Factsheet 14 – How did Cobb & Co. spin the wheels of opportunity?

Quirky fact:
In some very remote areas, change stations were known to serve passengers prickly pear jam and stewed galah!

Background Information
The gold rush of the 1850s sparked a mass migration of hopeful prospectors to the rich diggings of central Victoria. Overnight new settlements sprang up to support the population growth and fast and reliable transport and communications became imperatives. Americans Freeman Cobb, John Murray Peck, James Swanton and John Lamber seized the opportunity to establish a stagecoach service from Melbourne to Castlemaine and the first Cobb & Co. run was made on 30 January 1854. Initially, the company imported its coaches, along with experienced drivers, from the USA and Canada. This experience gave Cobb & Co. a competitive edge as its drivers were faster than others, averaging 10 to 12 kilometres per hour with a team of five or seven horses. Teams were replaced with fresh horses at changing stations, which were generally located 25 to 40 kilometres apart.

The roads were hard going. The coach body was suspended on thick strips of leather called thoroughbraces that would rock back and forth enabling the coach to negotiate the roughest conditions. However, motion sickness was common among the passengers. For this reason the changing stations, though often basic in their fare (meals of stew, salt beef or damper), were always a welcome break in the journey.

Cobb & Co. followed the gold rushes. Routes opened to Gympie in 1869, Clermont and Copperfield in the 1870s, and Palmer River, Charters Towers and Croydon in the 1880s. Within twenty years, Cobb & Co. covered Queensland. Barcaldine, Longreach, Winton and Charleville became major depots for the company and Charleville was the Queensland base for its coachworks from the 1880s. In 1900 the Queensland operations comprised 39 routes, averaging two services per week on each route covering 7,750 kms from railheads to distant communities in the Outback. A day’s journey would be around 80 kms, using 40 horses and six staff. Altogether, Cobb & Co. would harness 9,000 horses and travel over 31,000 kms every week.
Inquiry Questions

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Questions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>What challenges did the environment of Outback Queensland give early settlers?</td>
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<td>How did the development of Cobb &amp; Co. address those challenges?</td>
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<td>7/8</td>
<td>Why did people move to such remote places?</td>
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<td>What were the liveability challenges they had to address?</td>
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<td>History</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>How did Cobb &amp; Co. influence the development of the colony and society?</td>
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<td>Design an advertisement which would encourage early settlers to use the Cobb &amp; Co. Coach Line.</td>
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<td>Science</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>What scientific ideas, interventions and technologies were applied by Cobb &amp; Co. and by settlers in this region?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7/8</td>
<td>What scientific understandings were applied by coach builders and operators?</td>
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Points of Interest

- **Kinnon & Co. Royal Mail Gallop**
  Retrace the steps of Cobb & Co. by travelling on the original mail route between Longreach and Windorah enjoying the unique history of Cobb & Co. and Longreach.

  Kinnon & Co. Booking Office
  126 Eagle St, Longreach QLD 4730

  **Cost:** Fees apply
  **Hours:** 9:00am to 5:00pm daily, Coach rides 9:30am, 11:30am and 2:00pm weekdays (seasonal from March to October)
  **Phone:** (07) 4658 1776
  **Email:** info@kinnonandco.com.au

- **The Australian Stockman’s Hall of Fame and Outback Heritage Centre, Longreach**

- **Qantas Founders Museum, Longreach**

- **Australian Workers Heritage Centre, Barcaldine**

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**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- **Cobb & Co. Museum – a campus of Queensland Museum, Toowoomba**
  Phone: (07) 4659 4900
  Hours: 9:00am–3:00pm weekdays
  Email: inquiries@cobbandco.qm.qld.gov.au
  Educational information and resources [www.cobbandco.qm.qld.gov.au](http://www.cobbandco.qm.qld.gov.au)

- **Queensland Museum**
  Phone: (07) 3840 7555
  Email: inquirycentre@qm.qld.gov.au
  www.qm.qld.gov.au

- **Cobb & Co. Heritage Trail**
  [www.cobbandco.net.au/trails.html](http://www.cobbandco.net.au/trails.html)

**REFERENCES**

- **Cobb & Co. Heritage Trail**
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- **Queensland Museum**
  www.qm.qld.gov.au

**FURTHER INFORMATION**

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