



JERRY RANDALL FINISHES OFF A LARGE BUFFALO.



HALF A TON OF EDIBLE BEEF IS LEFT TO ROT.

The Buffalo Industry In The Northern Territory

Short term leases cause an annual wastage of thousands of tons of meat

The shooting of our Northern Territory buffaloes for their hides has long been a major industry in the North. Shooters operate on annually leased land, and thus have little inducement to stabilise themselves through the establishment of permanent fixed plant which they might forfeit next year. Thus no facilities yet exist for the treatment of the thousands of buffalo carcasses that are wasted during each season.

By our Northern Correspondent

MOONLIGHT whitened the grass and shone on the backs of the blobs that were slowly grazing buffaloes. Soft grumbling and chomping and the occasional click of hooves were the only sounds made by the herd.

The horsemen rode silently from their camp among the paperbarks and came on to the plain. Occasionally a horse stumbled as a hoof dropped into the hard imprints left by the buffaloes during the wet season when the edge of the plain was bordered with puggy wallows.

The horsemen drew closer. The hindmost buffalo threw up its head with alarm and lumbered forward. It cannoned into the beast in front and panicked the herd. Grass was forgotten as the buffaloes surged forward.

Hooves pounded and the horsemen advanced at a gallop, spreading to encircle the milling herd. The night echoed with the crash of flaming guns. Buffalo after buffalo lurched to the ground.

Then came the dawn. Dead beasts littered the vast expanse of plains.

Scattered beasts, not yet dead, propped themselves up with their forelegs, their dragging hindquarters furrowing a wide track behind. The whistling chirr of the wheeling hawks mingled with the harsher carr of the crows, and dingoes slunk tentatively forward to spring backward each time a wounded animal stirred.

While the sun was still low, the horsemen came again, followed by their string of sturdy pack horses. Working methodically they skinned the dead animals after finishing off the wounded, then cinched the wet heavy hides on the pack horses.

Before the sun was overhead the horsemen left the plains, the laden pack team plodding behind urged on by horse-tailers.

The shrill cries of the hawks increased as they dropped on to the gory carcasses now bloated with the heat of the day. Crows fought for a place on the swarming flesh and scattered when the dingoes padded closer.

In 1951, five thousand tons of buffalo beef fed the crows, hawks and dingoes of the Northern Territory. Nine thousand carcasses rotted on the

plains. The year 1948 saw the slaughter of 17,000 beasts, with a wastage of nearly 10,000 tons of beef. Yet in some places people starve.

The Northern Territory buffalo industry is at present concerned only with the production of hides which are marketed overseas, processed and used in the manufacture of machinery belting. At the current price of 2/5 per pound, the buffalo hunter receives approximately £9 per hide from Darwin dealers.

Water buffaloes are not indigenous to Australia. They were introduced into the Northern Territory in 1824, when an attempt was made to form a settlement at Port Essington. The nucleus of Australia's herds was originally imported from south-east Asia to provide beef and milk for an earlier settlement on Melville Island.

Buffaloes thrived both on Melville Island and the mainland. Huge tracts of the north are heavily reeded swamps and grass plains, so with few natural enemies, apart from occasional losses of calves to blacks, dingoes and crocodiles, the herds multiplied to pest proportions.

own. The late Joe Cooper is credited with almost completely wiping out buffaloes on Melville Island, while tough pioneers like Paddy Cahill and Hazel Gaden, armed with old single

Buffalo hunters then came into their
With such unrestricted slaughter, the buffalo fast diminished. Finally the Government stepped in and draft-shot Martini-Henris, blasted the herds on the mainland.

The buffalo contributed greatly to pioneering the north. Tracks were blazed into previously unexplored country to the west, and to the east across northern Arnhem Land, in pursuit of the valuable hides. Fights with blacks were commonplace, the blackman eventually working for the white man.

ed the Buffalo Industry Ordinance. The ordinance decreed that only bulls over three years old could be shot and that a licence to shoot a restricted number must be obtained annually.

At the beginning of World War 2, there were few full time shooters, although descendants of Hazel Gaden were firmly established in the field. Over the war years the herds were unmolested and increased substantially.

At the war's end buffalo hunters again came into their own. Every available grazing lease was taken up and shooting camps organized with black labor. Buffalo hunting became partly mechanized as shooters operated from trucks. At first only bulls were shot, but each season, with increasing overhead, shooters found it more difficult to show a profit. Few shooters were able to attain their licenced tally, and in an effort to do so, some shot cows and undersized bulls, or poached on neighbouring leases.

Today buffaloes still roam in large numbers in Arnhem Land, which is taboo to white man, but on most grazing leases where shooters operate, the herds are rapidly decreasing. 1952 was a record low and the position is considered serious. Foresighted shooters recommend a closed season for three to five years, and in fact anticipate this move.

Some leaseholders are conserving their herds by only shooting on a small section of their property to meet expenses. On the East Alligator River, by mutual agreement, there is a two miles neutral strip separating Smeeton-Doyle's from Randall's block.

Buffalo hunters themselves admit theirs is a cruel, gory business and look forward to the "wet" when they can wash the blood from their hands until the next season. Cruelty they say is inevitable. They operate in the most humane way possible, considering they are working on wild herds, and point out that if their leases were secure, steps to domesticate the buffaloes could be taken and slaughtering carried out in a more satisfactory manner.

June, 1953

Buffalo hunters say that the Government takes little interest in their activities and is only allowing their leases to stand until better use is contemplated. This is understandable, as on the face it would appear that the buffalo hunter only takes from the land without developing it. Even permanent camps are hewn from bush timber and roofed with bark.

However, the fault here could lay with the Government. Ostensibly buffalo blocks are grazing leases, to be renewed annually, but the authorities are under no obligation to renew them. Holders are told that if they like to carry out certain improvements on a grazing property there is a good chance of it being changed to a pastoral lease with an extended period of say fifteen years. However, having made necessary improvements, they must forego all title, leaving the lease open to public application, theirs of course receiving due recognition. To these hard-working bushmen, the risk is too great, so they will continue taking from the country until such time as their leases are changed or forfeited.

It must not be supposed by any means that buffalo-hunters are an unimaginative lot. On the contrary, most I know have offered constructive ideas for the development of their industry. These ideas however revolve around the lease problem.

Despite the deplorable wastage, all shooters utilize to the fullest extent whatever beef they can from the buffaloes. Buffalo steak, tongue and liver is their staple diet. Several have pointed out to me that Australia is the only country in which the buffalo occurs that it is not domesticated and utilized generally for beef, dairying and other domestic purposes.

One school of thought advocates the absolute destruction of the herds to make way for the cattle industry. However, a great deal of country in which buffaloes thrive is impossible for cattle, which are highly susceptible to swamp cancer, tuberculosis and buffalo fly. The buffalo is apparently immune to these scourges, so seems the only practical animal to cultivate.

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HUNTERS move camp with the aid of donkey wagon. Trucks are often used.

HIDES wrinkle and lose value if they are not removed soon after beast dies.



N.T. BUFFALO

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It would take a few years to build up domestic herds—calves being taken from the wild herds and run as breeding cattle. Buffalo shooting would continue as usual, to keep the wild herds in check and lessen the chances of them being joined up by the domesticated ones.

J. Randall, holder of Mudginberry lease on the East Alligator River, feels he has a satisfactory solution to the problem of wastage. With a group of Sydney business men he is now waiting for a promised area of land to be made available by Vestey's interests for the purpose of erecting a factory for the treatment of buffalo carcasses.

Tests carried out by scientists proved that adrenalin is obtainable from the kidney fat, neatsfoot oil from the carpal and tarsal joints, glycerine by-products from the hooves and horns, tallow, meatmeal, bone-meal and fertilizer from the residue.

Randall estimates that each carcass should be worth £32 clear of expenses to the company.

The area of land in question is at Alligator Heads, Mary River, and could take in the carcasses from three big buffalo hunting properties. The company's truck, following in the wake of the shooters, would pick up the skinned carcasses and convey them to the factory. It would not be practical for meat intended for human consumption to be handled in this manner, as satisfactory inspection would be impossible. Beef buffaloes would of necessity be domesticated beasts.

Although buffaloes are shot from trucks, horseback shooting has proved more efficient. A white shooter may also employ a number of native shooters both for horseback and foot shooting.

Shooting camps are shifted in accordance with the distribution of buffaloes. Day shooting begins at picaniny daylight. Camp lubras prepare breakfast about two hours before daylight while the horse tailers are catching the horses. Usually foot shooters

move off together along the edge of the swamp while horse shooters fan out through the scrub. The pack team and skimmers trail behind.

When buffaloes are sighted in the scrub or on the plains, the shooters gallop in pursuit, dropping each buffalo with a spinal shot. The following skimmers then take over finishing off the beasts and loading the hides on packhorses.

Sometimes in the mad gallop a buffalo may be only wounded. Such animals are dangerous. While obtaining material for this article I saw several buffaloes charge and twice narrowly escaped myself. A wounded buffalo charges headlong, swinging its head to gore with the massive horns. If the charge fails, it turns and charges again. I once saw a buffalo pounding a native's hat into the ground while the native clung precariously to a white-ant riddled sapling just out of the buffaloes reach.

But buffalo hunters are tough and promise to outlive their own industry.

EARLY SHARKS

—from page 105

body of the shark was buried on the beach.

The best "tailers" often put on a show for the crowd, and I have seen a tailer almost waist deep in water. "Familiarity breeds contempt", and these lads knew no fear. Great amusement was created one night when a chap named Mick O'Neil nearly went to sea because he went for the tail of a shark which was swimming side by side with the hooked fish, and afterwards you'd sometimes hear one of the boys call out: "Look out, Mick! That's the wrong one".

During 1927-28, many Sunday paper issues had articles on the Bondi shark fishermen, and these may still be read in the newspaper files. Newspaper men often came to the beach and took flashlight photos of the fishing.

Mr. Lance Walsh was one of the outstanding fishermen in those days,

and he at one time received a letter from America. The letter stated that the writer had read newspaper articles on the shark fishing, and was amazed that such fish were hooked, played and landed on open beaches. The American said that one day he intended to visit Australia and have a go at the sharks. The letter was signed "Zane Grey". It was just a letter from a fisherman, and we took little notice of it. (Zane Grey later on came and fished Australian waters).

Another interesting incident occurred one day in the early thirties when a comparatively unknown man gave Lance Walsh two pieces of split cane and suggested he make a rod and try it on the sharks. I saw the cane and helped Lance with the making of the rod, probably the first "Southam Cane" game fish rod used in Sydney. It might be interesting to find this rod today and compare it with the latest "Southam Game Rod".

Things have changed. No longer is Bondi filled with schools of salmon at night; the rods no longer stand along the surf; the "tailers are gone. In place of this, the modern game fishing launch rides the waves. Here and there you may find someone who remembers, but I think they are few and far between.

THE ESI-WAY

—from page 107

If using this method, however, one should be careful to ensure that the knife-edges do not move in their bearings, although the ends of the knives are butted closely against the blank ends of the bearings, there must be some clearances, with the result that the pointer can move slightly towards or away from the reference scale, with consequent variation in the amount of parallax. I hasten to add that this does not appear to occur while weighing, but seems to be confined to the operations of assembling and setting for weight.

And the conclusion? Well, the Esi-Wa is not cheap, but in view of the host of practical features, I could never agree to it being called expensive. In fact, I fail to see how the makers could turn out an equal instrument at a lower price, and having seen the operations and degree of precision entailed, I rather incline to surprise that the price is not appreciably higher. However that may be, I am sure that this is an instrument which will give the utmost satisfaction, and that 16 Reynolds Avenue, Bankstown will be a busy place when the scale's capabilities come to be fully appreciated.

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