

PASTORAL PURSUITS

When Australia rode on the sheep's back – David Boyd's book captures a unique chapter in our history

Story: Tricia Duffield, Rod Corfe and Ian Cole

Although it started as a personal memoir to share with his grandchildren, David Boyd's beautifully illustrated autobiography 'Pastoral Pursuits – David Boyd's Autobiographical Collection', is a record of one of the most significant eras in NSW agriculture.

David Boyd may not be a household name, but he has been a key figure in the growth and success of Australia's wool, wheat, cotton and beef industry, and is well known on the Bourke and Brewarrina Shires.

David was the man tasked with acquiring vast properties for the pastoral company Clyde Agriculture, owned by the British-based John Swire and Sons.

His book is not just the personal story of David's rise through the industry, but a record of a time when Australia truly 'rode on the sheep's back'.

Clyde Agriculture had deep ties to Bourke, Brewarrina and Walgett, with its Bourke cotton gin a major employer at Bourke, and with property holdings stretching across the three shires and beyond.

David steered the massive growth of Clyde Agriculture, which included a property portfolio containing some of the most significant holdings from Coonamble and Warren to Cunnamulla and Quilpie, including the mighty Toorale and Beemery stations. Clyde Ag was for a short period, the largest wool grower in Australia, the fourth largest cotton grower, the seventh largest wheat producer and NSW's largest beef producer.

David's 'Pastoral Pursuits' autobiography is a hefty 253 pages, richly illustrated with photographs which capture the landscape of outback Australia, as well as photographs from his extensive travels to exotic locations around the world. It is also deeply personal, revealing early hardships, the pain of losing a child, the difficult balance of fatherhood and a huge and demanding career.

David is now retired, but at 84 is still keenly interested in the agricultural industry, politics, the state of the world and whatever else catches his attention.

"I'm very surprised to realise I'm 84, which is bloody old, but I don't feel it" he told 2WEB's Rod Corfe. "I have a few issues but I'm very well and very thankful for that.

"The book started as a cheap paperback, which I thought might have commercial appeal, but my little suburban printer convinced me to turn it into a coffee table book with quality paper and photographs. It's my life story."

David was born in Moree and moved to Tamworth when he was very young. His father suffered from Hodgkins disease and required medical treatment which saw the family move to Sydney, where after five years of treatment, his father died. The death of his father brought enormous change in the family's fortunes and future.

David left school at 16 and found work as a jackaroo in the outback.

"I started jackarooing in Queensland the day after my 16th birthday. I did it for about three years and I just thought there must be something more interesting than this, and I applied for a job at Dalgety."

David was with Dalgety for more than 28-year years. His first country branch posting was to Bourke in 1960, the starting point for his long and successful career and the place where he met local girl, Gail Dugan, who six years lat-



David Boyd at the Bourke Show with Lisa and Bill Ridge. PHOTO SUPPLIED

er, became his wife.

"When I arrived in Bourke, I was told I was the new bookkeeper and I really didn't know what I was doing, but I never regretted starting at the bottom," he said.

"Bourke in 1960 had had some good seasons and the town was thriving. The wool boom at that time meant there was plenty of cash about. I loved the big numbers of livestock and the big minds of the industry."

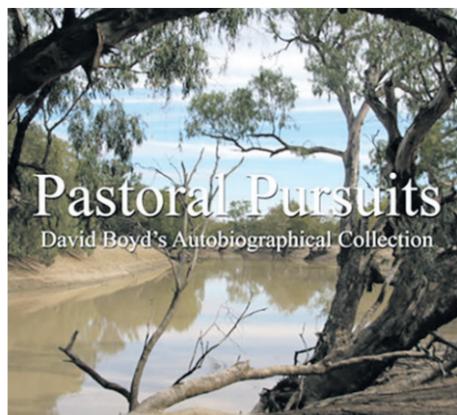
From Bourke he was moved to Ivanhoe, before undergoing a three-year cadetship in South Australia and Western Australia, then back to Bourke and Nyngan before his first posting as branch manager, at Hillston.

It was while at Hillston, following the loss of their first child after a difficult birth, that David and Gail decided to travel the world for a year, and heal. Photographs from that trip around the world feature prominently in the book, but it really pays homage to his home country – especially the place which played such a big role in defining his future career – Bourke.

David tells the story of his surprise decision to take a bold leap of faith from Dalgety to the newly minted Clyde Agriculture company, and his rise through the ranks during an era when agriculture was Australia's identity and biggest industry.

The book tells the story of David's great admiration for aircraft catering tycoon Dudley Dunn who came to Bourke in 1973 and bought the huge Toorale Station holding and the Royal Hotel. Dudley then added Latoka, Janbeth and Longmeadows – all near Bourke where he developed cotton farms under the banner of "Wesbeef Pastoral Company".

Another great friend of David's – the CEO and Chairman of Swire – Edward Scott became involved and eventually the Wesbeef Pastoral Co became Clyde Agriculture – completely owned by the Swire group. In June 1988 David met with Dudley Dunn and Edward Scott and accepted an offer of Managing Director of Clyde Agriculture.



David Boyd's autobiography, 'Pastoral Pursuits' is a beautiful, pictorial coffee table book which celebrates life on the land. PHOTO SUPPLIED

Despite the importance of Clyde Agriculture as a major agricultural company, David declined offers to set up the head office in Sydney and instead Clyde Ag's administration and accounting in Bourke. David said another legend of the industry, the late Les Walsh, was a great supporter and during his time in Bourke, Clyde Agriculture went from strength to strength.

At their peak, Clyde's 20-odd property aggregations carried more than 400,000 sheep, with the annual woolclip of around 8000 bales the nation's largest, 36,000 cattle, 24,000 hectares of dryland farming and 10,800ha of irrigation, mostly cotton.

The story of Clyde Ag's spectacular growth to its eventual demise makes for a fascinating read, wrapped in glorious images.

Later when Clyde Ag sold off their magnificent agricultural holdings, David was disappointed with the breakup of his creation.

For David, perhaps the saddest development was the private sale of Clyde's 'jewel in the crown' station, Toorale on the Darling, along with its extensive water licences, to the federal and state governments, to become a national park.

Outside of his work with Clyde Agriculture, David said that his chairmanship of the Darling Matilda Way Sustainable Region Board and securing \$3 million for the completion of the Back O'Bourke Exhibition Centre.

This book is at times an intensely personal journey through the rise and fall of an Australian agricultural empire.

Next year it will be 20 years since David retired, but he continues to advocate for the agricultural sector whenever he has the chance.

'Pastoral Pursuits – David Boyd's Autobiographical Collection' began as a memoir for his four grandchildren but is a fascinating read for anyone interested in the history and inner workings of the pastoral industry during an historically important era. It is also a personal story which pays tribute to his wife Gail, who is now buried in the cemetery of her beloved hometown of Bourke.

Following are two stanzas of a poem written by the Bourke Bard Andrew Hull in 2007 when David retired – a poem called "David Boyd – a story to be told".

*Your friendships loom as large
as your attention to detail
So Edward Scott and Dudley Dunn
will feature in your tale
As will Beemery, Toorale, Clover Downs
and Wingadee
And Pier Pier and Thylungra
and Latoka and Rumleigh
There will be regrets if the story's
to be true
So Portland Downs will rank among
the losses that you rue
But your tale is not a sad one,
and it will not dwell on loss
It's Measured by your influence
on lives that you have crossed.*

David Boyd's book "Pastoral Pursuits" is available by accessing David's website – jdboyd.com