



## Balancing Heritage and environmental conservation management of small homestead leases in a remote pastoral landscape

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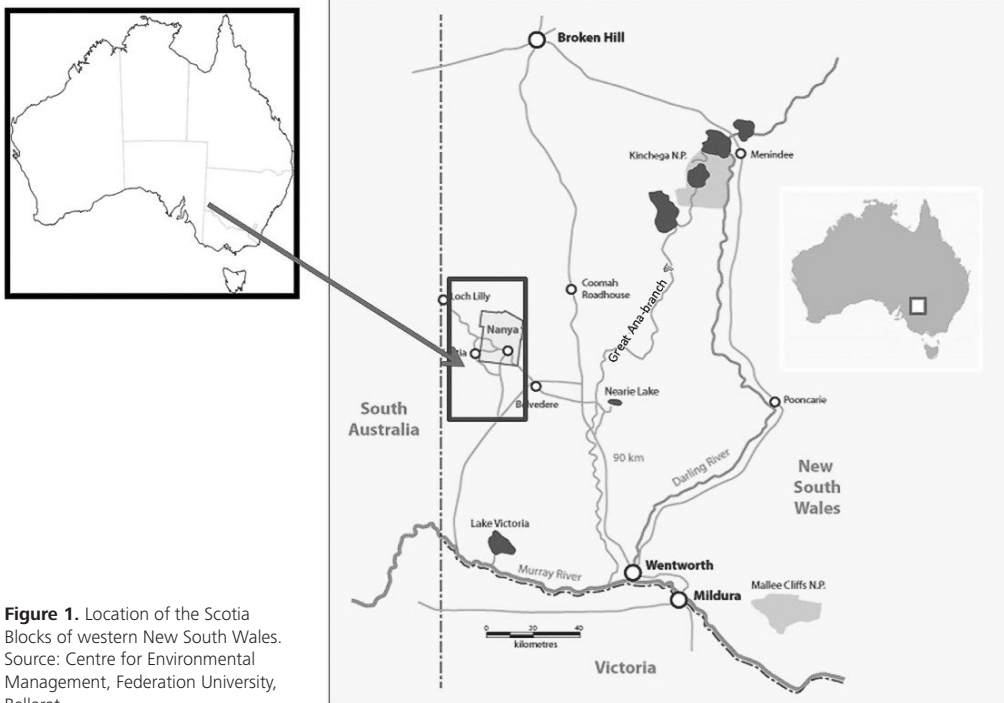
## **Abstract**

Whilst the history and significance of the large pastoral holdings from Australia's early history (such as Kinchega and Yanga in western New South Wales, NSW) are generally well understood, recognition of important examples from later phases, following the break-up of these large holdings into small family blocks, is often neglected. Using the example of Nanya Station, with five other homestead leases established in the 1920s, in the Scotia region of western NSW, this paper provides an overview of the changes in legislation that led to the establishment of small homestead leases and highlights the important role that the latter have played in our pastoral heritage. In 2004, the University of Ballarat purchased Nanya Station for the establishment of a centre for conservation, teaching and research. Over the past 25 years many pastoral properties (large and small) in the Australian rangelands have come under conservation management by state conservation agencies and increasingly into privately owned and managed reserves. In this paper, the challenges of addressing the conflict of retaining the pastoral landscape, buildings and other infrastructure elements under these conservation management arrangements in a remote former pastoral site are explored with particular reference to Nanya Station. Issues considered include removal of pastoral heritage elements such as ground tanks and fences to achieve environmental conservation objectives and retention of buildings which will also meet current community standards and health and safety concerns associated with visitation.

## **Introduction**

European land settlement in Australia commenced in 1788 when Governor Phillip claimed possession of the land for a penal colony on behalf of the British Government. All lands were vested in the name of the Crown, thus the title Crown lands. From 1791 to 1831, successive governors issued free grants of land on behalf of the Crown to encourage and advance settlement of the state. Originally, land in the far west of New South Wales (NSW) was divided into vast pastoral holdings. From the mid-1880s the NSW Government pursued a policy of closer settlement (Heathcote 1965: 42-63), a practice entailing resumption of large properties and subdividing them into units or home maintenance areas capable of supporting a family, then allocating homestead leases by ballot (Young et al. 1984: 84-85). An example is the splitting of the original 800,000 ha Momba Station into 27 small, family leases (Pickard 1990). Family leases in western NSW varied according to stock carrying capacity from 10,000 to 100,000 acres.

The personal stories of life on these smaller pastoral leases provide a fascinating insight into the twentieth century period in the pastoral history of NSW and a period of Australia's history



**Figure 1.** Location of the Scotia Blocks of western New South Wales. Source: Centre for Environmental Management, Federation University, Ballarat.

that is often not explored. Important stories include how people lived off the land in these remote areas from the 1900s onwards, through difficult drought periods as well as the good times, such as during the Korean War induced wool boom of the early 1950s (Grattan 2004: 104-5). The buildings and infrastructure relating to these pastoral properties warrants detailed investigation in their own right, rather than being noted as later additions to an early pastoral lease, as is often the case. Investigation of the six Scotia blocks of far western NSW (Figure 1) taken up in the late 1920s allows focus on this later period of Australia’s pastoral history, providing insight into settlers lives and livelihoods. Until the 1980s, these blocks were managed as grazing leases with production of wool from merino sheep being the predominant activity. Increasing costs and reduced incomes has led to alternative uses including conservation and farming of feral goats.

The purchase of pastoral leases by both state agencies and private organisations for conservation does not always lead to positive outcomes for cultural heritage conservation since this is frequently a low priority for funding. Furthermore, there are a number of instances where retention of cultural heritage values is in conflict with natural environment conservation (Lennon 2007). Examples include closure of ground tanks, removal of fences, closure of rubbish tips, and removal of historic artefacts and modification of buildings. These issues are discussed later in the paper in relation to Nanya and other leases in the Scotia region of far western NSW.

### Background to the establishment of the scotia blocks

The Scotia blocks became six homestead leases and they are located in far south western NSW to the west of the Great Darling Anabranch (Figure 1). The Scotia was a region of thick mallee scrub, interspersed with bluebush flats and Belah woodland which began about twenty-five miles west of the Great Darling Anabranch, land traditionally owned by the Barkindji Aboriginal group (NPWS 2001: 17). The first European settlement on the land was by George Melrose in 1845 as a squatter following exploration of the area by Sturt and Eyre. Despite Melrose developing the Lake Victoria lease over the next few years, after surveys of the area were

completed by the NSW Government and land offered for tender in government gazettes in 1854, the Lake Victoria lease which encompassed this area was granted to John McInlay who had no previous link to the area (Withers 1989: 8, 27).

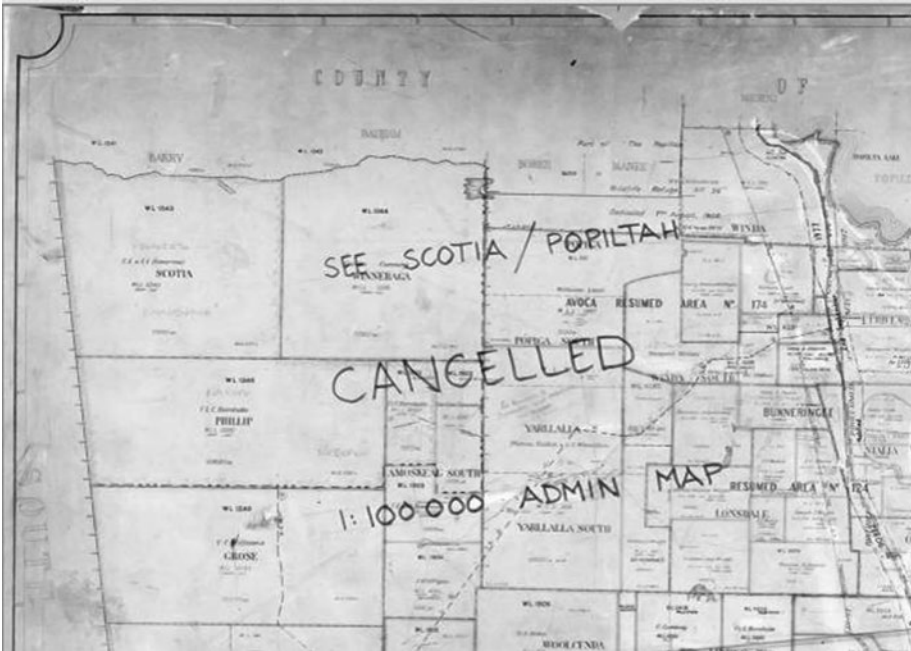
In 1859, the Lake Victoria lease was transferred to Charles Brown and shortly after to John Hay. At this time the lease consisted of the East Rufus, West Rufus, Tara, Yantarella, Westbrook and Scrub Blocks 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 10 (Jervis 1947: 152). The lease consisting of 1,114,240 acres was sold in 1862 to Phillip Gell. However, he was ruined by drought and left the lease in 1869. *The Argus* (Melbourne), 12 February 1876, records the lease being owned by McPherson and the *Wentworth Telegraph and Murray Darling News*, 18 November 1882, reports its sale to Robert Tully.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* of 15 July 1885 reports the Lake Victoria Pastoral Holding (Leasehold No. 170) included the following runs: East and West Rufus, Pellwalka, Yantaralla, Tara, Wannawanna, Westbrook, Amoskeag, Scrub run blocks 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 10, Scotia blocks 1, 2, 3 and 4 and Winnebaga. At some time during the 1870s Scotia blocks 1, 2, 3 and 4, Amoskeag and Winnebaga, which along with the Scrub run blocks formed the back blocks of the Lake Victoria lease, were formed by the NSW Lands Department. It is assumed that this was in the hope that they could be leased as separate runs as a revenue raising exercise. On an 1879 pastoral map, the six blocks discussed in this paper, are encompassed by Winnebaga (would become Nanya), Amoskeag, Scrub 8 and 9, Scotia 1, 2, 3 and 4 (MacDonald 1879). The name Scotia, the Latin name for Scotland, perhaps relates to a local administrator of Scottish descent. Alternatively, the name may have been suggested by Henry Ricketson's homeland, Nova Scotia, as Winnebaga and Amoskeag, the names of the waterholes on his neighbouring runs, are similar to the Canadian words for a lake over the United States border (Withers 1989: 123)

In 1883, the Legislative Council of New South Wales held an inquiry into the state of the public lands following the failure of the selection acts to satisfy the demands of new settlers for land. The subsequent *Land Act 1884* created the western division of the colony and divided the large pastoral holdings into two areas, the leasehold to be held under a pastoral lease with tenure of fifteen years and the resumed area which could be held by an annual occupation licence until it was claimed by homestead lessees. Homestead leases not exceeding 10,240 acres and not less than 5,760 acres were granted within the resumed areas and on application a lessee had to pay a deposit of one penny per acre and the cost of a boundary survey, as well as paying for any existing improvements. The lessee had to fence the boundaries within two years if possible and live on the land for at least six months of every year during the first five years of the lease. Otherwise the conditions and length of tenure were the same as those of pastoral leases (Withers 1989: 93).

It is likely that, following the *Land Act 1884*, the back blocks of the Lake Victoria lease which became part of the 'resumed area' were subject to boundary changes, in some cases renamed and offered as Homestead Leases. Scotia blocks 1 to 4, were initially leased by the London-based Australian Mortgage Land and Finance Company, which paid 70 pounds a year in rent, but there is no record of the country being stocked and in 1897 the Scotia blocks were offered for sale by the state as Improvement Leases (Withers 1989: 123). The name 'Improvement Lease' indicates the requirement of potential lessees to make improvements on the leasehold area (clearing of scrub, provision of water and fencing). These blocks would therefore have been offered for a cheaper rent than the formerly offered Homestead Leases. However, without access to water all blocks except for part of Block 3 remained untenanted but sometimes the adjacent properties (Belmore and Nulla) used the land to run wethers (castrated male sheep) during the winter months (Withers 1989: 123).

After George Anderson's success in finding artesian water on Belmore, the dry Scotia country comprising 432,000 acres was surveyed and divided into six Homestead leasehold blocks allocated by ballot (Withers 1989: 219). On the Tara and Windemeyer Parish maps of 1926 (Land and Property Information NSW 2001) they were named Winnebaga (would become Nanya), Grose [Scrub 8], Phillip [Scotia No.1], Scotia [Scotia No. 2], Badham [Scotia No.3] and Barry [Scotia No. 4] (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Section of Tara Parish map of 1926 showing four of the six Scotia blocks.  
Source: Land and Property Information, NSW, Bathurst.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* of 27 September 1928, refers to the 'leasing of the hitherto despised and neglected stretch of country known as the Scotia Country for sheep raising'. This was due to its low suitability for grazing, difficulty of clearing and lack of water. The nature of the land demonstrates the need to offer the land by ballot rather than by leasehold. All properties were approximately 30,000 ha with a prescribed stocking rate of 3,000 sheep. Subsequently, the lease areas were again renamed most likely by the new owners.

The ballot system ensured that all the leases were taken up, although Mark Williams who drew one of the northern leases of the Scotia blocks with Badham (Nagaella), took one look at the timber and thick scrub and forfeited it. Subsequently the forfeited lease was transferred to H. C. and H. A. Cullen in 1929. Barry (Loch Lily) was drawn by Frederick Hucks and Phillip (Tararra) by Thorvald Ludwick Christian (Toby) Bornholm. Scotia (Ennisvale) was occupied by Aubrey Bowerman, whose father was an overseer at Lake Victoria, Harry O'Flynn settled at Grose (Tarawi), and Winnebaga (Nanya) was taken up by Gordon Cumming initially with his brother Lorie (*Sydney Morning Herald* 27 September 1928).

## Life On The Scotia Blocks

Life on the Scotia blocks was very different to that experienced on the large pastoral holdings of earlier years. The new leaseholders initially camped on the land and set about drilling bores, excavating ground tanks and establishing vernacular styles of fencing—largely using materials off the land. At Nanya, Cumming initially camped on chaff bags before constructing a makeshift hut with bush poles and rudimentary concrete using local calcrete as a low quality aggregate and at Nagaella, the Cullen brothers' first hut was constructed from flattened kerosene tins. (Withers, 1989) These anecdotes indicate that the new lessees were not wealthy and the infrastructure that was subsequently erected suggests that they did not make their wealth on the land. From establishment until their closure as pastoral leases, only essential infrastructure was constructed with just a brief period of wealth during the 1950s wool boom.

All of the blocks would have contained basic houses, most dating from the 1930s. Prosperity in the 1950s allowed some improvement to buildings and infrastructure. In most cases ancillary

buildings were of rudimentary construction with chicken sheds built from bush poles and wire, and laundries and meat houses constructed from recycled materials. The shearing sheds and quarters were also simple buildings constructed from local materials and, unlike earlier pastoral layouts, were located close to the homestead.

At Nanya, the wool boom period of the 1950s is reflected in the improvements made on the property. These improvements included a substantial Red Gum framed homestead constructed adjacent to the earlier cottage and new steel machinery shed. At this time, all of the Scotia blocks had a resident family and there was an active social life including weekend tennis tournaments and community Christmas functions (Norma Scadding, Belvedere Station pers comm. July 2005).

When the homestead leases of the Scotia were established in the late 1920s they were intended to have a carrying capacity of approximately 3,000 sheep, which was seen to be adequate for a family income. This may initially have been the case, and subsequently during the early 1950s when wool prices were at an all-time high 144 pence per pound (Pearson & Lennon 2010). However, over the next 20 years wool prices declined and from the early 1970s, increasing costs and declining wool values made incomes inadequate to support families (Pearson & Lennon 2010). Despite this Gordon Cumming of Nanya, known to have lived frugally (Norma Scadding, Belvedere Station pers comm. July 2005) lived at and worked his property until he died in 1983 at the age of 97. Similarly, the Bornholm brothers managed Tararra and Ennisvale until the 1990s.

During the 1980s, many of the leases were sold and amalgamated with adjacent larger leases, but as wool prices further declined in the 1990s this trend was reversed and many leases were purchased for alternative land uses including the 'farming' of feral goats and for conservation. Of the six Scotia blocks, which in the 1950s supported six families four are now managed for conservation and two for feral goats.

### Managing cultural heritage

On properties still in pastoral use the management of buildings and other infrastructure generally follows business priorities relating to pastoral management. Properties managed for cultural heritage conservation face a different set of issues. Management is dependent on available funding and on the management of conflicts, these include; costs associated with building stabilisation and restoration, adaptation of buildings to alternative uses which meet community standards, meeting health and safety requirements, and balancing nature conservation objectives with retention of cultural heritage values.

The technological infrastructure including bores, dams, yards, fencing and machinery have potential contributory cultural heritage significance but may be overlooked. There have been many examples where the easy option of quick demolition of buildings in poor condition has been taken without formal assessment of heritage value or documentation. There are many examples in recent years where homesteads, shearing sheds and quarters have been



**Figure 3.** Nanya homestead complex. Source: M. Westbrooke 1992 and S. Westbrooke July 2005.

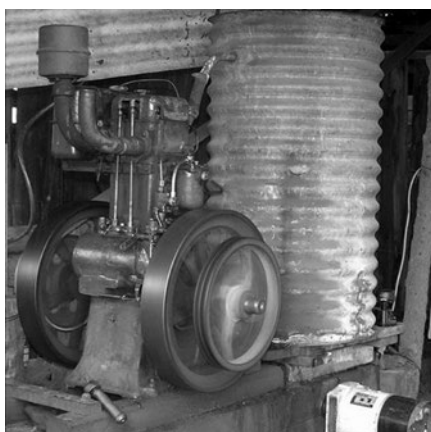




**Figure 4.** Remains of Southern Cross bore pump on Ennisvale Station, Crystal Bore. Source: M. Westbrooke January 2010.



**Figure 5.** Functional and landscaped ground tanks on Nanya Station. Source: M. Westbrooke February 2011.



**Figure 6.** Lister 6HP CS c. 1950 diesel engine providing power but not meeting health and safety guidelines. Source: M. Westbrooke October 2006.

demolished and obsolete machinery and materials removed due to poor condition and health and safety issues for visitors. Nanya Station was purchased in 2004 by the University of Ballarat for the purposes of nature conservation research and teaching (Figure 3). The issues identified above are illustrated with particular reference to heritage elements from Nanya and other Scotia properties. These properties do not currently have conservation management plans but aspects of built heritage are included in property management plans.

### ***Bores and ground tanks***

Despite optimism regarding water quality in the 1920s, water from bores was of high salinity and reticulation was expensive due to the rapid corrosion of steel pipe. As a result of the poor quality of the bore water and the maintenance costs of equipment, much of the stock and domestic water supply on the Scotia blocks is from ground tanks. These are excavations into which run off water is directed by earth banks following high rainfall events. These tanks are now a prominent landscape feature. Of more than ten bores sunk in the Scotia only two are still functional. Many disused bores remain and demonstrate the important role of Australian engineering firms during this period. Figure 4 shows the remains of a pump at the disused Crystal Bore on Ennisvale Station. The pump was built by the Toowoomba based Southern Cross Company who manufactured water pumps from 1876 and a wide range of stationary engines from 1910–1982 (Laurent 2002). It is preferable unless under threat in their original location, that artefacts such as this are retained in situ rather than removed for scrap, or to remote collections, as removal can diminish or damage the significance of both the item and the place (NSW Heritage Office 2000: 3)

On properties managed for nature conservation a priority is to reduce grazing pressure from exotic animals including rabbits and feral goats and populations of native kangaroos. A key strategy to deter these animals is to cover up ground tanks by filling the dams and returning the land to the original landscape profile. In most cases, however, the high cost precludes total landscaping and they are closed by blocking the inlets, which is also the best outcome for conserving the cultural landscape. Figure 5 shows a functional tank and one closed by total landscaping. An additional controversial issue on conservation properties with public visitation is the retention of functional tanks to attract birdlife, despite the birds not being endemic to the natural arid landscape.

The Southern Cross windmill still used for pumping water from a retained ground tank for the Nanya homestead complex can be seen in Figure 3. The



**Figure 7.** Cultural plantings: Agave at hotel site on Lake Victoria, Kurrajong and Cactus–Nanya. Source: M. Westbrooke July 1975 and M. Westbrooke February 2009.

single cylinder Lister diesel engine, until recently used for domestic power (Figure 6), is an important heritage element, but unfortunately large single cylinder engines such as this, with crank starting and exposed flywheels, do not meet current occupational health and safety requirements and thus may be decommissioned or removed.

### **Cultural plantings**

A policy of most nature conservation reserves is to eliminate all exotic plant species. However, non-native cultural plantings can be an important heritage element. In remote areas of Australia Tamarisk, Pepper Trees and Agave may be the only remaining elements of previous European occupation. Figure 7 shows an Agave, which is the only obvious feature remaining of an early hotel on Lake Victoria, and cultural plantings at Nanya.

Most of these plants do not pose a threat to the environment as they do not spread easily. They can be left as part of a heritage overlay to the limited areas of intensive past disturbance. The issue is more complex where the plantings are Australian natives ‘out of place’ such as Kurrajong, which does not naturally occur in the western province of NSW (Harden 1990) and may in the future be wrongly recorded as an extension of its range.

### **Homestead complex buildings**

Buildings of the Scotia blocks are functional and typically consist of one or more homesteads, shearing and machinery sheds and shearers quarters consisting of four-room accommodation block, kitchen, messroom and amenities. Since they are generally built of local materials, they can provide insights into the original vegetation. The main support posts of the shearing shed at Nanya are crudely trimmed bush poles of native pine (*Callitris glaucophylla*), now locally rare.

A number of factors lead to the need for repair, renovation and modification of pastoral buildings. These include storm damage, fire and the fact that they may not meet current institutional building guidelines. For reasons of cost or the requirements of alternative use,



**Figure 8.** Nanya shearing shed showing Native Pine supports and repairs with treated pine. Source: M. Westbrooke January 2010.





**Figure 9.** Paling fence and ‘double post-and-rail’ fence on Nanya Station. Source: M. Westbrooke January 2010.

the repairs/renovations may not meet conservation guidelines. Figure 8 shows repairs made to stabilise the shearing shed at Nanya Station using treated pine. While these repairs could not be undertaken with the Native Pine and River Red Gum used for the original structure, the repairs are clearly distinguishable as a later change and assist in stabilising the structure so there is no further loss of original fabric.

### ***Yards and fences***

Yards are associated with the mustering of sheep. They are constructed at shearing sheds and at remote locations. These yards illustrate early fencing techniques, such as ‘double post-and-rail’ or ‘paling’ fences (Pickard 2009). Examples are shown in Figure 9. These yards are of additional interest from an ecological point of view, as the number of trees felled to create these fences often explains the occurrence of extensive treeless areas. These open areas remain due to the failure of many arid woodland trees to regenerate under conditions of elevated grazing pressure (Westbrooke 1998). Based on data from Pickard (1994), fencing a 30,000 ha property such as Nanya, is likely to have led to the felling of 15,000–20,000 trees from the 30,000 ha! This example, as well as the species of timber used for the shearing shed, demonstrates

insights into ecological history can be derived from the observation of cultural artefacts. There may be a desire to remove fences for aesthetic or ecological reasons, but the extent of fence lines normally means that retention of examples of the range of fencing techniques will not conflict with environmental conservation objectives.

### ***Rubbish tips***

Because of the remoteness of the properties all rubbish needed to be disposed of on-site. This has both positive and negative aspects as, despite the visual eyesore often involved, old tips are rich assemblages of artefacts illustrating earlier lifestyles (Figure 10).



**Figure 10.** Bush rubbish tip at Nanya including kerosene tins, old bottles and kitchen utensils. Source: M. Westbrooke January 2010.

## **Conclusion**

The evolution of the Scotia properties illustrates the rich pastoral history that exists in relation to small homestead leases. The significance of these properties lies in their ability to demonstrate the mid twentieth century era and the less prosperous side of Australia’s pastoral history. Although rudimentary, the remaining infrastructure on the leases tells stories of the struggle for a dependable water supply and the simple and difficult life led by those who tried to make a living off these back blocks. The properties may not include grand structures or early

colonial relics, but their remoteness, starkness and demonstration of mid twentieth century pastoral technologies and rural way of life, needs to be recognised and preserved. Changes in land use from wool production to alternative uses including conservation, tourism, and feral goat management lead to opportunities, threats and challenges. The amalgamation of small homestead leases left many heritage buildings without an economic use and thus put them at increased risk as redundant buildings (Pearson & Lennon 2010). In the Scotia, Nanya and Tarrara Homesteads were unoccupied from the 1980s. Change of use from subsistence pastoral activity to conservation, in particular, may provide opportunities to meet cultural conservation objectives but it is essential that managers put both heritage and environmental conservation aspects on the agenda prior to undertaking management actions. A limitation to this however is the source of funding which typically is directed to environmental conservation and, as noted by Lennon (2007), the cultural features rarely reach the threshold whereby they are eligible for government funding due to their cultural significance. Whilst the Register of the National Estate includes many large homesteads and shearing sheds many other structures and examples of the technology that influenced the spread of pastoralism are poorly represented (Pearson & Lennon 2010). Until recently, it was only on properties purchased as state conservation reserves that restoration of heritage elements of these leases was likely, however, the increasing number of properties purchased by private organisations for conservation (such as the new use of Nanya as an ecological research station) has opened up further opportunities for funding of cultural heritage management alongside their use for ecological conservation and research.

## Acknowledgements

We wish to acknowledge the generous assistance given by many people in providing information on the history of the Scotia. In particular we thank Rusheen Craig, Jeanette Hope, Geoff Rhodda (dec.), Norm and Norma Scadding and Maxine Withers. We also sincerely thank Peter Bevan who inspired our interest in pastoralism.

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