Remembering Territory families

Pioneering pastoralists – the Hayes family

Mum was actually born at Oodnadatta, she was a member of the Bloomfield family and she grew up out at Loves Creek or what's commonly referred to as Ross River these days. Dad grew up at Undoolya. He was actually born at Maryvale Station but he was only a kid when they shifted up to Undoolya. He was there all his life and that's where we all grew up...

Jimmy recalled, as a child, going out with the Aboriginal women from the station to collect bush tucker:

As a kid, I think you see things different but we knocked around in the bush. We were fairly isolated, we had a pretty good upbringing. First few years of our lives, certainly before we went to school, typical of kids – if there was mud to play in, we'd play in it! As we got a bit older ... We'd hurry up and finish school, mostly finish by lunchtime, and we'd go out ... gathering whatever was on the menus. Anything from rabbits to – rabbits were a good source of food for us – we'd be out there digging rabbits like all hell... and then – I don't know, just bush kids.

Members of the family worked on the stations and knowledge was passed through generations. Jimmy married young, Gail Ride, and their first son, Richie was born in 1965. Talking about his own children, Jimmy said:

Like all kids, they grew up out on the station – Richie being the oldest member of our off-shoot. Mum and Dad were really good at that stage, taking Richie around – on bore runs, fixing fences. You’d go and find cattle with them. Yeah, virtually Mum and Dad grew Richie up as though he was a son...

In the bush you need many skills and you need to be able to diversify. Richie, like his father Jimmy a generation earlier, went away from the station to learn new skills, but always returned. Richie recalled:

When I first left school in 1980 I did an apprenticeship as a diesel mechanic in Alice Springs. I did four years of that. I did a little bit of time extra to that, say, five years away, and then I went home, ’84 or ’85, I can’t remember... Doing an apprenticeship, that was really something I was interested in, being a mechanic or whatever, but once that was over, it was pretty much go home ... Apprenticeship. I used to go home on weekends and work on the station... I’ve changed my career quite a bit too with leaving station life so much and going into the grape game.
The family broadened its interest in the land including horticulture as well as pastoral concerns. Jimmy and Richie explained that the reasons for the strength of the family holdings, was also, in a way, the driving force behind the expansion. More land was needed to support the new generation and a different economic base and changing technology:

As the family’s expanded ... Undoolya couldn’t support, we were battling to support... Dad had three sons working at home and something had to give. Either the boys split up, go and do something else or, and we were all interested in the land, so we bought another station. There’s a lot of money in buying a station. There’s a lot of money in building grape farms... we went with the grape farm...

See things have changed from horses where we’re mustering with horses back to quad bikes or on very rare occasions we’ve even put a helicopter in for convenience.
[Northern Territory Archives Service NTRS 3163, BWF 40, Jimmy and Ritchie Hayes]

The Hayes family remains on the land, an ongoing part of Central Australian history.