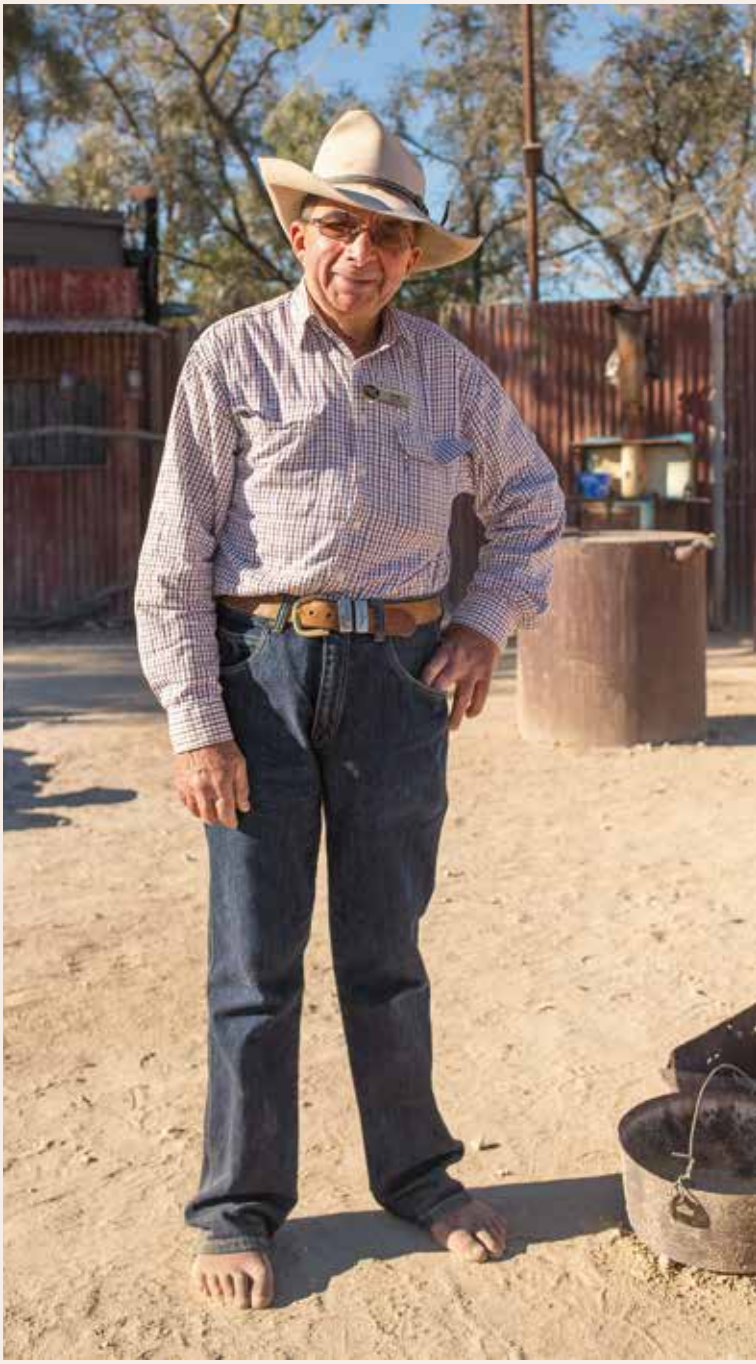
MY TOWN

Longreach

Shoes may be optional but a sense of pride isn't – locals in this Central West Queensland town, the one-time home of Qantas HQ, love their community, as well as the region's vast open spaces and pioneering history. To mark Qantas's 98th anniversary, **Susan Horsburgh** finds out what else the residents rave about.



BUSH POET

Quenton "Scotty" Scott

"I was born in Rockhampton and brought up on cattle properties. Four days before my 21st birthday, I had a pretty bad horse accident; while I was out mustering, my horse fell and I spent six weeks in a coma. I went to a rehabilitation centre in Brisbane – hated Brisbane – and got a job with the Department of Primary Industries, working as a research assistant and animal attendant. I got a transfer to Longreach in 1991 and just loved it here – the people, the climate, everything about it.

I've been known as the Barefoot Poet since I stopped wearing shoes at least 10 years ago. I've never really liked shoes. I used to wear them a bit – they made me wear them for the job – but I used to take them off fairly often. Age is catching up to me now and my balance isn't very good so I'm better off without them.

I mostly work with the tour operator Outback Pioneers, reciting poetry around the camp fire for the Starlight's Cruise Experience. Captain Starlight was a cattle duffer – he did a lot of work at night and could navigate pretty good with the stars. In 1870, he stole 1000 head of cattle from around here and took them down through the Channel Country nearly to Adelaide.

Poetry is becoming more popular at country music festivals like Tamworth and Gympie but it's still a dying art. I've always loved poetry. I still remember a poem I learnt in grade five, *Where the Pelican Builds* by Mary Hannay Foott. My favourite is probably *The Trailer* by Col Wilson, aka 'Blue the Shearer', about backing up a trailer. Of the old bush poets, I like Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson. Their poems are easy to learn and they tell a story. A lot of modern poems don't flow real well and they've got too much bad language.

A few years ago, I helped set up Iningai Nature Reserve, a little 200-hectare park on the edge of town. There are three good walking tracks and the birdwatching is pretty popular. We have a lot of red-tailed black cockatoos at the moment.

Towards the end of the year it gets hot – maybe 45°C on Christmas Day. It gets cold, too. Well, I reckon it does but all these southerners come up and they're in shorts and T-shirts."



GRAZIER

Rosemary Champion

"My family has been here since the early 1890s; my mother's grandparents came out from Northern Ireland. My father, Sir James Walker, was mayor for 35 years and was one of the co-founders of Longreach Pastoral College. He was also chairman of the Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame when the Queen opened the building in 1988.

The Queen first visited Longreach in 1970, during the drought. It was a really hot April day and my parents hosted a lunch on their property. We had to cater for 100 guests and the Queen was so airsick after flying up from Cunnamulla that she couldn't eat anything. After all the trouble we went to, she had a cup of tea and an orange juice. Prince Philip was adorable. He was charmed by my 18-month-old daughter.

When the call was put out for projects to celebrate the bicentenary, Albury, Tamworth, Toowoomba and even Canberra wanted to have the Stockman's Hall of Fame. The last two contenders were Longreach and Cloncurry – and I don't think Cloncurry has ever forgiven us.

I'm chair of the Queensland branch of the Stockman's Hall of Fame, which has more than 65,000 visitors a year. What's amazing about the building is that it's so ageless – people have called it 'the Opera House of the outback'.

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Not only does it explore our pioneering history, it tells the stories of butchers, bakers, train drivers – all the people who ventured out to establish our regional communities. We've just launched a new project honouring Indigenous stockmen and stockwomen. It's a 60,000-year journey.

My husband, Warwick, and I have been on Longway Station for more than 40 years. We've been married for 56 years and we're just so lucky that we can do what we love to do and have each other to do it with. I guess the outback is in our DNA.

There's nothing we don't have in Longreach. It's a close community, housing is cheap, you don't have to lock your doors and there are fantastic services. The drought has been pretty disheartening but I have a major fundraiser for cystic fibrosis every year and I can easily raise $8000 in a morning. People never stop giving in the bush."

SWIMWEAR DESIGNER

Julie Brown

"I had no connections when I moved here in 2000 to take a marketing job with Longreach Pastoral College. I'd been working in Brisbane for a couple of years but I grew up west of Rockhampton – I'm a bush girl at heart. Longreach is such a vibrant community with lots of young people and the social scene is loads of fun. I just felt totally at home.

I met my husband, Adrian, here in 2003. We have a 20,000-hectare sheep and cattle property 60 kilometres outside of Ilfracombe. I love working beside him – mustering and fencing and all that physical work – but when we married in 2004, we started discussing ways to generate off-farm income.

Years ago, I decided rashies and board shorts would be perfect Christmas presents, as my parents, brother and I are all fair-skinned and have had basal cell carcinomas removed. I looked online but couldn't find anything in nice colours or larger sizes. My search went on for a couple of years and one afternoon in 2006, when Adrian and I were walking out a mob of cattle, I said, 'I've thought of our off-farm business ideal' He just rolled his eyes – you know, 'Who would be mad enough to start an online swimwear business in outback Queensland?'

Then the drought really started to bite. By April 2015, we were totally destocked and it was crushing. Drought is a slow, merciless beast; it gradually takes things away from you. The swimwear idea popped back into my mind and I decided to take a swing at it. I had no idea what I was doing but, tiny step after tiny step, Coola Cozzies grew and we launched the Facebook page in December that year. As long as you have the internet and a postal service close by, you can run an online business anywhere.

I've always believed that all things are possible if you work hard enough and Coola Cozzies has fortified that belief. It's not making millions but I see my rashies at the Longreach pool and it gives me such a thrill."





CURATOR

Tom Harwood

"My wife says I'm an aviation tragic. When I was a kid, I could identify every aircraft in production by silhouette alone. I grew up in Brisbane but in 1972, when I was in Year 12, we came to Longreach on a trip. Dad dropped me off at the aerodrome and I ran around looking at the hangars. I started flying in 1974.

I got into radio and came back to Longreach in '91 as the ABC's morning presenter. I did that for 10 years, was manager for another 10 and then retired. I did a heritage project on the Qantas Hangar, which led to aeroplane tours, and eventually I became the curator at the Qantas Founders Museum – we're not owned or operated by Qantas but we can use the name.

The museum opened in '96 as a community project. We have the oldest civil aviation structure in Australia – the 1922 heritage-listed hangar – and full-scale replicas of the DH-50, which was the Qantas airliner in 1924, and a DH-61 from 1929. The Super Constellation from 1954 has just been painted and reassembled. It was found in an aeroplane graveyard in the Philippines and had to be pulled apart in Manila, shipped to Townsville and then brought in by low-loader.

In the café, meals are served on Qantas crockery – the stuff that's obsolete is donated to us – and there's a Nancy Bird Burger on the menu. We have cabin-crew uniforms and early tickets on display but one of my favourite things is the joystick from the first Qantas airliner, which became the first Flying Doctor aircraft in 1928. It was sold to Rockhampton Aerial Services and crash-landed in the water near Bribie Island in 1935. The pilot took the joystick home as a souvenir and about 60 years later, his son gave it to the museum.

I came to Longreach for two years but I forgot to go away. There's something about the country, about the whole place, that just gets you. You're part of a community and if you don't get out there and make things happen, they won't happen. There's a caring for each other – a connection."



DEPUTY PRINCIPAL

Rachelle Moore

"I was posted to Longreach in 1995 to teach at the School of Distance Education and I'm still here. Once you get into the swing of the town, it's easy to meet people. It's a friendly, welcoming place and we've got some fantastic tourist attractions that keep the town buzzing. I'd never return to the city.

I've been deputy principal since 2005. When I used to teach lessons on air, it was via high-frequency radio so there were no visuals. Now we use web conferencing and you can see the kids at home. They're just beautiful – so well mannered and quirky. And very confident; they're used to speaking to adults, I guess.

We have 171 students and cover an area twice the size of Victoria. Most of the geographically isolated kids are on sheep and cattle properties. We teach all curriculum areas but predominantly English and maths over the air. Then the home tutor teaches other subjects such as science, history and geography. I've seen students go on to study medicine and physiotherapy – you can guarantee that if your mum is a teacher, she'll leave no stone unturned.

In 2012, we did our first school musical. Now I do one every two years. This year, it's *The Amazing Adventures of Superstan*, on for one night only at Longreach Civic and Cultural Centre [on 4 December]. I record the dances on DVD and the students learn them at home.

There are 96 students in the musical and every child in the school, from Prep to Year 10, can be in it. The auditions are done remotely and they're great to watch – the kids paint backdrops and get into costume. The director, Sean Dennehy, is an internationally known actor, producer and director from Brisbane. When he was out here with Opera Queensland in 2012, I told him that I needed some help and he's since become part of the family.

We come together for four-and-a-half days of face-to-face rehearsals and put on a full production with sound, lights and costumes. We get a full house, with 700 people, and a standing ovation."



RACE CALLER

Rob Luck

"I'll never be a local because I've only been here for 26 years. But when you're a newcomer like me, you can see the identity and ownership that comes with living here. I came to Longreach as the high-school principal and didn't intend to stay but it was a great place to bring up kids: it has country values, security and people know each other, their joys and disappointments. My first impression probably would have been the vast openness; it felt like we were out in the middle of nowhere. It was open and inviting.

We ended up buying Barkers Newsagency 23 years ago. The hardest thing was working side by side with my wife, Leanne. We'd almost put a line down the middle of the shop and say, 'You stay on that side and I'll stay on this side.' That was just a teething problem.

I've also been president of the jockey club for about five years. I've always had a passion for racing. In 1965, when Eye Liner won the Champagne Stakes, the hairs on the back of my neck stood up. I was hooked for life. The club has grown in leaps and bounds. In the old days, 90 people would go to the races on a bad day; now we get a minimum of 250. It's the place to be. We've renovated the old membership area and we've got council support to develop a multi-function entertainment precinct for conferences and weddings.

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I do the race-calling for the area. It can be tricky, as you have to acquaint yourself with the colours and names. I'm self-taught. I started about 13 years ago, when someone on the committee said, 'We haven't got a race caller this weekend. You're doing it.' I'd never called a race in my life. It was a total disaster, of course: I dropped the binoculars, I couldn't find the field and there were pregnant pauses for about 200 metres!

What makes Longreach distinctive? It's the location, the distance factor. You're happy to drive for four hours to take your kid to a sporting event in Emerald and come back the same day. Distance is a state of mind when you live in Longreach." ●