

Clayton's story ...

I was born and reared on Newhaven Station from 1965 onwards. I went to correspondence school, nickname 'School of the Air of Alice Springs' ... all the bush children from other cattle stations and communities attended there. In my younger years I was a busy lad helping my parents on jobs after school. I spent my free time riding bikes, reading books and comics and playing board games with my parents.

In the late 60's early 70's I started driving my dad's vehicle and motorbike on the station, I was a lively teenager then. Newhaven work was always very busy for me and my parents, and if we had big storms we took it easy in the station house as it was too wet and boggy to do much work. We went away to Adelaide a few times for holidays and had a look around there while Newhaven was drying after the big wet season.

In the dry times on Newhaven and other cattle stations, we had bushfires started by lightening after dry storms and not much rain. We got the old station grader and the Bedford truck going and many 44 gallon drums of half petrol and diesel, fire bugs and shovels and drinking water to fight bushfires. Sometimes we fought at night and day until all fires went out.

In the summer we drove a 100km trip around six or seven bores to check on stock, water and tanks, pumps, troughs, barbwire fences and paddocks every two or three days when very hot. If water pumps were broken down we would spend half a day in the early morning or late afternoon to beat the heat. In the winter every year we mustered the cattle to brand the cleanskin calves and truck away the fat cattle to Alice for markets down South. That's how we lived and ran the station. We did the same thing to the wild horses, brumbies as they were called.

My dad, Alex, and I would camp out bush for one or two weeks at the grader camp. We graded the bore roads and fence lines clean before bushfires came, and cleaned bushes off the dirt roads to stop our vehicles getting punctures.

Sometimes one of us would run out of fuel in the bush. We would camp out under the stars in swags and eat tucker around the camp fire.

We always carried spare grader tyres as we sometimes staked the front tyres because of dead sticks, trees and stumps. We sometimes rung up the SSB radio to talk

to my mother Rosemary at the station house at midnight to say we were okay, or to my brother. These SSB radios were quite handy then before telephones and sat-phones came in. We could also talk to town people through the RFDS Base in Alice Springs.

Once or twice a month we drove 370km to Alice Springs to buy food, fuel, spare parts and new tyres for the station. We had our own house in town and stayed there for a few nights.

In winter we hired out a few young fellows to help us in the mustering camps as there was plenty of work to do. We had one bloke work for us who stayed for three or six months as required.

I left Newhaven when I was 18 and started work in Alice Springs then. I went back to Newhaven for Christmas and some weekends to stay with my parents and it was good to go bush then.

We sold Newhaven in 2000 because my parents wanted to retire and live in Alice Springs. They started up Newhaven Station in 1958 from scratch. We had built everything on our land which was 705 square miles. It was a really sad thing then and I had asked Alex if I could manage and run the station with half the number of cattle. He said to me, "You leave here and live in town and find some work as there is no future for you here."

About two or three years afterwards, I got very depressed and bush sick for Newhaven. I had my car, rifle and road train licenses, then I got pretty ill and my doctor had to take my licenses away. I rode my bike then, and I couldn't do any gardening work. This went on for one year and my doctor gave me tablets to try out and I didn't believe this and said, "This doctor is trying to poison me with the tablets."

I stayed at my parent's town house while I was getting better. Later, after one year, my doctor gave me back my car license and said, "You have to concentrate on still taking tablets and can drive now. But no tablets, no license."

I was very happy to get my driver's license back. I lost my gun and truck license but I don't worry about it now. My parents and I are living in Alice Springs now and I am quite happy. I still have two part-time jobs and do some gardening and live in a flat and have three cats now. ✕

Clayton

