

Cordillo Downs Station

FROM WOOL TO BEEF



Cordillo Downs is one of outback South Australia's enduring pastoral properties and for almost a century was part of the Beltana Pastoral Company's vast empire. The station has survived isolation, droughts and floods, and for more than 60 years produced tonnes of quality wool for world markets.



In the Beginning

'Cardilla', as the station was initially known, was first leased in 1875, but no improvements were made until 1883 when Peter Walte (Beltana Pastoral Company) took up the lease. A manager was appointed and the property was stocked with 10 312 sheep, as well as cattle, horses and a camel.

A well was sunk for the homestead (a hut with a canvas roof) and a start was made on dams for the stock. A station kitchen, yards and the impressive stone woolshed were constructed soon after.

Fencing began in 1885 and shepherding soon unnecessary. By 1896, Cordillo Downs had numerous dams and wells to water the stock and was completely subdivided into paddocks.

Transport & Supplies

By June 1884 camel strings made regular calls at Cordillo Downs. They were indispensable to the isolated station, carrying supplies from the southern railway and returning with bales of Cordillo wool. The round trip was approximately 1,200 kilometres and could take from three weeks to many months, depending on conditions. Bullocks or horse teams were occasionally used in the region, but the sandy track was a problem for these animals. Donkey teams were also used, with 30-40 sturdy beasts hitched to a load of up to five tonnes. When the motor truck appeared in the 1920s, it was quickly introduced into outback service.

Droughts

Since the late 1800s the property has endured many dry seasons, some of which have severely reduced stock numbers and affected the management of the station. During the 'Great Drought' of 1897-1901 for example, supplies ran short when it became too difficult for even camels to travel the waterless Strzelecki Track. Sheep flocks were reduced from 66 000 to only 7 000 by the time the drought broke.

The dry years from 1920-1930 were particularly devastating, leaving the country in such poor condition that in 1931 (even though the drought had broken) Cordillo Station was closed. The property was not restocked until 1936.

A New Era

Despite a Government bounty on scalps from 1912, dingoes were a continual menace to pastoralists across outback South Australia. In 1941 the dogs devoured most of the lamb drop on Cordillo. It was considered far too expensive to improve the boundary fences, and instead the property was restocked with cattle. By 1942 all the sheep were gone and Cordillo Downs had begun a new era as a cattle station.

Below: Cordillo Downs Homestead and Woolshed c1920 with drying racks in foreground.



Twenty-First Century Station

In 1981 the Brook family took up the Cordillo lease after it was auctioned by the Beltana Pastoral Company. The station today covers an area of 7 800 square kilometres and runs approximately 7 000 head of poll Hereford cattle.

The cattle are mustered in the cooler months, using motor bikes, Toyotas and helicopters, and are transported to southern or eastern markets by road trains.

Medical Aid

In 1923 the Beltana Pastoral Company employed Sister Kinnear as a nurse for Cordillo Downs and other runs.

She lived in a corrugated lean-to and treated the sick on the stations, or travelled with them to the nearest doctor 560 kilometres away.

When Sister Kinnear returned to Adelaide a year later, she successfully campaigned for a dedicated nursing hospital for the region, and in 1924 the Australian Inland Mission home was constructed at Innamincka.

A REMINDER THAT THIS IS PRIVATE PROPERTY

The buildings in this area are all part of the Cordillo Downs Homestead.

While the owners generously invite passing travellers to look more closely at the State Heritage-listed woolshed, please respect both their property and privacy.

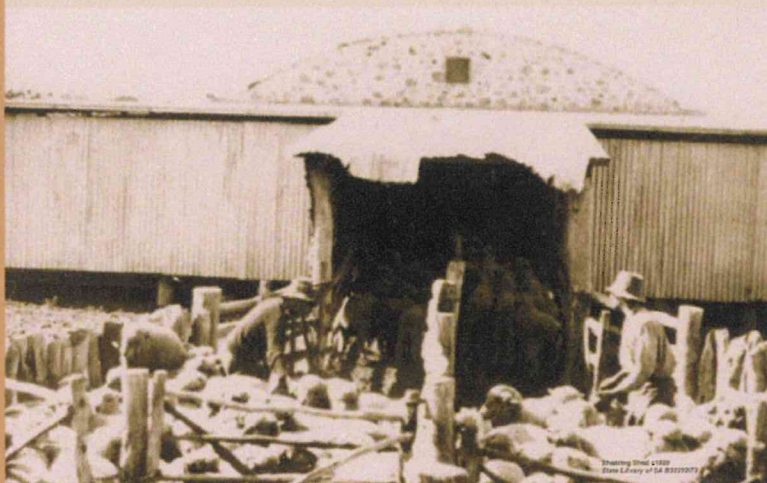
Remember, it is only the woolshed that has been made available to the public, so visitors should not walk past it to view other buildings or structures.



Visit www.heritage.sa.gov.au for more information about this and other outback heritage sites.

Cordillo Downs Woolshed

CLICK GO THE SHEARS...



The 1883 stone woolshed is a significant reminder of Cordillo's historical contributions to South Australia's wool industry. Like other early Cordillo Station buildings, it was constructed of local sandstone rubble with a curved, galvanised iron roof - a form that was self-supporting and dispensed with the need for large wooden frames. This provided greater interior space, and was an ideal design in a region with little natural timber.

Shearing

The Cordillo Downs shearing shed boasted 88 stands (recorded as 120 stands by 1890), with a steam-driven press to compress the wool into bales. The record number of sheep shorn on the property in one season was 82,000 head in 1888 - all with hand shears!

"Shearing began ... in the coolest part of the year [c1896] ... The sheep were mustered... into larger and larger mobs until they formed a red-brown undulating carpet pouring over the landscape in a cloud of red dust to the woolshed yards."

Shearing time was a continual din of bleating sheep and cracking whips, bells or whistles to start and halt shearing, rattle, thump and splash of the wool scour and the roar of the hot air blower in the drying room, oaths, shouts and laughter. After dark the activity continued around the campfires of the hangers-on - the teamsters, hawkers and others - as they fraternized into the night. For a couple of weeks all was excitement and bustle, then the last sheep was bundled down the chute into the sunlit pen, the gates swung open and the sheep headed away to the far paddocks ..." Helen Tolcher, Drought and Deluge (1986)

Mechanical shearing began in 1907, when the Federal Sheepshearing Company had the contract to shear Cordillo's 36,000 sheep. A team of 42 men (30 shearers) completed the task in three weeks. The record tally for one man was 187 sheep shorn in one day.



The Wool Scour

After a scouring plant was installed in 1885, Cordillo Downs wool clip was cleaned before it was baled and shipped to England. Scouring the wool removed dirt, grease and sand. This reduced the weight by up to 40% and made it more economical to transport.

The machinery for the scour, which included several large steam engines, was brought up the Strzelecki by wagons. The trip took nine months and two weeks. At Innamincka, to negotiate the rising Cooper, the teamsters had to put 52 bullocks on one wagon and enlist the aid of the local mounted constable. By 1891 the venture was an obvious success, with more than 1,400 bales of scoured wool carted to Farina or Lyndhurst by camel.

From the scouring plant near the creek, the wet wool was carted to the homestead, where it was unloaded into vats and repeatedly passed through rollers to squeeze out excess water. It was important that the scoured wool was completely dry before it was baled, as damp wool was known to self-combust. Initially the wool was laid on calico sheets, or hung on racks in the sun, and continually turned to dry. In 1892 a drying room, which maintained a constant temperature of 42°C, was installed at Cordillo Downs. The drying shed and woollscour buildings no longer exist, but some of the machinery is still found on the property.



A Charitable Event

In 1888, when the shearing ended, the shearers and station-hands on Cordillo Downs organised a concert that raised £27 8s for the Shearers' Ward at the Adelaide Children's Hospital.

This ward specialised in the treatment of eye diseases, and was a favourite charity in the outback, where eye disease was prevalent. Similar fund-raising performances were an annual event for many years.

After 1942, when the last sheep were removed from Cordillo, the shearing shed became a store and garage. Its significance to the State's outback heritage was acknowledged in 1980, when it was entered in the South Australian Heritage Register.



Government of South Australia
Department for Environment
and Heritage



South Australian
Tourism Commission



Visit www.heritage.sa.gov.au for more information
about this and other outback heritage sites.

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN OUTBACK HERITAGE RESEARCH NOTES

These notes were compiled by Deb Morgan of the Department for Environment and Heritage in the course of a project to prepare interpretive signs for installation in the outback in September 2005 and are made available on this web site as a service to interested researchers.

Homestead and Woolshed, Cordillo Downs

Location:

Cordillo Downs Homestead is located approximately 177 kms north-west of Innaminka and the station occupies a large part of the North-Eastern corner of the State adjoining the Queensland and NSW borders.

The Cordillo Downs Homestead and Woolshed are included on the State Heritage Register

Statement of Heritage Value:

Cordillo Downs Station was established in 1883 by Peter Waite and Robert Barr-Smith. It was then known as Cardilla Downs Run. Originally devoted mostly to sheep, the station's huge woolshed was built in 1883 and a wool scouring plant was installed in 1885. It was built of sandstone rubble, and is buttressed in order to support the curved roof. The woolshed provided stands for 120 blade shears. Supplies and machinery for the station had to be transported 600 kilometres by Afghan camel trains up the Strzelecki Track, which usually took three weeks from the Farina railway siding. Drought and the Depression caused the station to close in 1931. Cattle were reintroduced to Cordillo Downs around 1940.

Research notes: Cordillo Downs Station

1875 **John Frazer**, a Victorian, took up the lease on an area of 3755 square kilometres near the north eastern corner of SA. He failed to stock the land within the required time and under the terms of the pastoral lease he forfeited the lease. (HT p61)

1878 The Crown Lands Consolidation Act and Regulations had been passed recently (in ?) allowing Crown Lands to be allocated by ballot. **Edgar Chapman** was successful out of 15 applicants, and took up the lease for 21 years at minimal rental of 2s 6d per square mile, plus a lease fee of £1. (HT p61)

The Cardilla Downs Pastoral Lease No 2800 was originally taken up by Edgar Chapman of Adelaide, stockholder, in 1878, 1,350 square miles for a period of 21 years at 2/6 per mile. ...Peter Waite also purchased the lease of a neighbouring block at a Lands Department auction in 1883 of Pastoral Lease No 3118, described as being between the Diamantina and Cooper's Creek and near Lake Hope, 364 square miles at 2/7 per annum per mile.

(BPC p 43-44)

1879 Cooper lakes area surveyed by **W H Cornish** – described the region north of Innaminka to the Qld border across Sturts Stony Desert as being "chiefly good flats with large red stones, fairly grassed, with sandhills running away in a northerly direction". (HT p60)

1879 The area which is now the north east corner of South Australia was first surveyed by the South Australian government in 1879, under pressure from pastoralists in the

region who needed confirmation of where the Qld/SA borders were, as well as the exact boundaries of their own leasehold properties. A number of disputes had already arisen over the use of land where boundaries were not defined, and lessees were reluctant to invest in developing their runs whilst the extent of their runs was unclear. (HT p58-60)

William Barron was the surveyor appointed, with a well equipped and well armed team supplied with sixteen of Thomas Elder's camels broken to harness, and in May 1879 set up a base camp at Innamincka. He commenced the survey of the north-south border, continuing the line northwards from the previously surveyed border between SA and NSW. After several months of enduring the extreme conditions, Barron became ill and could not continue. His replacement **Augustus Poeppel** took charge early in 1880 and accompanied by A H (Alec) Salmond from the Qld Survey Department, proceeded to complete the survey of the Qld-SA border along the 26th parallel of latitude, between Haddon Corner and Poeppel's corner. The uncertainty of the position of the border and of individual runs adjoining it was now at an end. (HT p58-60)

1784 Poeppel went on to complete the survey of the NT/Qld border. (HT p58-60)

1883 Early in 1883 Peter Waite took up country along Cooper Creek to form Kanowana Station. (HP p 105)

1883 Lease transferred to **Peter Waite**, one of the partners in the **Beltana Pastoral Company** with Thomas Elder and Nathaniel Phillipson. [According to Pearce, the partnership was with Elder and Robert Barr-Smith, HP p 105] Run then known as Cardilla. (HT p61) At the time of transfer the property is recorded as having no Crown improvements; it was a new block (AC p 489)

A well was sunk for the head station, and a start made on dams for the stock. The Cordillo country was chiefly tablelands of desert sandstone, with undulating hills rising out of gibber country, and patches of glowing red sandhills, wind-rippled and sculpted into dramatic shapes. Compared with the Cooper channel country, it appeared desolate and uninviting ... nevertheless Waite recognised the country's potential. By the end of March 1883 he had installed a manager, **A E Witherby**, who had earlier been on Beltana Station, at a salary of £300 pa. A return completed by Witherby on 27 March 1883 showed the run had already been stocked with 10,312 sheep, 580 horned cattle, 28 horses and a camel. (HT p 82, AC p 489)

Phillipson and the manager of Lyndhurst Station John Kiingsmill visited in early 1883, by which stage a canvass-roofed hut was built, and plans were made for yards, station kitchen and stone woolshed. The woolshed and other early buildings were designed with curved galvanised iron roofs which were self-supporting – a great saving in timber which was scarce. (HT p 82)

With the exception of the thatch roofed meathouse and several galvanised iron sheds the station buildings are of pugged sandstone. The settlement contains a manager's house, overseer's house, men's quarters, kitchen, woolshed, store, and blacksmith's shop. The large woolshed is constructed of local sandstone rubble masonry. The side walls are heavily buttressed to support the curved arch of the wide corrugated iron roof – an innovation which resulted in an economy of vertical roofing supports and a consequent saving of interior space. (HP p 106)

1884 R Ahlmann, a station hand, fell down Needle Well and was killed on 4 January, His burial took place the same day, after Mr Needham JP had held an enquiry. (BPC)

1885 Fencing of Cordillo Downs started – using wire of a high steel content that was a nightmare to work with as it constantly whipped and curled. Fencing meant that shepherding could be abandoned and the sheep more efficiently watered and pastured. The Beltana Pastoral Company's camel teams were indispensable at this time, and Tage [sic] Mahomet came and went from Beltana and Mt Lyndhurst Stations, bringing rations, wire and other supplies, the camels 'stringing soft-footed up the sandy Stryzelecki track' from Beltana in only 24 days. (HT p 85)

- 1885 Installation of the wool scour, machinery (several large steam engines – HP p 105) brought from the railway on wagons by teamsters Crack, Hornhardt and Doherty, being nine months and two weeks on the track. The teamsters had to put 52 bullocks on one wagon and enlist the help of the mounted constable at Innamincka to negotiate the rising Cooper, but in October the machinery finally arrived and was set up for use that season.
In the beginning the scoured wool was spread on calico sheets on the low ground below the great stone woolshed with its massive buttresses, and turned continually in the warm inland sunshine by Aboriginal women until it was dry and ready to bale. (HT89)
- The partners considered it more economic to scour the wool at Cordillo than to incur 'dead freight' on greasy wool on the 600 km haul by camel train to Farina; the scouring getting rid of perhaps 40 per cent of extraneous matter. On 15 July Mr Witherby was 'putting up and fitting the boiler'. On 6 October the machinery was unloaded from the wagons and was, apparently, set up efficiently because six months afterwards the station diary records 'wool scouring finished'. (AC p 490)
- Carting unwashed wool added considerably to transportation costs, as the bales were heavy with sand, dust and grease. Rather than have its wool washed on arrival in England, which was common practice then, the Beltana Pastoral Co decided to install a complete wool scouring plant at Cordillo Downs in 1885. The parts for the plant were carted up by camel strings, and reassembled on the station near a waterhole.
- This venture was highly successful. By 1891 more than 1400 bales of scoured wool had been carried by camel to Farina. The handwork required in the washing of wool was done at the homestead by Aboriginal women. The shorn wool was taken from the plant to the women on the back of a horse-drawn wagon. The women would take the wool off the wagons and put it into huge vats, about two metres square. They then passed the wool between rollers to squeeze the water out of the wool, a process which was repeated several times over a period of about half an hour. After this the wool was hung to dry on drying racks and, when it was ready for packing into bales, it would be pressed by machine and a metal band placed around the bale and riveted into place. Remains of the wool scouring plant can still be seen near the waterhole on the station. [?] Cordillo Downs and Nappa Merrie, just east of Innamincka township, were the only two pastoral stations that washed and scoured their own wool. (PR p 35)
- 1886 Cordillo had subdivision paddocks, well watered with dams and wells, and sheep were moved south to the partnership's other stations in mobs of 10,000 or more. Fencing proceeded more slowly on the other stations, but eventually shepherding ceased throughout the area (HT p 85)
- 1887 'James Carr ... cut his throat at Cordillo Downs ... and was subjected to the long torture of a journey to Port Augusta before he finally died.' (HT p228)
- 1888 Industrial trouble on Cordillo - shearers supported by a Shearers Union rep refused to sign the agreement covering terms of employment
- 1888 80,000 sheep shorn on Cordillo yielding nearly 1,000 bales of wool. (HT p 82)
- 'Shearing began in the Cooper district in the coolest part of the year, about 1 July. The sheep were mustered, a long job in the huge paddocks – gathering in the scattered sheep from timber-covered flats or the rocky gorges of the hill country, moving them from the shade of dense gidyea trees and out of the bushy creases in the downs into larger and larger mobs until they formed a red-brown undulating carpet pouring over the landscape in a cloud of red dust to the woolshed yards.
- Shearing was a time of continual din of bleating sheep and cracking whips, bells or whistles to start and halt shearing, rattle, thump and splash of the wool scour and the roar of the hot air blower in the drying room, oaths, shouts and laughter. After dark the activity continued around the campfires of the hangers-on – the teamsters, hawkers and others – as they fraternized into the night. For a couple of weeks all was

excitement and bustle, then the last sheep was bundled down the chute into the sunlit pen, the gates swung open and the sheep headed away to the far paddocks, while the bales were already on their way to the wool sales.'

(HT p 85-86)

- 1888 At the end of shearing each year, the shearers and station hands on Cordillo gave an entertainment to aid the Shearers' Ward at the Adelaide Children's Hospital. The ward specialised in the treatment of eye diseases, and had been chosen as a particularly suitable charity for the people of the Outback, where eye disease was prevalent. ... These fund-raising concerts were an annual event for many years....The function held in 1888 raises £27 8s for the hospital and was reported as follows:

'The performance was given in the woolshed on an improvised stage of planks, draped with tarpaulins. The programme also state 'Ten minutes interval for refreshments – champagne and oysters'. This turned out to be jam tarts and coffee. Carriages were announced for 10.30 pm but dancing was entered into with much zest after the entertainment was over ... no less than four of the softer sex graced the proceedings with their presence. The dance would otherwise have been designated by a bushman as a 'buck ball' or 'bull dance'.'

(HT p 90)

- 1890 85,000 sheep shorn producing 1,000 bales of scoured wool. Cordillo covered 4800 square kms of which the stony portion of 2214 kms was stocked with sheep. A large workforce employed – up to 150 people. Woolshed had stands for 120 shearers. Other improvements included a woolscour, manager's residence, station kitchen, store, men's quarters, smithy, stockyards and other conveniences. Beside the waterhole there was a vegetable garden with watermelons, tomatoes, herbs and grapes, and there were large underground tanks (HT p 82)

Two other stations in the region ran both cattle and sheep – Haddon Downs and Cadelgo Downs were amalgamated with Cordillo during the 1890s.

Aboriginal women were used as messengers, carrying papers and goods to the construction camps on Cordillo Downs, and carrying the mail from Cordillo to Haddon Downs. They also worked as shepherds and at the woolscours at shearing time. (HT p 133)

The Aborigines naturally gravitated to those stations where rations could be obtained. Kanowana dispensed food and blankets to a dwindling group on that part of the Cooper. On Cordillo, Cadelgo and Haddon Downs the Aboriginal population had always been transient, the nature of the country allowing hunting and foraging only after local rain. However, once the stations were established small camps clung to the outskirts of the head stations from which came superb stockment and – prior to the erection of fences – shepherds to mind the flocks. (HT p 138-9)

There were managers' wives on Cadelgo and on Haddon Downs, and as time went on a number of women and many children on Cordillo Downs But most men lived alone. (HT p 177)

Caroline Charlotte Oakey, wife of Walter Oakey who was employed at Cordillo as a farm servant.....? Gave birth to her 10th child at Cordillo station on 3 June 1889, and named him Charles Cordillo Oakey. The couple went on to have two more children at Cordillo, Henry Herbert (22 May 1891) and Leah Charlotte (10 Sept 1892). (Biographical Index of SA and family history internet site <http://ruzoz.customer.netspace.net.au/ruzoz/index.htm#TOC>)

- 1890 A schoolmaster, William Sturdy, started at Cordillo at 25s per week to teach the growing number of station children. (AC p490)

- 1890 In Dec 1890 Peter Waite was in England and Phillipson's report written from Cordillo was sent to him. "The season here and on our Cooper cattle run is all that can be desired. The shearing

- here has resulted in 85,000 sheep giving over 1,000 bales of scoured wool. On the Cooper (Kanowana) we have an increase for the year of 5,000 calves". A year later the tally of scoured wool was even better, reaching 1,424 bales, and Afghan camel trains of as many as forty camels were being employed to cart wool to Lyndhurst Siding. (BTC p 47)
- 1891 In a climate of industrial unrest affecting Qld shearing sheds, and threatening to disrupt shearing at Cordillo, N E Phillipson applied for police protection in June 1891 for non-union shearers. Innamincka and Diamantina police ordered to patrol Cordillo and other stations. On 15 July the Shearers' Union delegate arrived at Cordillo from Haddon Downs where a union camp had been set up, and those shearers who were union members left the next day for Innamincka. A week later the free shearers [ie non-union] from Adelaide arrived having walked the 145 kms from Innamincka, and Mounted Constables Jukes and Smith from Innamincka stood by to ensure peaceful shearing. Though anonymous threats were made to burn the shed down, there were no incidents. (HT p 88)
- 1891 In spite of the threat of industrial problems the early 1890s were the 'roaring days' of Cordillo Downs, with record wool clips and vigorous program of station improvements: Large numbers of sheep were moved between the Beltana properties, eg BP Hack later a manager at Cordillo Downs is recorded as leaving Cordillo Downs on 2nd Dec 1891 with a party of seven drovers to move 8,000 wethers to Murnpeowie. Three weeks later C Conway arrived with his plant (horses and tucker dray) to take 10,000 wethers to Murnpeowie. Shortly afterwards he departed via Parnacherrie and Coongy supported by seven blackboys and two white men, Hihett and Lightfoot. In April 1892 Conway was off again to Murnpeowie with another 10,353 sheep. £34,000 had been expended on improvements at Cordillo, a huge amount – the wool scour was the most expensive item. . (BPC p 47)
- 1892 A drying room heated to maintain a temperature of 42 degrees was installed to bring the total value of improvements on Cordillo to £34,000. .(HT p 90) [Burnell's dryers installed – BPC p 46]
- The importance of thoroughly drying the scoured wool was underlined when in 1894 Cordillo lost a load of wool from that year's clip when it caught fire and with the exception of a few bales was totally destroyed, wagon and all. The fire was believed due to the wool having been damp when pressed. (HT p 90)
- 1893 Peter Waite's son David Waite, inspector of the Beltana runs visited and reported Cordillo had no feed, sheep very poor and weak. He thought Cordillo was safe from rabbits as they could not stand the hot stones in summer time. (AC p490)
- 1895 Sept £1,000 damage caused by an accidental fire in the drying shed. .(HT p 90)
- 1898 New manager A J McDonald took over. Installed windmills or 'air-motors' – an innovation soon extended to other Beltana properties. (AC p 490)
McDonald wrote of the employment of aboriginal women at the wool scour "Mr Hack is of the opinion it would pay better to have all whites and no gins, for while the gins are present the whites waste too much time fooling around" (BPC p 47)
Influenza outbreak on the station - McDonald wrote "We are all pulling through the effects of influenza and the empty coffin built by Mr Hack has not yet been called into service – I think we will loan it to the Spaniards as a 'torpedo boat'".(BPC p 47)
Stock stealing must have been a problem – Beltana Pastoral Cos properties together with the proprietors of Haddon Downs and Cadelgo Downs and the Bank of NSW together offered a £100 reward for information securing the imprisonment of sheep cattle or horse stealers. (BPC p 47)
- 1897-1901 Great drought – teamsters could not travel on the waterless tracks, and supplies ran short. Camels were used in times of drought to bring the woolclip south to the railhead at Farina, or alternatively the clip was taken to Charleville in Qld. Cordillo relied on camels for delivery of supplies. Sheep flocks were reduced to a fraction of what they had been – on Cordillo of 66,000 there were only 7,000 left when the drought broke. (HT p 91)
- Wagons with horse teams were often used, but the Strzelecki track posed some difficulties for wagons, running as it did through sandy country. One observer in 1891 commented:

'...[progress along the track:] more resembled ploughing than ordinary driving, and was I think heavier than anything we had previously met with. We here came upon a teamster who with between three and four tons of wool on his wagon and with a team of 12 horses had been 14 days getting ten miles from Monte Collina station'....

(HT p91)

Camels came into their own in drought years, with strings of up to 70 animals each loaded up with a bale balanced on either side of the hump. However during the great drought of the 1890s the wool clip could not be sent south due to a shortage of camels which were by then in short supply. In 1897 a team [possibly of horses?] carrying part of the Cordillo wool clip set out for Charleville, but after getting halfway was forced by the dry conditions on that route to return to the Strzelecki track. (HTp91)

On wagons with timber sides, the load filled the bed of the wagon, with the second tier cantilevered with the width of a bale outside the wagon and a third narrow tier locking it in place. Flat wagons carried two equal tiers with a third slightly narrower on top. (HTp91)

Unlike the early years of other properties, Cordillo Downs' rations and supplies had never been brought up by bullock teams: the terrain was very difficult. By June 1884 Elder's camel strings had begun making regular calls to Cordillo Downs. Given the terrain and the range of goods the camels were capable of carting, the camel strings ... of up to 70 camels at a time ... were quite indispensable to such a station. The camels led by Tagh Mahomet were in and out of Cordillo Downs regularly. In one trip which was fairly typical, made by Gool Mahomet on 5 June 1884 [date may be wrong – Gool Mahomet only came to Aust in 1897 according to another ref in PR: could be 1924? Or could refer to Tagh Mahomet], they brought up food rations, building materials, bore-pumping equipment, furniture, horseshoes, fencing wire, and even curved galvanised roofing iron. Their route from the Lyndhurst or Farina siding to Cordillo Downs, up the Strzelecki track, took three weeks in a normal season, covering about 600 kilometres. The purpose of the camels' return journey to Farina siding was to cart the bales of wool produced at Cordillo Downs. Each step of the way was hard going, and particularly hard at the hottest time of the year, but the Afghan camel strings proved to be reliable and economical. (PR p 34-35)

From the 1880s to the early 1900s Afghan camel strings took rations and stores from Farina to Mount Lyndhurst, and up the Strzelecki track to Innaminka, Nappa Merry, Cordillo Downs and Arrabury. From these stations the camel strings brought bales of wool to Farina's railhead. (PR p 37)

Afghan camel strings continued to come across Sturt Stony Desert to both Cordillo Downs and the nearby station, Arrabury, and cart bales of wool back to the Farina railhead until the 1920s. By that time the camel strings were owned by the Afghans and not just driven by them. (PR p 35)

Bullocks were occasionally used, but as time went by **donkey teams** were a common sight, with 30 or 40 sturdy little beasts hitched to a load of about 5 tonnes. They took six weeks to travel the distance a horse team could cover in four weeks, but they were stout-hearted and steady, and the stations sometimes had their own donkey team as well as using the teamsters' services. When the motor truck appeared in the 1920s it was quickly pressed into service. (HT p 91)

- 1903 Adjoining stations Cadelgo and Haddon Downs lost almost all of their stock during the drought and Cordillo took over both stations. (HT p 92) Cadelgo in Jan 1903 and Haddon Downs in Oct 1905. (BPC p 57)
- 1905 The Government bore sinking program was completed along Qld-SA stock route (via Birdsville), pastoralists provided with permanent water supplies at staged intervals along the track. Deepest well-borings ever attempted in Australia during this period, eg Johnston Brothers contractors Patchawarra Bore on Farina to Haddon route in extreme eastern corner of SA – finally abandoned in 1916 after £26,392 had been expended.

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- 1906 Great flood – communications to the station cut, rations stranded on the wrong side of the Cooper, shearing postponed. Creeks on Cordillo flooded, but most of the sheep country was above the reach of the floods. Damage to the dog fence increased the problem with dingoes. (HT p91)
- 1907 Machine shearing introduced. Federal Sheepshearing Company had contract to shear their 36,000 sheep with team of 42 men, of whom 30 were shearers. Completed in 3 weeks, record tally for one man for one day was 187 sheep. Team then moved down to Murnpeowie, causing consternation in the pub at Innamincka on the way. (HT p 89)
- 1907 Cordillo fenced its 10,360 square kilometres [77,800 sq kms according to AC] of country against dogs. As a sheep run it was highly vulnerable, although neither rabbits nor dingoes thrived in the stony country that made up much of its area. (HT201)
- 1907-1910 Bore sinking stepped up on BPC properties, & numerous dams built – At the 1910 shareholders' meeting it was reported that 7 new bores had been sunk for £10,626 (BPC)
- 1909 Shearing teams travelled Stryzelecki track by bicycle, making the trip in four and a half days. (HT89) PHOTO in HT
- 1911 A traveller between Farina and Cordillo noted that once having passed Mt Hopeless, 'dingoes were seen constantly. At Caraweenah they were especially numerous and very cheeky ... The pest howled the greater part of the night, and came within 100 yards of our camp'. (HT p 201)
- 1912 SA passed the first Wild Dogs Act, which authorized the rating of lands to supply funds for a scalp bonus. The bonus varied over the years between 4s and 12s 6d, and it was hoped that it would provide an incentive for hunters and trappers. Efficacy of this scheme questionable – open to abuse. (HT p 202)
- 1913 Qld voted to fence their border with NSW against dogs for 217 kilometres east of the SA border, and those two States agreed to fence northwards from Corona Station to the Qld border. This was to be done by topping the existing rabbit fence with 76 centimetres of wire netting, and it was hoped that this would prevent dingoes breeding up in the deserted Stryzelecki country from crossing into NSW and Qld. By 1919 the Qld dog fence was no longer either dog or rabbit proof, the lower original part of the fence having rusted away leaving the newer dog-proof extension stranded in mid-air. The fence had been erected originally at Qld's expense, 15 metres within her boundary, and NSW had no control over its state of repair. In 1920, that Government did acquire control, financing maintenance of the fence by a tax on landholders augmented by a government subsidy. The SA vermin fence lay along kilometres of sandhill country, with the consequent difficulties of sand drift and banked up roly-poly bushes necessitating constant rebuilding either upwards on a newborn dune, or downwards into scoured waterways. Both fences were patrolled. (HT p 201)
- 1914-1915 Drought years. Cordillo lost 23,000 sheep which were on the station in 1915 and a further 3,500 which died on the road while being sent south in a vain effort to save them. (HT p 212)
- 1914 Drought brought the dingoes in to the waterholes of the Cooper where they preyed on thousands of dying stock.
- 1920 - 1930 mainly drought years – stock route in very bad condition – constant dust storms, some stations closed down. (HT p 213)
- 1923 Beltana Pastoral Company engaged a nursing sister **Sr Margaret Kinnear** to tend the sick on the big runs round Cordillo. 885 kms from a doctor in one direction, 560 kms in another. Set up a 'ward' in an iron lean-to at the end of the shearing shed. Cared for sick and injured on the three northern stations or accompanied them to the nearest doctor. Sr Kinnear's own health suffered and she was replaced in 1924 by Sr Levick, and then by Sr Grant in 1926-28. Sr Kinnear appealed to the Adelaide newspapers to get a hospital at Innamincka – 1924 AIM Innamincka Nursing Home built with large donation from Sir Josiah Symon and support of Cordillo and other station owners. (HT p 230)

"A medical problem with a difference arose about this time at Cordillo Downs – a sickness confined to the head station and characterised by diarrhoea and vomiting. Every possible source of infection was investigated, and food and water supplies carefully guarded against contamination. Even the nursing sister was stricken. Dr (later Sir) John Cleland investigated and the illness proved to be arsenical poisoning. The station's milk supply came from a flock of goats, which sometimes camped on sheep skins which had been treated with a preservative containing arsenic. This had contaminated the goats' udders, and thus the milk." (HT p 230)

- 1927-1930 A series of dry years culminated in savage drought.
- 1928 Nov: Cordillo manager reported no feed. Stock losses in that year more than 50,000. (AC p490)
- 1929 The position in the region was desperate Even the Mitchell and Flinders grass having disappeared ... Cordillo's flock was down 40 per cent to 30 000, the rams were shepherded outside the netting fence and handfed daily ('Meggitts nuts' according to AC)... a shearing contractor travelling between Cordillo and Murnpeowie at this time commented 'I travelled 200 miles and never saw anything alive, not even a bird, until I got to the Cooper'. (HT p93)
- 1931 Cordillo Downs closed until 1936 (HT p 214)
Although the drought broke in 1930 the country was in bad condition. The Beltana Pastoral Co closed Cordillo down, sending the last 21 677 sheep south to Murnpeowie and leaving only a caretaker and fence riders on the run.
- 1935 Though conditions had improved, it proved impossible to restock Cordillo from the natural increase on the company's other runs, so the station was put on the market. It was listed as including extensive improvements, an average shearing over the previous twenty years of 51 000 sheep (the highest being 78 000) yielding an average of 887 bales of scoured wool (the highest being 1338 bales), and a lamb marking of up to 12 000 a year, but did not sell.
- 1936 The company restocked Cordillo with sheep taken from Murnpeowie. (HT p93)
- 1939 Following the removal of sheep because of the depredations of dingoes, cattle were introduced at Cordillo with 300 breeding cows and 200 steers being brought in in late 1939. (HT p 79)
- 1941 Beltana Pastoral Company AGM in December was told that despite an energetic dingo control programme, "Dogs on Cordillo have become a menace despite many hundred killed. They have accounted for most of the lambs. The restoration of the boundary fencing to effective dog proof condition would have been expensive – forcing us to remove the sheep and stock with cattle only." (HT p 203)
After the last sheep were removed the shearing shed became a store and garage for station vehicles. (HT p 94, HP p 106)
- 1942 Last flock of sheep in the Cooper region sent away from Arrabury. [neighbouring property over Qld border] (HT p 203)
- 1942 1,000 dry cows and 14 bulls added to the 1,000 cattle already on Cordillo. 14 breeding bulls purchased @ 30 guineas per head from Nalpa station were subsequently introduced to improve the quality of the herd. (HT p 79, AC p 491)
- 1943 First mob of Cordillo bullocks sent to Adelaide sales in May. (HT p 79)
- 1944 Heavy rains – Cordillo cattle took their place at the top of the market with those of Innaminka, Nappa Merrie and Arrabury. (HT p 79)
- 1946 Poor rains over preceding three years, waterholes dry, so 2800 cattle sent south to Murnpeowie another Beltana Pastoral company run. (HT p 79)
- 1947 Cordillo used for breeding cattle to be fattened on Murnpeowie, which was closer to the railhead at Maree. Over the next three years Cordillo Shorthorns gained distinction both on the Adelaide stock market and at the Royal Show. (HT p 79)

- 1949 major flooding of the Cooper over several seasons 1949 – 51. Damage to the dog fences resulted in another invasion of dingoes. Qld began aerial baiting. (HT p 203)
- 1950 Sept – 1008 fat cattle from Cordillo ... were taken across the Cooper at Innaminka. (HT p 226)
- 1950 Lake Eyre filled for first time since white occupation. (HT p 226)
- 1951 Cordillo wins champion fat steer at Royal Adelaide Show. (HT p 79)
- 1973-1974 Floods inundated the country up to 100 kms west of the Cooper – record floods filled the southern arm of Lake Eyre for the first time in recorded history. (HT p 226)
- 1976 Cordillo Downs incorporated 7,700 sq kms, occupying the north-eastern corner of SA, and was running over 6,000 cattle. (AC, p491)

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CORDILLO DOWNS H.S. - WOOLSHED



CORDILLO DOWNS H.S.



CORDILLO DOWNS WOOLSHED



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