Background Information

Harry Redford’s bold exploits as a cattle duffer earned him an enduring place in Queensland’s history. The expert bushman and cattle drover turned his handy work to ill-gotten gain when, in 1870, he, along with a small group of hand-picked companions, stole 1,000 head of cattle from Bowen Downs. At that time, many properties were vast and Bowen Downs at roughly 1,744,000 acres (1 acre = 0.404685 hectare) was one such property. It occurred to the 28-year-old Redford that stock from the property’s remote reaches could be stolen without detection. He and his gang erected cattle yards in a secluded area close to the Thomson River. When the yards were ready, they mustered small mobs from the station and when numbers reached about 300, they were driven south to a small holding property owned by Redford’s unsuspecting employer.

When the cattle numbered 1,000 plans were made to drive them overland to South Australia, though two of Redford’s men refused to go, afraid they would not survive the largely uncharted journey. The mob moved along the Barcoo River and Cooper Creek and down the Strzelecki Track. Cattle were sold along the way and on reaching Adelaide the gang members split up and went their separate ways.

The law eventually did catch up with Redford and his men and they were brought to trial at Roma. Nevertheless, much to the outrage of the courts, all were found innocent by sympathetic juries.

Redford’s exploits earned him the nickname Captain Starlight – the name of the fictitious central character in Rolfe Boldrewood’s Australian classic ‘Robbery Under Arms’ penned in the early 1880s. Although Redford’s criminal exploits made him famous, he was one of the first pioneers of the lower Cooper Creek and was the first to overland cattle down Strzelecki Creek. His skills as a great drover and his cattle drives of the early 1880s were matched only by other legendary Queensland drovers Patrick Durack and Nat Buchanan.

Australian Curriculum Links

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Inquiry Questions

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<td>How did stockmen deal with the challenges of travelling through this environment with cattle?</td>
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<td>How did the landscapes and environment influence the way stockmen operated?</td>
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<td>What aspects of society made it easy for criminals like Starlight to succeed? Has this changed?</td>
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<td>How did scientific knowledge (astronomy, geology, biology, physics, chemistry) help these stockmen succeed?</td>
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Points of Interest

Redford’s most famous legacy in the Longreach district is ‘Starlight’s Lookout’ also known as Cassidy’s Knob. On this hill which rises gently over the surrounding plains, Redford is purported to have placed a man to keep watch like Starlight to succeed. Has this changed? While they were gathering cattle from Bowen Downs.

- The Harry Redford Old Time Tent Show
  Laugh at the antics of Australia’s most famous cattle duffer, Harry Redford or ‘Captain Starlight’, with live animal acts, stockmen and stockhorse comedy acts. A mix of poetic story and Australian humour to create live theatre, Outback style!

  Kinnon & Co Store, Eagle Street, Longreach
  Email: operations@kinnonandco.com.au
  Phone: (07) 4658 1776
  Website: www.kinnonandco.com.au

- Thomson River Cruise, Dinner and Sound and Light Show
  Watch the sunset while cruising on the historic Thomson Belle Paddlewheeler or Thomson Princess Riverboat. Afterwards, on the banks, enjoy bush poetry and a 2 course dinner around the campfire before being immersed in the spirit of Harry Redford in the Starlight’s Spectacular Sound and Light Show.

  Eagle Street, Longreach QLD 4730
  Email: operations@kinnonandco.com.au
  Phone: (07) 4658 1776
  Website: www.kinnonandco.com.au

- Qantas Founders Museum, Longreach
- Powerhouse Museum, Longreach
- Longreach School of Distance Education, Longreach

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Music Australia – Musical score and play
www.musicaustralia.org/apps/MAT?function=showDetail&currentBibRecord=00004286
6387&itemSeq=&total=&returnFunction=getACopy&sessionId=

Sensational Cattle Stealing Case
A Harry Redford Story
Author, Alber H. Sutton
First published in 2002

REFERENCES

Westprint Maps
J. Decher

Longreach Regional History
www.longreach.net.au/lre_history.html

Savannah Guides
www.sgltd.com.au

FURTHER INFORMATION

Australian Stockman’s Hall of Fame and Outback Heritage Centre
Landsborough Highway, Longreach
QLD 4730
Phone: (07) 4658 2166
Email: museum@stockmanshalloffame.com.au

www.stockmanshalloffame.com.au

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