"We man the gates and we help out in the secretary's office. Serve the food at the marquee and help with the food and beverage.

**"WE ALL THOROUGHLY ENJOY THE JOURNEY UP THE BIRDSVILLE TRACK AND HELPING OUT WHEN WE GET THERE."**

It takes around 70 volunteers and countless hours of hard work to bring the races to life each year.



The NAB volunteer team

# THE BIRDSVILLE HOTEL

The Birdsville Hotel is the kind of place that sits atop many a bucket list – and not just because its refreshments come served with a side of Outback hospitality.

Not only does the Birdsville Hotel date back to 1884, it's the last watering hole before the Simpson Desert, which makes this quintessential Queensland as iconic for its location as its architecture.

While people come for the history, they stay for the atmosphere, which race day or otherwise, makes this pub so iconic.

While the outside temperatures have been known to soar, within the inner sanctum of this pub's solid stone walls, the beers are always icy cold.

They haven't always been that way though – early stories tell of the days before refrigeration when beer would be poured in a saucer and you'd have to blow on it to cool it down (and keep the flies away!).

But that's all part of the charm of this bar, which wears its history on its sleeve (and evidently its walls).

Everything about the Birdsville Hotel is imbued with the spirit and character of the Outback – with the walls to prove it, covered with stories, signs, photos, paintings, trophies, and all sorts of oddities.

Open everyday from noon.  
[birdsvillehotel.com.au](http://birdsvillehotel.com.au)

## ONE FOR THE BUCKET LIST

... walking into the Birdsville Hotel for the first time is magical. For a moment you feel you are part of history. The character, warmth and ambiance of this iconic pub is pure outback. Isn't having beer in the front bar of the Birdsville Hotel on everyone's bucket list?

*Naomi, First time visitor to Birdsville.*



**If walls could talk, the Birdsville Hotel would have a tale or two to tell. Lucky for visitors, some walls do talk, that is, when if you know what to look for.**

**Play I-spy with these icons at this famous Outback watering hole:**

### The 'hat walls'

It's hard to miss the iconic hats hanging on the wall. They belong to people who have lived, done the hard yards and gone above and beyond in the Birdsville community for more than a year. But don't just expect to hang your fascinator up this race weekend. To earn a space on this wall-of-fame, you are invited to hang your hat by management as a sign of the hotel's respect and you need to call postcode 4482 home for more than 12 months.

### Old Event Flags

Birdsville's history can be told by the flags on the wall here. Keep your eyes peeled for the banner used when equine flu led to the cancellation of the Birdsville Races: 'Who needs horses? Let's party!'

### Witty One Liners

It's someone's job each day to write something on the chalkboards to make the bar laugh, like this one: 'Man was given a sense of humour to compensate for Nature's law of gravity'.

### Licence plates

From the army who have passed through town.

### A Birdsville Races Countdown

Adjusted down each day, until the days are whittled back to 1.

SPONSORED

135 YEARS BIRDSVILLE RACES

21



A FOCUSED KAYLA CROSS,  
WINNING JOCKEY OF THE  
2016 BIRDSVILLE CUP

# MOMENTS THAT STOPPED THE RACES IN THEIR TRACKS



"THE DIAMANTINA IS FLOODING SO BADLY NEAR BIRDSVILLE THAT MR. HARRY DING, MAIL CONTRACTOR ON THE MARREE-BIRDSVILLE RUN, IS SENDING AN OUTBOARD MOTOR BOAT ON THE MAIL CAR ON ITS NEXT RUN."

The Recorder Newspaper, March 1940.

**A**s far as records show, the Birdsville Races have only been stopped three times in its 135 year history. In 2007, the race meet had to be called off due to the outbreak of equine influenza in Australia.

In 2010, the day's racing (Cup Day) had to be abandoned due to torrential rain on the Friday.

Last year, the races were postponed until Sunday due to rain, (see photos) and a bumper 11 race program was run with Moore Alpha creating history as the first all

female trainer/jockey combination to take out the Birdsville Cup.

In the late 50s and early 60s it is believed some race meets at Birdsville were postponed due to the drought.

Records show the races still ran intermittently during World War One and Two, with winners photographed at Birdsville in 1920, 1938, 1939 and 1940.

**Fun fact:** This photo was taken 48 hours before the photo on page 7. It was a Birdsville miracle (and lots of hard work), that the track was cleared for the Sunday races.



Sally Ding

## WHAT CAUSES BIRDSVILLE TO FLOOD?

Birdsville may be surrounded by sand dunes and desert, but as the saying goes, when it rains, it pours.

Generally, every three to five years, the Diamantina River will burst its banks cutting off all access into Birdsville.

In 1940, the flooding was so bad, the river reportedly became 27 miles (43 km) wide.

It's hard to believe the trick that is the Diamantina River can stretch kilometres in width when she's raging after rain.

The channels which give this corner of Queensland its name, Channel Country, stretch out like veins from the Birdsville artery, limiting access for those travelling on four wheels in and out of Birdsville; sometimes for up to three weeks.

In general though, Summer brings the wet season to Birdsville, and between December and February, Birdsville sees approximately 70mm of rainfall.

Sharon Chapman

# ROYAL FLYING DOCTOR SERVICE

**There is nothing that depicts outback Queensland's spirit and ingenuity more than the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS).**



Dr Ian Robinson treating a patient

**N**ext May the RFDS turns 90, celebrating its first aeromedical flight from Cloncurry to Julia Creek in northwest Queensland on 17 May, 1928.

RFDS Head of Marketing, Ian Finlayson, says services to Birdsville commenced pretty soon after that historic flight.

“It was originally established for aero-medical evacuations, but gradually became a primary healthcare service, providing regular GP visits to remote communities,” says Ian.

“Our founder Reverend John Flynn, recognised people living in the outback would be unable to survive living there without access to quality healthcare.”

Over almost a century, the service has grown to become an integral part of outback life not only for locals, but visitors too.

“We provide a GP clinic during race weekend, along with other staff to provide medical care.

“In recent years, as the races have become an iconic event, we've proudly become the primary beneficiary.”

“The funds raised over the weekend are very important. Every bit helps, as a Not for Profit organisation, we need to raise about 12 to 13 million dollars a year to run our service.”

Birdsville Race Club President David Brook has had a long association with the RFDS and says raising funds is a big focus of the race weekend.

“We have people collecting donations all weekend, and everybody supports it, which is great.”

“As John Flynn said, without medical services, families will never stay in the outback.”





# OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

Tourism & Events Queensland

## TAKE THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED WHEN IT COMES TO RETURNING HOME FROM THE BIRDSVILLE RACES.

The tagline for this iconic race meet “where the dust never settles” gathers new meaning for racegoers who travel by car to Birdsville.

This corner of the outback is best distinguished by its gibber road surface and accompanying cloud of dust that mushrooms over vehicles as they hurtle into town.

If you're returning to Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide or Brisbane from the races, then swap your return journey for one that's full of surprises.

Introducing the best from border country with four deserts, three State borders and a taste of the famous Birdsville Track:

### 1. Walkers Crossing Track

This road just south of Birdsville is the definition of a hidden gem.

It's well known in 4WD communities – up there with Gunshot Creek Crossing in Cape York as a must-do trail because it travels next to the Tirari, Sturt Stony, Strzelecki and Simpson Deserts.

As if Walkers Crossing Track is not adventure enough, there's 100km of the famous Birdsville Track to explore before you reach it.

#### **What do you need to know?**

Four-wheel-drives are a must! Desert flags are not only a natty accessory for the car but a recommendation and you'll need your headlights on, but don't expect great visibility through the dust anyway.

### 2. Innamincka

While it might not wear the title of Outback Australia's smallest town, with a population big enough to play a game of volleyball (12 people in total), Innamincka is not far off.

Make your next stop from Birdsville for the opportunity to spend the night with the Innamincka dozen. Its onsite restaurant, The Outamincka Bar, serves up some of the best pub grub you'll find this far west.

**Tip:** There's a petrol station here so fuel up after a day of driving.

### 3. The Dig Tree

It's not just your adventure story that will be penned in this territory. You're in Burke and Wills country now and one hour drive from Innamincka you'll find the setting for the end of their story.

After heading north on foot, Burke and Wills returned to the Dig Tree only to find their supplies depleted, and their team gone – possibly Australia's worst case of terrible timing.

**Remember:** You'll want to pack your own supplies. A billy tea and a biscuit will go down nicely as you brush up on your Australian history.

### 4. Thargomindah

What does this outback town have in common with London and Paris?

Thargomindah was the third city in the world to adopt electric streetlights in 1983, taking after the metropolitan heavy weights.

Pay a visit to this town of 240 people, which aside from being an early-electricity adopter is also known for its kangaroo population. You're guaranteed to see them bounding down the main street.

**To find more information on travelling to and from Birdsville, see: [birdsvillerraces.com](http://birdsvillerraces.com)**



Tourism & Events Queensland

[www.birdsvilleraces.com](http://www.birdsvilleraces.com)

We've compiled this program based on records and recollections from a wide range of sources. If you have any records or information, we'd love to hear from you and continue collecting Birdsville history: [events@birdsvilleraces.com](mailto:events@birdsvilleraces.com)

  @birdsvilleraces #birdsvilleraces

 @thebirdsvilleraces #birdsvilleraces

