

Life on the open range



Campdrafting is a unique Australian sport involving a horse and rider working cattle

Living on a cattle station that may be hundreds of kilometres from the nearest town brings with it some unique privileges, and some challenges too

The 'local' school can be a few hours' drive away and many properties only receive mail weekly by privately-operated mail plane. However, technology has made a huge difference to the people in these remote outposts, helping them to connect more easily with each other and the wider community.

With most managers of CPC stations having children, access to education is a key issue. The answer is a hugely successful distance education system called 'School of the Air'. There are 16 branches of this school across Australia, with the homework assignments being sent out to the rural properties in two- to three-week units to be completed by the children and sent back to their teachers for marking. There are also interactive eLearning sessions each school day where the children can see their teacher and classmates for up to an hour.

On station, lessons are led by a tutor who is employed by CPC. They are typically someone from a rural background with an interest in a teaching career. For them, the role is a great opportunity to test their skills in a small classroom environment and also to get involved in station life. This form of teaching generally takes the children up to 11 years of age – after that they go on to boarding schools in the region for their secondary education, with CPC contributing towards the cost.

When you're living and working in such distant outposts, community gatherings are a rare but valuable opportunity to catch up with neighbours and friends. Campdrafting

is a particularly popular event in rural Australia, with people coming from great distances to show off their horsemanship and cattle herding skills.

Recognising the importance of these events to local life, CPC regularly sponsors local campdrafts and rodeos, loaning cattle or providing financial support. This can involve up to 1,000 head of cattle being caught, sorted, freighted and then returned to the station, so it's a huge undertaking and vital to the future of these events. CPC employees also help out, often volunteering for shifts in the yards, cleaning up or taking on roles in the campdraft committee.

Despite the remoteness of the stations dotted across the outback, communities are thriving. As CPC's managers and their families can testify, the internet and a few well-supported social events can do a lot to bridge the huge distances that separate people.



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