

CASE STUDY 1

Mapping the Life and Cultural Legacy of Queenie McKenzie



INDUSTRY: Pastoral and community

THE PROJECT: Alternative outcomes for the 'Texas Mob'

THE BACKGROUND:

Queenie McKenzie (now deceased) was an important cultural leader of a large group of Aboriginal people who inhabited the area that is now known as Texas Downs Cattle Station. This land was claimed by pastoralists during the 1800s. Aboriginal people worked on the cattle station until they were forced off during the 1960s and prevented from visiting their sacred sites to take their children to learn about their heritage. This 'lock out', which continues, caused a lot of grief for Queenie and her people.

When Queenie arrived at the new site where they were to establish Texas Downs, she was a young girl and grew up to spend most of her adult life working as a cook in the mustering camps where her and other Gija people worked tirelessly to manage the cattle for the station management.

Written in the Land, the Life of Queenie McKenzie

When work to document the life and cultural legacy of Queenie began, an elder, Patrick Mung, had to ask permission from the station managers to revisit his land and take the researchers out to the sacred places that Queenie had talked of so often, so we could photograph them for the community book. During this visit, Patrick was evidently relieved to be back on his traditional lands and expressed his sorrow that he cannot easily bring his grandchildren to this land to teach them about its sites and stories. The grandchild that did accompany us on that trip was in high school and she had never seen those sites. Patrick's concern was that the children would not know where they came from, or where they belonged.

Queenie's dream was always that the Texas Downs country she painted over and over again would one day belong to the Aboriginal people who had always looked after the country. She fought for Texas Downs to always belong to the 'Texas Mob'.

Written in the Land, the Life of Queenie McKenzie

OBJECTIVES:

When the book about Queenie was created, it was decided that the royalties would go to Queenie's successors to keep their culture alive, as Queenie had been the women's cultural leader, and the loss of her leadership had a great impact on these women.

This was necessary, but it also created difficulties amongst the stakeholders. Because the land that the stories came from belonged to the 'Texas Mob' – Queenie's families – they rightfully expected that they, too, would benefit from the book in some way. The objective of this cultural mapping exercise was to find enterprise opportunities resulting from the book that could benefit the Texas Mob.

THE ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN:

The Texas Mob were displaced from their traditional lands, and, as Queenie had done until she passed away, they lived in a reserve-type situation – a community made up of many displaced groups of Indigenous people, adjacent to their traditional lands.

Through consultations with Patrick Mung and others, a list of the Texas Mob's needs was collated. Their needs were predominantly about jobs or business opportunities, and the need to access their land so that their knowledge of the country could be passed on to their children before it was too late.

The completed book provided a record of the cultural assets contained within Texas Downs, as well as memories of the Texas Mob that had been recorded over many years, including during the mapping of Queenie's life story. These cultural assets could be used in many ways to provide opportunities for Patrick and the others, such as his extended family groups. The women's organisation Ngali Ngalim Purru would receive the revenue from the book to support them in carrying on Queenie's cultural leadership.

CHALLENGES:

The challenges of this project were to find opportunities based on the cultural assets within the book that would create revenue streams that could benefit the Indigenous people from Texas Downs, and to create a situation where Patrick and the other elders could access their traditional lands and pass on their knowledge to the younger generations.

OUTCOMES:

The Texas Downs area is a major tourist destination. Although seasonal, the stunning wilderness environment, which is adjacent to a world heritage listed national park, Purnululu, draws thousands of visitors each year. The difficulty for Aboriginal people like Patrick and his people, who live in remote areas, is getting the support they need to sustain their culture. Unfortunately, governments do not yet understand the value of that, and how critical it is to the wellbeing of Indigenous people and the land.

See the additional resources to find out what is now possible for the Texas Mob as a result of the book.

FUTURE:

The future is in the hands of the Texas Mob. To achieve their desired outcomes, they need suitable development partners and the support of government. As the Texas Downs area is a tourism hot spot, development would greatly benefit the Australian tourism sector as well as Patrick and his people.

This is an ideal situation for this type of partnership to bring real outcomes to Aboriginal people based on their own expressed needs, instead of the implementation of programs that are not chosen by Aboriginal people, and consequently prove to be unsustainable.

For further information on this case study visit www.writtenintheland.com



1. Queenie McKenzie. 2. Written in the Land: The Life of Queenie McKenzie. 3. Trail.
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- 1. Texas Downs where Patrick remembers mustering cattle.
- 2. Kids and Patrick boarding a helicopter for Texas Downs.
- 3. Patrick Mung receives the book.
- 4. Kids visit Texas Downs for the first time.
- 5. Cattle yards Patrick worked in on Texas Downs, they formed part of a route over thousands of kilometers.
- 6. Sade. 7. Women receive their book.
- 8. Patrick shows Jennifer the owl rock art on Texas Downs.
- 9. Texas Downs locked gate. 10. Texas Downs.
- 11. Queenie McKenzie and Rover Thomas.
- 12. Teacher in class during oral book history project.
- 13. Women of Texas Downs.
- 14. Patrick relieved to be back in his own country.
- 15. Cattle on Texas Downs.
- 16. Texas Downs flora.

