

8th Red Ruby Devon World Conference 2008 and Tour.

Overview by Karen Schumacher

The organisers of this Australian conference targeted a theme of "sustainable beef production", and throughout the tour we were shown both stud and commercial herds, plus had a range of guest speakers all within the theme. As each property owner spoke it was clear they all knew exactly where and who was their market. I was impressed with such a good focus.

Australia is a vast continent and it would have been impossible to get to every area where Devon cattle are farmed. The organisers planned the tour around New South Wales, and we certainly had full days. It became apparent the affect the long periods of drought had had on the different properties with many commenting on the lower numbers through destocking regime over the last few years, to seeing stock who are obviously still showing the affects of the drought conditions. Equally we were privileged to see some excellent stock both in condition and conformation.

Without exception every property we were privileged to visit treated us royally, with at times the feeling we were in a feedlot, as we dutifully did justice to breakfast, morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea, and then an evening meal. Thankfully we had dancing on several nights to help our clothes to continue to fit. (Well almost).

A reflection of the docility of our breed was when between 40 to 100 people would descent on yards and paddocks, and the stock generally allowed themselves to be viewed, discussed, poked and prodded at very close range. I found everyone on tour were very generous with their time and knowledge. Every property generated discussion and different views on the stock, with differing perspectives and requirements to meet the conditions in the various countries. Of note was the demand for cattle with horns in Queensland, to deter wild dogs. There is increasing interest in poll stock internationally, with people from America, UK, Brazil, and New Zealand all now in discussion with Australian breeders for stock and semen.



The tour group had the day at the Bull and Female stud sale in the Bull selling centre, Marriot Park, Gunnedah. The highest bull price was \$11,750 for Vix Biofuel B88 (P), a 2 year old bull bred by Vic Edwards. This was bought by Benoak Stud. That night we attended the official opening of the exhibition of Devon History at the local Gallery. Throughout the tour and at a number of events we had good exposure by both written media and television.

Great for the breed. A lot of work had gone into the exhibition and it reflected in the very professional and interesting way it was presented.

We were lucky enough to travel through the Rangers Valley feedlot. It was an eye opener, with 250 acres of feedlot yards. This property has about 2,000 to 2,500 cattle go to slaughter every month. (500 per week). They have around 33,000 head in the

feedlot currently. The entry weight for cattle coming in is 400 – 450 kg live weight, and they are finished at 750 – 800 kg. The Angus cattle are fed for 300 days, the waygu for 400 days. The cattle are fed twice a day. With the current increase in grain price, feedlot operations are struggling. This particular one is in a loss situation, and is relying on its Japanese owners to continue to support it. Currently in the USA the feedlots are running at about 57% capacity. The property employs 40 staff.

All stops had been pulled out at Paul and Loma Wright's property, when we were greeted by an avenue of flags of the countries of all those on tour. Very impressive. Their son Greg, a partner in the property, gave a good display of both working dogs and stock horse ability. Later in the day we visited O'Connor Catholic College, and viewed their cattle. What a great bunch of young people. Very keen, the stock all well handled. Angus Cottey (UK) kindly did a demo for the students of clipping for showing, while we partook in more food.

The next morning saw the commencement of some of the formal discussions. It is very clear that the Australian Devon group are focussing on the future, not only of the Devon breed but of the beef industry. Changes in technology, genetics, traits, and market requirements are happening at an increasing speed and they mean to be part of the changes. As Chairman Bob Crawford stated, "we either join the other beef industry participants or we get left behind as a fringe group". The visit to the University of New England at Armidale, included talks by representatives of ABRI (Agricultural Business Research Institute), AGBU (Animal Genetic Breeding Unit), and Beef CRC (Co-operative Research Centre). Heather Burrowes of Beef CRC, spoke of the funding from Government, where it has gone and where they are heading going forward. To receive the funding the projects must be driven by the industry and must have a university partner. They have developed in Australia the MSA (Meat standards Australia), which grades the meat quality into 5 grades. This is seeing a premium paid for the higher quality meat, slower than they would have liked to see, but is happening quicker now.

Heather noted that MSA and Breedplan are the delivery vehicles for the research results to get the information out to the industry. A tremendous amount of work is happening with DNA and genetics. The organisation has partner links with USA, Canada, UK and with Meat & Wool New Zealand. An interesting web page reference was given: www.beefcrc.com.au has a quarterly magazine for the beef industry, and talks of the progress with genetics and DNA work.

A brief discussion was had about the development of the Australian Cattle Genetics Export Agency (ACGEA), which operates out of the ABRI's office. Breeds such as Angus, Limousin, Simmental, Murray Grey, Charolais, Herefords, and Shorthorn have entered into and are participating in developing protocols for exporting. This is being developed under the umbrella of the International Livestock Resource & Information Centre. (ILREC). The ILREC has requested the Australian Devon Society to join the other major breeds of the Australian Beef Industry. Each breed will have its own individual breed specifications which will need to be met. The general feeling is they need to be included and be a player.

The conference itself had excellent guest speakers, all following the theme of sustainable beef production.

Inside the farm gate discussion was had on the importance of the health of your soil, then on to the financial gains of early weaning and how to wean smarter. Looking

outwards marketing both on the domestic and international scene was discussed. The first day finished with Betty giving the Brazilian report and an overview of the next World conference in Brazil in 2012. An exciting programme is being developed.

Day two had reports from the other societies. These have been included at the end of this report. They are found also in the special edition Bulldust which was produced for the conference.

The tour then continued with plenty more wonderful properties and stock to visit and discuss at great depth. Our second to last night had a session at the Crawford's, where speakers continued our theme. A presentation by Falkirk index explained their animal assessment system. Those in New Zealand will recognise the name Clive Dalton who is involved with this programme. Quite a storm brewed up while we were in the wool shed, but hardy as we were it did not stop the party. The band generously loaned their guitars to our Brazilian friends, and quite a jam session kicked in. The bulls down below just sat down and dozed.

Throughout the tour a number of Australians joined us for some of the time. A huge thanks to Paul and Loma Wright, Bob Crawford and a special note for Sal, the editor of Bulldust. Talk about above and beyond the call of duty. Sal is almost 8 months pregnant, left hubby looking after their 18 month old son, and she was with us for the whole tour. Collectively we all had our hearts in our mouths when she was almost knocked over in a bull paddock, and we all feel family to the new baby. I found everyone to be tremendously helpful, willing to share their knowledge and met many people I now think of as friends. What a great bunch were on tour.

The tour was tremendous and will be a hard act to follow. Well done to the committee, the sponsors, and all the property owners who hosted us.

The United Kingdom lot are planning for a tour in two years time. Keep your eye out for it; I believe Gavin Hunter is the key organiser.