

# From Hunter to the Gulf

## horse drive

The following article is reprinted with the permission of Mr. A. A. Mac McLellan, a noted Scenic historian.  
It recounts the mammoth task of driving 245 horses north from the Hunter Valley to the Gulf of Carpentaria, a distance of 2500 kilometres.

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While the Gulf of Carpentaria is situated in excess of 2500 kilometres north of the Upper Hunter district, during the 19th century there was a close association between residents of the two districts.

From early in the 1860s flocks of sheep and mobs of cattle and horses were walked from the Upper Hunter district into the Fitzroy River Valley of Queensland.

The families active in this droving were the Brodie, Haydon and Wrights, all then resident in the vicinity of Murrumbidgee.

Though Burke and Wills only reached the gulf in 1861, by 1867 John Bisset Brodie and Thomas Alexander Brodie (sons of Peter Brodie then deceased of Glenalvon) had reached the Gulf near the mouth of the Flinders River and had established a station on that river called Donor's Hill.

It is reported that the second to reach the Gulf in that area was Adam Stuart Haydon (son of Thomas Haydon then deceased of Bloomfield who by 1870 had, in association with A. A. Mac McLellan, taken up P. W. Wright of Bickham), taken up Vena Park Station situated south of the town of Normanton.

Another of the Brodie boys, George John, was a member of the party which surveyed Normanton and still another, Frederick Arthur, by 1874 had replaced one of his brothers in Donor's Hill.

From about 1870 at fairly frequent intervals drovers set out with cattle or horses from the Upper Hunter and travelling through Central Queensland, often terminated their journey in or near Normanton.

Of these drovers, Stuart Haydon was most regular making the journey at intervals of two years.

The droving which is about to be described was clearly not novel, but its interest is that its route and difficulties are recorded.

Prior to September 1884 Bernard Haydon, a brother of Stuart Haydon and a cousin of the Brodies, then the lessee of Bloomfield and the owner of most of the country on Scott's Creek, had agreed with Stuart to take up over 1100 square miles of land near Normanton.

Stuart had taken up land and Bernard now wanted to stock it.

245 horses  
He had got together 245 horses of which 194

were his own, 13 belonged to Stuart, four belonged to J. Forsyth, a store manager of Normanton, six belonged to Bob Ray, an employee of Bernard and 37 to Jack Mullins, of Mulla Creek, near Nundle.

On September 25, 1884, he left with a droving team comprising Bob Ray, Jack Mullins, Tom Waldron (a Bloomfield employee), J. Dever (also a Bloomfield employee), Bruce (either a son or brother of a Timor settler) and Jack Mullin's brother.

Leaving Bloomfield they had only 145 horses as 100 of Bernard's horses were being agisted on Benjamin Abbott's land west of Quirindi.

The first day's march brought them to Willow Tree and the second day to Durey where during the night the horses rushed, but all were collected.

They arrived at Benjamin Abbott's property on the third day and added in the 100 horses Bernard had on agistment there.

On September 29 they arrived at Merrigulah, a property owned by Bernard's cousin, Stuart Wightman.

On this day's march the horses rushed again and seven were lost in the Trinkey scrub.

Next day Jack Mullins and Tom Waldron went back and recovered the missing horses.

They left Merrigulah on October 1, but when camping that night found two horses were missing. Jack Mullins and Bruce went back and to them.

Narrabri  
By the 4th they were at Narrabri when Bernard decided that the horses would travel best in two groups; one of 165 horses be placed in Bob Ray's charge and the smaller group under Jack Mullins.

In the 7th, Bernard, with Bob Ray left Narrabri and proceeded to Millie where they arrived on the 9th, Jack Mullins following about a day behind.

At Millie, Bernard left and returned home. Bob Ray with the leading group made Mungindi on the 12th and learnt that grass ahead was short and poor but he pressed on and made St. George on the 19th.

Then he found that grass ahead was worse

and was told that there was no chance of making Normanton.

He telegraphed for instructions and Bernard told him to go to Mitchell and ascertain conditions there.

Accordingly he headed off.

Jack Mullins, however, coming up behind thought conditions were too bad to go ahead and after staying at St. George for a while decided to return to the Barwon River and thence to Bloomfield where he arrived on January, 14, 1885.

Meanwhile Bob Ray had made Mitchell, but finding conditions worse ahead decided to go eastward to Roma where he arrived on November 2.

On this stage a number of horses knocked up and he obtained agistment at Yuelbah, not far away.

### Moonsoon

The information he obtained at Roma was that his only chance of going north was to go towards the coast, and even so it was unlikely that he could get northward of Nive Downs in Central Queensland until the moonsoon came to North Queensland.

Nive Downs was a Brodie property and Stuart and Bernard arranged for him and his horses to stay there pending the arrival of the rains.

Bob Ray after a lengthy halt left for Taroona which he made on December 2nd then headed for Duaringa on the Fitzroy River but finding grass good on the way he turned westward and made Springsure on January 7, 1885.

The grass on this stage was so good that the horses were getting fat.

Rain had fallen in good quantity late in December and early in January and the grass situation to Normanton became good so when Bob Ray and his horses arrived at Clermont about January 15 he received instructions to head directly toward Normanton.

This he did and passing through Aramac and Hughenden, arrived at Bernard Haydon's property Glenore, just south of Normanton by February 27.

Bob Ray lost a few horses after delivering Stuart's horses and Forsyth's horses less one lost between Hughenden and Normanton. He placed 140 horses on Bernard's land.

