

## FROM DEAD HEART TO RED HEART: DEVELOPING THE DESTINATION IMAGE OF THE AUSTRALIAN OUTBACK

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### Abstract

The Australian Outback projects a destination image which is unique and attractive to tourists. While this destination image is promoted by various destination marketing organisations, it was initially established by a range of media, including books, magazines, art and film. Though crucial to the development of destination image, such *organic* media stand outside of the control of destination marketing organisations and the tourism industry. This paper examines the development of the Outback's destination image through three sources. These are the books *Australia Unlimited* (1918) and *I saw a strange land* (1950) and the film *Jedda* (1955).

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## INTRODUCTION

In the last forty years the Australian Outback has developed as a major tourist destination. According to Weaver, Australia and the USA are, 'the two countries where desert ecotourism is best represented and longest established' (2001: 254). However, the destination image of the Australian Outback is far more complex than just an arid ecosystem. It combines environmental (landscapes, flora, fauna), cultural (Aboriginal) and historic (explorers, settlers) attributes in projecting a highly attractive image as a last frontier.

The appeal of the Outback's destination image is illustrated by how it has been claimed by six Australian states and territories, as well as a range of businesses (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Organisations etc. using the Outback in their Branding**

Organisation	Branding
Northern Territory Tourist Commission	Australia's Outback: Northern Territory This is the Real Outback
South Australian Tourism Commission	Flinders Ranges and Outback
Western Australian Tourism Commission	Golden Outback
Tourism New South Wales	Outback NSW
Tourism Queensland	Outback
Tourism Victoria	Mildura Murray Outback
2002 Year of the Outback	2002 Year of the Outback
Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame and Outback Heritage Centre	Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame and Outback Heritage Centre
Qantas Memorial Foundation	Qantas Founders (sic) Outback Museum

Promoting an attractive destination image of the Outback has been a major strategy of destination marketing organisations such as the Northern Territory Tourist Commission (Hall, 2003: 167-171). However, the Outback's destination image was developed well before the introduction of formal marketing strategies. Non-tourism media, particularly books, newspaper and magazine articles, paintings, poetry, films and television were critical in shaping ideas about the Outback, including its potential as a holiday destination (Haynes, 1998). Furthermore, non-tourism media has continued to influence this image, sometimes complementing, sometimes contradicting, tourism marketing.

The influence of non-tourism (or *organic*) media in shaping a destination's image has been the subject of a number of recent studies (Beeton, 2001 & 2004; Busby and Klug, 2001; Croy and Walker, 2003; Frost, 2004C & 2004D; Herbert, 2001; Kim and Richardson, 2003; Riley et al, 1998; Sargent, 1998; Tooke and Baker, 1996). However, in considering the Outback, this literature is limited in two ways. First, it is primarily focussed on the northern hemisphere. Second, there is a tendency to see media as a *revolutionary* force, with individual films (in particular) having an immediate and dramatic effect on image and tourism visitation. In contrast, there has been little consideration of a group of media productions having a slow *evolutionary* impact on a destination over time, a pattern which seems to fit the Outback better.

Initially the image of the Outback was extremely negative. In the nineteenth century, the tragedies of the exploring parties of Leichardt and Burke and Wills created an image of the Outback as hostile, dangerous and sterile. In the case of Burke and Wills, books, paintings and monuments perpetuated a myth that they had died due to the harsh environment. Indeed they were often erroneously portrayed as dying of thirst in the desert (Bonyhady, 1991). The term 'Dead Heart' became popular through the book *The Dead Heart of Australia*, written by J.W. Gregory, Professor

of Geology at the University of Melbourne, in 1906. Gregory's account was of an expedition around Lake Eyre, but his term was quickly applied to a much larger area (Cathcart, 1998)

Such a negative view generated critics, who countered that there were other positive aspects to the Outback. This paper considers three examples of such views. These are: Edwin Brady, who coined the term 'Red Heart' as an alternative to 'Dead Heart'; Arthur Groom, who saw the potential for a vast National Park; and Charles and Elsa Chauvel, whose film *Jedda* presented the Outback in colour and provided a powerful critique of government policy on Aborigines. Combined with other media representations, these works changed the image of the Outback and laid a foundation for the modern tourism industry.

In considering the development of images of the Outback, parallels may be drawn with the American West. One oft put view is that Outback Australia is attractive to American visitors as it is at a similar stage of development to the (possibly mythic) America of an earlier period and therefore offers frontier experiences no longer possible in the USA (see for example Durack, 1962). Certainly fiction and films have shaped a long-standing popular image of the American West (Coyne, 1997; Frost, 2004D; Hitt, 1990; Pilkington and Graham, 1979). In contrast, the scale of works on the Australian Outback is much smaller, though like the Western they have shaped a unique and appealing image.

### **EDWIN BRADY AND AUSTRALIAN UNLIMITED**

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the journalist and advertising agent Edwin Brady wrote a number of travel books on Australia. His first works were built around unusual modes of transport: a small boat in *The River Rovers*, a horse-drawn waggon in *The King's Caravan* and a motor car in *Picturesque Port Phillip* (all published in 1911). In *Australia Unlimited* (1918) he attempted a far more audacious project, a massive well-illustrated book covering the whole of Australia and promoting a strong case for greater agricultural development. *Australia Unlimited* was in no way a conventional travel book, but it was a powerful shaper of the image of the Outback.

Brady's argument was that Australian farmlands were, 'highly fertile and unlimited in area' (Brady, 1918: 88). With the development of railways and irrigation projects, Australia could be home to 200 million people (Brady, 1918: 56). Such expansion required the commercial farming of Australia's interior. Unfortunately, Brady argued, 'very early in the country's history there grew up a stereotyped conception of the interior as a dry and waterless desert ... Book after book has been written perpetuating this fallacy' (Brady, 1918: 37).

Brady argued for an end to negative language. He suggested that, 'let us be done forever with this foolish talk of the "Central Australian Desert"' (Brady, 1918: 584) and 'Instead of a "Dead Heart of Australia" there exists in reality a Red Heart' (Brady, 1918: 630). There was no desert, for the, 'invaluable subterranean waters of Australia are permanent and inexhaustible' (Brady, 1918: 94). Technology could overcome any limitations:

It has now been proved by meteorologists that Australia is not a drought-stricken country. Increased production of recent years has been due, not to better seasons – but to improved farming methods, particularly in "dry" areas, and also to an extension of [water] conservation, storage, irrigation, better transport, and the artesian supply (Brady, 1918: 97).

In the future, Brady predicted for this Red Heart:

Out of this mighty heart what treasures of meat and wool are destined to be poured! By its maternal beats what millions will yet be fed and clothed ... [and] send through the great transcontinental aorta floods of national life into the veins and arteries of the whole Commonwealth (Brady, 1918: 588).

Brady's vision of a productive Outback was highly influential. According to geographer J.M. Powell, *Australia Unlimited*, 'did very well because it offered a well-timed corroboration of the ascendant nationalist-imperialist line and because its confident air insinuated the idea that Australia had been undersold' (1993: 9). By being published at the end of the First World War, it tapped into popular views that Australia had to 'populate or perish'. It also propagated a Federal view of Australia's future. Working together as a nation had just been successfully demonstrated for the first time during the war, Brady's attractive argument was that this could continue in other fields. Both sides of politics incorporated Brady's ideas into their policies and extensive agricultural development of the arid inland was a major concern during the 1920s (Frost, 2003B).

Edwin Brady occupies a paradoxical position in Australian travel and environmental literature. On the one hand, his *Australia Unlimited* has been credited with changing the way Australians saw the arid regions of Central Australia and encouraging further travel writing (Griffiths, 1996: 186; Haynes, 1998: 140 & 144). In addition, Brady's establishment of a writers' camp at Mallacoota on the Victorian-NSW border has been portrayed as instrumental to the declaration of a coastal National Park in 1909 (Anderson, 2000: 72) and Brady's early works inspired pioneer bushwalker and conservationist Myles Dunphy to attempt to replicate his travels (Meredith, 1999: 66). On the other hand, Brady has been severely criticised as a destructive force. Commenting on Brady's *Australia Unlimited* (1918), Tim Flannery described it as 'one of the most extraordinary and influential books written' on the development of inland Australia. However, Flannery argued that its 'contents are laughable' and that 'it is difficult to read his work today without baulking at the ingenuousness of his arguments'. Despite these faults, Flannery recognised that Brady's writings were taken seriously and led to unsustainable development, massive environmental degradation and a series of faunal extinctions in Outback areas (1994: 359-362).

## **ARTHUR GROOM SAW A STRANGE LAND**

After World War One there was a growth in literature and promotional material concerning the Outback. Some was linked to general development. The missionary John Flynn, for example, initially was a keen advocate of Brady's push for increased population (Hains, 2002: 88). However, in time he became less certain that the Outback could support large numbers. Instead, he focussed on building interest in the Outback amongst city-dwellers, reasoning that only such a connection could stimulate support for his work (Hains, 2002: 139-142). Others were more concerned with travel and tourism. Noted travel and nature writers such as Charles Barrett and Robert Croll wrote of their trips and promoted exhibitions of Aboriginal Art in metropolitan centres (Griffiths, 1996: 176-9). However, the images they created were still of a remote and dangerous frontier.

Arthur Groom's *I saw a strange land* (1950) is significant in two ways. First, Groom's main intention was the creation of a National Park in Central Australia and his book was far more concerned with the promotion of tourism than others (Griffiths, 1996: 180). Groom was a Queensland journalist, who had come to prominence for his partnership with Romeo Lahey. As detailed in Groom's *One mountain after another* (1949), they had set up the Queensland National Parks Association and had promoted tourism to the Lamington National Park through the establishment of Binna Burra Lodge (Frost, 2004A).

Groom journeyed through the Outback around Alice Springs in 1946 and 1947. His intention was, 'I wanted to see if Central Australia's scenery was grand enough ... to warrant tourist development in any large degree' (Groom, 1950: 12). He was particularly drawn to Uluru, then known as Ayers Rock and rendered by Groom as 'Oolra' (Groom, 1950: 131). At that time Uluru was 'seldom visited' and as it was in an Aboriginal Reserve tourists could only visit with written government permission (Groom, 1950: 167). Groom was greatly impressed, comparing it to a cathedral (1950: 164). However, he was also concerned that it would be damaged as it became more popular. He argued that:

Unless its protection is made permanent before access is considered, the day will surely come when people will paint their names on its pink walls, steal the native pounding stones and relics about it, shoot its many birds and unusual animals and root up the unique plants at its base (Groom, 1950: 168).

In concluding, Groom argued that, 'close protection of this strange land is more than necessary. It will be a criminal tragedy if exploitation is allowed in terms of dividend only' (1950: 211). Unfortunately, Groom did not detail how that protection was to be organised, nor how tourism would operate. However, in his book on the Lamington Plateau he foreshadowed the need for a 'great National Park for the Centre of Australia' (Groom, 1949: 205).

The second feature of Groom's work is the prominence he gave to Aborigines. Brady had treated the Outback as *Terra Nullius*, an empty space to be filled by farmers. In Groom, Aboriginal people are everywhere, as guides, keepers of local wisdom, in photographs and in dialogues with the author. Furthermore, Groom subtly subverts prevailing ideas. At first, he reveals, 'I had believed the work of Missions to be nothing more than a merciful delaying of the final death of the Aboriginal race'. However, after spending time at Hermannsburg Mission, he proclaims, 'The contrast presenting itself at Hermannsburg was unexpected. This was no dying race – there were too many children' (Groom, 1950: 22).

## THE CHAUVELS' NORTHERN TERRITORY STORY

Early Australian film-makers shunned the Outback as a location. It was too expensive and potentially too dangerous for equipment and cast. Many early films had strong Australian themes, but they were shot close to the capital cities. The first major film depicting the Outback was *The Overlanders* (1946), which depicted a World War Two cattle drive from Darwin to Brisbane. Made by the British Ealing Studios, it was initiated by the Australian Government, which had complained that the Australian war effort was not being featured in British propaganda films (Shirley and Adams, 1983: 168-9).

In 1955, Charles and Elsa Chauvel released their feature film *Jedda*. At this stage the Chauvels were Australia's major filmmakers with successes including *In the wake of the Bounty* (1933, Errol Flynn's first film), *Forty Thousand Horsemen* (1940), *The Rats of Tobruk* (1944) and *The Sons of Matthew* (1949, a fictionalised account of the O'Reillys on the Lamington Plateau). Highly successful, *Jedda* was significant in developing the Outback's image in three ways.

First, *Jedda* was filmed almost entirely on location in the Northern Territory, particularly Katherine Gorge and Mataranka. Utilising a working title of *The Northern Territory Story*, the Chauvels reversed the 'standard sequencing of pre-production', first choosing locations and then developing a story to fit them. This unusual course of action 'formed an integral part of the massive publicity and promotion up to and following its release (Cunningham, 1991: 156-7, see also Shirley and Adams, 1983: 198-200).

The Chauvels' strategy in filming almost entirely on location is best appreciated by comparison to their contemporary, American director John Ford, well-known for his location shooting in Monument Valley, Utah. However, Ford did not film entirely in Monument Valley, his strategy was to film in more conventional locations and use Monument Valley for certain shots. Thus, *Stagecoach* (1939) was filmed in the studio, at the Iverson Movie Ranch in Los Angeles and at the Mojave Desert, with second-unit footage of Monument Valley spliced in (Rothel, 1990: 188). For *Fort Apache* (1948) the fort set built at Corriganville in Los Angeles was mixed with desert scenery and even *The Searchers* (1956) has Bronson Canyon in suburban Los Angeles substituting for parts of Monument Valley (Rothel, 1990: 39 & 150-5). For the Chauvels to film with hardly any studio sets and at the authentic locations represented in the film was unheard of at that time.

Second, *Jedda* was filmed in colour. Again this was relatively unusual. Westerns such as *Fort Apache* (1948) and *High Noon* (1952) were in black and white, as was the Chauvels' previous film, *The Sons of Matthew*, even though it was filmed on location on the Lamington Plateau. However, the Chauvels realised that the Outback needed to be presented in colour. Previous black and white depictions, such as in the photographs in Groom's book, failed to satisfactorily convey this aspect of the Outback. By filming in colour, the Chauvels established the colours of the outback as an integral part of its destination image.

Third, the Chauvels cast two Aborigines, Robert Tudawali and Ngarla Kunoth, as their stars. Again, this was unheard of. Westerns, for example, only occasionally used American Indians as supporting players and generally Indians were portrayed as villains and by white actors. By casting two Aborigines as their leads, the Chauvels made Aborigines central to the image of the Outback portrayed. Like Groom, the Chauvels challenged notions of dying races and the need for assimilation, particularly through focussing on Aboriginal children. However, unlike Groom, they moved such issues to the centre of their story. In the Chauvels' representation of the Outback, the future of the Aborigines was the main issue.

## CONCLUSION

The destination image of the Australian Outback is the product of hundreds of books, magazine articles, films and television series. In this paper three such media sources were considered. From this examination of these sources, two important patterns emerge. These not only help us to understand how the Outback became such an attractive destination, but also how the process of destination image formation occurs in general terms.

First, the impact of media on destination image was *evolutionary* rather than *revolutionary*. In the nineteenth century, the Outback's image was negative – a dangerous and hostile environment. In turn, the three sources considered here each made contributions to changing that image. Brady's *Australia Unlimited* highlighted its economic potential and coined the positive term *Red Heart* to replace the unattractive *Dead Heart*. Groom's *I saw a strange land*, abandoned such boosterism, but highlighted the potential for a National Park and tourism and focussed on the Aborigines. The Chauvels' *Jedda* built on Groom's interest in scenery and Aboriginal culture, but presented it in the far more attractive medium of a colour feature film. It is this destination image, repeated and reinforced through other media and tourism marketing, which has remained as that of the Outback for fifty years. Importantly, no one media production created the Outback's destination image.

Second, the sources considered here are *organic*. They were created by journalists and filmmakers who were outside of the tourism industry. Brady demonstrated no interest in tourism and while Groom and the Chauvels wanted to promote tourism, their efforts were not connected to any official marketing strategy. The destination image was not the result of a formal attempt to create one, rather, in time, destination marketing organisations would have to tailor their marketing to an existing destination image.

Finally, it must be recognised that this study is introductory. It considers only three case studies, when hundreds could have been examined. However, these cases can be seen as representative of types of sources. *Australia Unlimited* is the most important of a range of literature which promoted the economic potential of the Outback. *I saw a strange land* is representative of a vast range of travel literature, often written by eastern journalists. *Jedda* represents an array of feature films, and is arguably the most influential and ambitious of these. Nevertheless, there is scope for further research into other sources, particularly those exploring other aspects of the Outback's destination image and its influence on tourism.

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