

## **Property as place: the importance of place in the exit behaviour of graziers**

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### **Abstract**

Farming properties are more than biophysical assemblages, they are socially constructed places that operate as repositories of meanings for the individuals and families who work and own these places. Given difficult financial and climatic times the Australian Government has provided funding support for those who choose to exit the grazing industry. However this support fails to recognise the strength of place attachment and the sense of place that families and individuals develop over time for their properties. Presenting data collected from grazing families in the Western Division of New South Wales the importance of place in the exit behaviour of graziers and their families under adjustment will be highlighted.

### **Introduction**

Despite an image of Australian agriculture as a relatively stable and enduring activity, both the historical record (Davidson, 1997) and contemporary experience (Gray et al., 1993) underscore the reality of farmers and their families constantly responding and reacting to various pressures. Adjustment pressure arises from a number of sources including secular movements in terms of trade, changes in government policy, technological change, natural events, degradation of natural resources, changes in farm family life-cycle, and changes in family needs and goals (Stayner and Gow, 1992). While adjustment pressure may give rise to opportunities beneficial to farmers and their families, adjustment pressure may also result in a reduction in the rate of return for farming businesses. Increased levels of farm poverty, decreases in farm cash income and delays in the intergenerational transfer of farm businesses are impacts often experienced among farming families under adjustment pressure.

To alleviate adjustment pressures farmers and their families may take actions to reduce the costs of maintaining the family household and the farming business or to increase financial returns, from farm-based and other activities, to the household and farming business. Strategies adopted may include the reduction of household and farm business spending, in particular 'discretionary' items such as holidays, entertainment, and health care, reductions and postponement of expenditure on maintenance and farm improvements, reductions in employed labour resulting in increased workloads, debt restructuring, sale or lease of land, seeking off-farm employment and intergenerational transfer (Stayner and Gow, 1992; Gray et al., 1993; Stehlik et al., 1999). An exit from the industry is an additional response strategy. This has been described as 'the most radical of adjustment actions' (Ginnivan and Lees, 1991). Assisting farmers to exit the industry through the provision of financial and other support has been one aspect of the Australian Government's response to ameliorate the negative impacts of adjustment.

The first adjustment scheme was introduced in 1935 providing funds to relieve farm debt. Following difficulties experienced in the wool and wheat industries and widespread drought in the 1960s the Rural Reconstruction Scheme of 1971 provided funds for debt reconstruction, farm build up and rehabilitation. Since then Australian Government adjustment assistance schemes have included financial support for farmers and their families choosing to exit the industry (Botterill, 2001). Recent iterations of adjustment assistance packages provide re-establishment grants, re-training grants, counselling and individual case management, and a period of income support while farming families are considering their future options (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, 2003).

Despite the provision of such schemes to assist farmers to leave the industry their uptake has been modest and subsequent program evaluations have consistently found re-establishment grants to have little impact on farmer exit behaviour (Industries Assistance Commission, 1984; McColl et al., 1997; O'Neil et al., 2000). O'Neil et al. (2000) found that the majority of farmers receiving income support under the recent scheme would not be influenced to exit the industry by the provision of the re-establishment grant. Furthermore they found that 79 per cent of re-establishment grant recipients would have exited the industry without receiving the grant.

Botterill (2001) highlights the role of values in the development of re-establishment assistance policy noting their focus on farm economic factors, and argues their limited success may be attributed to disregarding non-economic factors in farmer decision-making. Research by Gasson (1973) and Kerridge (1978) underscored the importance of value orientations other than instrumental to farmer decision-making. Similarly researchers exploring the ideological basis to Australian farming have highlighting the importance of non-economic factors in farmer behaviour (Craig and Phillips, 1983; Aitken, 1985; Gray, 1991; 1996; Alston, 1997). Ideology provides 'a psychological defense for those placed in a psychologically undesirable position in which intangibles such as independence, natural beauty, and open-air life are valued above the actual economic existence of the farm family' (Craig and Phillips, 1983:416).

Importantly leaving farming is not just about leaving the industry but also typically involves leaving a farming property. The property is not only a place of work but also a place of residence. For many farmers ownership has been transferred through successive generations, and they may have spent much of their pre-adult years on the property they now own and work. The farm as a place represents more than employment, and as with other non-economic factors, the contribution of 'place attachment' to the exit behaviour of farmers warrants further exploration. This paper reports on the nature of place attachment and its impact on the behaviour for a group of graziers in financial difficulty.

## **Place attachment**

The properties upon which farmers and their families reside are more than locations with biophysical assemblages of plants, animals and mineral substrates. They are 'places' that are imbued with meaning and provide a setting for social interaction. The literature generally recognises places as resulting from three intersecting components: biophysical location and processes; social and political processes; and social and cultural meanings (Canter, 1977; Sack, 1992). Biophysical location and processes refers to the material structure of a place incorporating both human and non-human physical features. For a farm this covers flora and fauna including the livestock, crops and pasture, the topography, creeks and dams, and the fencing, watering systems, sheds, silos, buildings and houses. Social and political processes

cover the interactions at various scales between and among individuals, including the social norms that mediate these interactions. For the farm this will include familial interactions and decision-making concerning the property and its day-to-day operation, the interactions with other farmers, suppliers, regulators, labour and purchasers, as well as non-farming interactions such as barbeques and picnics. Social and cultural meanings are the set of values, meanings and symbols that arise through the social interaction within the location. For a farm this will include the meanings associated with growing up on a property, the norms about behaviour on the property and the markers of significant life and family events. Thus farms and grazing properties are places: they are biophysical locations that are imbued with individually, socially and culturally relevant meanings and symbols through social and political processes (Evernden, 1992; Greider and Garkovich, 1994; Williams and Patterson, 1996).

A consequence of farms and properties being socially constructed and imbued with meanings and symbols is that individuals and families become attached to these places. Place attachment is an integrating concept incorporating several aspects of people-place bonding. Emotional attachment is a central feature of place attachment, however cognitive and behavioural aspects are also important (Low and Altman, 1992). In this paper we are particularly interested in the impact of place attachment on farmer behaviour.

Place attachment is important in providing a sense of security, both daily and on-going, with places offering predictable opportunities and facilities with stability (Elder et al., 1992; Low and Altman, 1992). Place attachment also provides a link with people, including family, kin, friends and community (Hummon, 1992; Low and Altman, 1992). Furthermore as places are also imbued with broader cultural and social meanings, place attachment links people to broader cultural and social groupings (Rappoport, 1982; Cuba and Hummon, 1993). Place attachment plays an important role in fostering self-esteem, self-worth and self-pride.

Two important dimensions to place attachment are place-identity and place dependence. Place-identity focuses on the role of place in understanding self-identity (Proshansky, 1978; Proshansky et al., 1983). It refers to those 'dimensions of self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, references, feelings, values, goals, and behavioral tendencies and skills relevant to this environment' (Proshansky, 1978:155). Thus for a farmer, their farming property is likely to contribute important aspects of their place identity.

Place dependence is based upon a transactional analysis of behaviour settings and refers to an 'occupant's perceived strength of association between him or herself and specific places' (Stokols and Shumaker, 1981:457). Place dependence incorporates a two part process incorporating an individual's evaluation of a particular place for satisfying their needs and goals in relation to alternative places (Shumaker and Taylor, 1980). Both place dependence and place-identity have been operationalised in empirical studies of place attachment (eg. Williams et al., 1992; Moore and Graefe, 1994; Kaltenborn, 1997).

## **Study site and methods**

The data for this paper are drawn from a study of sheep graziers and their families from the Western Division of New South Wales, Australia (Figure 1). The Western Division lies within the arid to semi-arid rangelands of Australia. The area is isolated and remote. The climate is characterised by hot summers and mild winters with low and erratic rainfall which varies from 450mm in the east to 150mm in the northwest corner. Drought is considered a

feature of the climate and recent significant droughts have occurred from 1978 to the mid 1980s, 1993-94, and in 2002-04 (Baker et al., 1999).

Land use is similar across the Western Division with pastoral leases supporting the grazing of sheep being the dominant activity. It is estimated that approximately 1500 grazing and agricultural businesses operate within the Western Division (National Institute of Economic and Industry Research, 1999). Financial returns to sheep grazing families in this area have been poor, with low farm cash incomes and often negative farm business profit (ABARE, 2000). Financial benchmarking suggests that a proportion of Western Division grazing families are financially unsustainable (Rendell et al., 1996).

Twelve grazing families who had experienced a significant degree of financial distress were interviewed. Each family had sought the assistance of specialist rural financial counselling services. Nine families were still operating their property at the time of the interview, three families had left or were in the process of leaving their property at the time of being interviewed. Both male and female household heads from each family unit were individually interviewed by an interviewer of the same gender, using a semi-structured interview approach (Spradley, 1979; Macracken, 1988). The interview sought information regarding their experiences of adjustment, responses to adjustment, and a biographical history of their property. Their views concerning leaving and the processes of leaving their property were particularly focussed upon during interviews. A modified place attachment scale was used to initially gauge the strength of grazier's attachment to their properties. Interviews were transcribed and inductively coded to reveal common themes and concepts following standard approaches (Tesch, 1990:141-145; Miles and Huberman, 1994:61-64).

## **Findings**

### **Interviewee overview**

Twenty-three individuals were interviewed consisting of 12 males and 11 females, with a median age range of 50-59 years old. The families interviewed had all experienced some level of financial difficulty and had high levels of debt (average debt equity ratio 59.7%). The majority of interviewees were raised in the Western Division (17 of 23) with the majority of these coming from grazing properties (13 of 17). Half of those who had been raised outside the Western Division had grown up on an agricultural or grazing property. A higher proportion of men had grown up on a property than had women.

For four properties the first non-Indigenous occupants were the current owner's grandparents who had taken up leases in the 1920s and 1930s. The current owners were the third generation raising the fourth. For two other properties the current owner's parents were the first in the family to own the property, making them the second generation raising the third. Accordingly some interviewees had spent most of their life living on the property they now own, though they may have had some periods away, for example at boarding school. More than three quarters of the interviewees had lived on their property for more than 20 years, with the remaining interviewees having resided on their property for more than 10 years.

### **Intensity of grazier's place attachment**

The graziers generally had moderate to strong levels of attachment to their properties. Table 1 shows their responses to a series of modified place attachment statements (Williams et al.,

1992). While such quantitative instruments are of limited value with a small sample, they highlight some aspects of interest. Overall the interviewees exhibit a moderate to strong level of attachment to their properties, with most graziers agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statements. However this level of attachment was not consistent across the two dimensions of place-identity and place dependence. The responses suggest that place attachment arising from place-identity are stronger than attachment arising from place-dependence. That is, while graziers may not consider their properties as providing the best opportunities for grazing and pastoralism, the properties were none the less a fundamental aspect of their individual self-identity.

Strong place attachment to grazing properties was emphasised by the grief and loss experienced by those who had left their properties, and by the expectation of such experiences from those currently living on their properties when considering the option of leaving their property.

**Table 1: Responses to place attachment statements (% of respondents)**

Statements		Strongly agree or Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree or Disagree
No other place can compare to this property	dep <sup>1</sup>	47%	18%	35%
This property is the best property for grazing	dep	44%	31%	25%
I feel like this property is a part of me	id <sup>2</sup>	82%	12%	6%
I identify strongly with this property	id	94%	6%	0%
This property is very special to me	id	88%	12%	0%
I am very attached to this property	id	94%	6%	0%
This property means a lot to me	id	94%	6%	0%

<sup>1</sup>dep indicates place dependence statement.

<sup>2</sup>id indicates place-identity statement.

## **Nature of grazier's attachment**

### Attachment and biographical experience

The majority of those interviewed had lived within the Western Division for the vast bulk of their lives, many on the same property that they currently reside upon. Most individuals conveyed stories of their growing up on their property and of particularly important experiences. Such biographical experiences in a physical location can transform that location into a symbolic extension of self by imbuing it with personal meanings of life experiences (Hummon, 1992). Through the experiences of growing up and living daily life on their properties with key family members the properties became important landscapes overwritten with the meanings and symbols of their own, and their forebear's, history. In the landscape there were places where parents had passed away and where their own children had grown up.

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In the following interview excerpt a male grazier in his 70s highlights the role of the property as a place that brings his father back to him as a consequence of building a fence together that had been destroyed by a bushfire:

*Interviewer: Are there places on the property that are meaningful to you, that are special to you?*

*Grazier 1: To me I can switch off. No, there are some places, yes. You see, we've been through our times with the bush fires in '74 took everything. Well, as far as fencing ... 70 mile of fencing we repaired or done and this, that and another and **my father helped me build a couple of them** and I just never got over it. Dad died about three years later. **My father had nothing to do with it and still, the memories come back when you get out there.***

For the same grazier, the property held the memories of significant stages in maturing of his children, the places where knowledge and traditions were passed on:

*Grazier 1: There's **odd spots around the place where I grew up with the kids**, you know, the boys and I did this here and there and you know*

*Interviewer: Fishing spots and stuff like that?*

*Grazier 1: No. **More where they got the lecture of the facts of life ... or where the young bloke shot his first kangaroo.** All those sorts of things. I did have some of the best dogs that's ever been round the district and there's lots of memories there of what, where and how. You know, **just individual specific things that are quite meaningful to me.***

When another grazier in his 40s talks about growing up around the homestead on his property he notes the similarity between what he had done and what his children grew up doing:

*... it's the same homestead, same place ... there's plenty of familiar places around the homestead here that, you know, **we'd ride our ponies through and around, whatever, when we were kids.** ... **I guess my kids grew up doing the same thing.***

Through the life-course new meaning may be ascribed to regularly visited places, what was an important place for one generation becomes important for the next and these meanings are transferred and reproduced through the generations. Importantly biographical experience has led to particular places being associated with important events and the daily work of running the property, of being a grazier, acts to reinforce the importance and specialness of these places. Through water-runs and checking on stock attachment to the property is regularly reinforced and enhanced. Constant visiting and being in those places in the course of being a grazier provides opportunities for past stories to be re-lived and new meanings to be ascribed. In the following excerpt a male grazier in his 50s is responding to the interviewer asking about how and when important places on the property are visited:

*Grazier 2: You do pretty much within your work. You know, especially in the warmer months of the year you're always doing water runs and you know probably even the colder months you're out and you're doing checks on stock and whatever. So, yes, **you visit those areas on your own, yes.***

*Interviewer: What's it like going there, you feel?*

*Grazier 2: I guess it's the same as just being out here. Something that you enjoy but I guess those places are just a little bit nicer than other areas that you might travel through. **I guess that they remind you how good it really is, those places***

In addition to regular visits in the course of the grazier's work, some places on the properties were also sites for recreational activities such as picnics, fishing, BBQs and other outings with family, friends and visitors. They provide a setting in which meaningful social interaction takes place, and through that process, often repeated, the place becomes imbued with those meanings and is valued.

*I guess there's places that we visit more often than others just simply because of location ... but there are places that are **more scenic and peaceful than others** and ... if someone is here and they're visiting ... **we'll go out for the day and have a drive around, have a barbecue or something, well you'll end up at one of those places because it's a nice setting, you know?... there's nice big trees and water and bird life and that sort of thing, especially for city people. That's something that they don't see too often or not every day of their lives so it's nice for them, but it's also nice for us too.***

The property acts as a place in which meaningful experiences and interactions take place. These occur throughout the lifetime of graziers and their work, in requiring travel across the property, provides opportunities for reinforcement of the importance of these places. The last excerpt also highlighted elements of the natural environment that were valued. In addition to the biographical experiences, the natural environment was a central focus of the graziers' attachment to their properties.

#### Role of the natural environment

Grazing in the Western Division takes place upon native vegetation, with mulga low woodlands being the most common range type, however other vegetation types include chenopod steppe, Poplar Box woodlands and grassy floodplains (URS, 2001). The use of native vegetation as the basis of production differentiates the Western Division (and other rangelands) from coastal and southern regions of Australia where grazing takes place on cultivated pasture often in combination with cereal cropping. The attachment to properties that graziers spoke of typically focused on the more 'natural' elements of their property: flora and fauna, rock formations and landscape relief, and water bodies such as dams, lakes and rivers. The following excerpt from a male grazier in his 50s highlights the importance of natural elements in his attachment to his property:

*To come up on the lake in the middle of the drought country and you see four year's supply in this great big lake, **it's brilliant blue with***

*swans and ducks. It's just nice to sit there. I just love watching nature and I had a total ban on that lake. No one was allowed to shoot. They could shoot on billabongs and tanks in the duck season ... but if anyone put a barrel over the lake they were kicked off the place. It just felt good. ... You go down and sit down and have lunch or something like that, take our friends down and have a barbecue. It's just really good and, yes, there's a lot of little spots like that. **The stand of Cyprus pines ... out in the rocks, up in the big hills, out the back we get wild oranges or passionfruit trees growing and that's just a novelty to go out there and see these massive big trees growing there, native to Australia and climb up on the rocks and just let your mind wander and think whatever. Just totally relax.***

A range of natural features were typically referenced in grazier's discussions of their properties: rare species of plants, colourful parrots and water birds, good fishing and yabbing spots, scenic places and good camping spots. Some also highlighted old houses and the ruins of previous occupants, and ancient lake beds with Aboriginal artefacts. A female grazier talks in her 50s talks about her property:

*Interviewer: Are there places on this property which are particularly special to you?*

*Grazier 3: There are. **Some for a reason that you can't define, you just know that that's the place.** I've always said if I have to retire it'll be to [Nice View] and that's our furthest out paddock and I'd rather retire there than in town. **There's an area there with a fairly rare acacia and I really love it out there.***

*Interviewer: Is that because it's a rare species?*

*Grazier 3: No, **it's just nice. You just go out there and it's a nice feeling.** ... **it is just the most peaceful place on earth.** And, yeah, it's special.*

Both the previous excerpt highlight that while the features of the environment are important, (for example the lakes, the plants and the bird life), these particular places on their properties are places they feel 'peaceful' and 'nice'; places where you can 'just let your mind wonder'. Given the financial difficulties faced by this group of graziers these places offer a respite from their daily financial concerns.

For at least one grazier the strength of her attachment to the property was evident in her desire to never leave:

*Interviewer: On the property, are there any particular places that are special to you?*

*Grazier 4: Yes, I've got two.*

*Interviewer: Yes?*

*Grazier 4: I'm going to be buried in one.*



*Interviewer:*        *Yes?*

*Grazier 4:*            *I'll just have my ashes spread there.*

The property was still a place of work, where the natural environment provided a setting for productive work that enabled graziers to differentiate themselves from others who lived and worked within towns and cities. That is their properties, and the more general class of the rangeland landscapes upon which graziers worked, were a fundamental part of how they construed their self-identity. Graziers strongly identified with the 'bush' as opposed to the 'town' throughout their interviews. The bush was generally seen as a superior place to live, work and raise a family than the town and city. Such a belief has been a strong component of Australian rural ideology (Craig and Philips, 1983; Aitken, 1985; Lees, 1997). In interviews this differentiation was apparent in a number of ways: that the bush was the best place to bring up children; that the bush supported the rest of the country; that bushies were friendlier than town people; and that individuals did not feel as comfortable in towns and cities. Through such arguments graziers were locating their attachment to a broader class of environment, rather than the more specific one of their own property. However the attachment to their property, and its superior way of life was the example from which the generalisation was extended. A female pastoralist in her fifties discusses the option of retiring to her closest regional centre, labelled here as Neartown:

*Grazier 5:*            *... Neartown is a town that - we were at a New South Wales farmers meeting on Saturday and there five or six women all talking. We were all from out in the bush, and **not one of us felt comfortable, or ever felt that we were part of that community.***

*Interviewer:*        *Okay.*

*Grazier 5:*            *And it's probably some of our problems, too, that we don't go to town to play tennis, and we don't go to the football and that sort of thing, **but there's no way we'd ever retire in Neartown. ... there's a big barrier between the rural and the townspeople.** And even though you try, I mean I think [my spouse] and I go out of our way to make people feel that, you know, they're on an equal **footing but they throw things back at you ... It isn't really worth the effort, so you smile "Hello" and walk on.***

*Interviewer:*        *So you'd go to a different town completely?*

*Grazier 5:*            *Yes, yes. No, we wouldn't - **we certainly wouldn't retire in Neartown and the reason we won't - they don't like the rurals at all, as a town.***

This grazier clearly sees herself as a rural person, she identifies with a particular environment that positions her socially in respect of townspeople. The antipathy and reticence she experiences from townspeople works against her identification with towns and will reinforce her identification with the 'bush'. Indeed the sense of community she feels with other women from the 'bush' will serve to confirm and enhance her attachment with that place. The natural

aspects of their properties are central to the attachment that graziers have with their properties, and to the bush more generally.

### Attachment and pride

Grazing on rangelands also requires some modification and addition, 'improvements', to the natural environment to enhance its capacity of raising sheep. When talking about their property and its importance to them, graziers spoke of the pride they held for their place, and in particular the pride in the 'improvements' they had made. The Western Division is a remote and climatically difficult region to raise sheep. The improvements, in terms of laying watering systems, breeding a good line of sheep, fencing and clearing vegetation, were all physical products of considerable hard work and hard labour in an unforgiving environment. Further this was a product of not just one generation's commitment to the property but also the labour of previous generations.

For some graziers there were special places that they visited to 'cast your eye around' and review their improvements. These places were often a vantage point that provided a good view over their property. A male grazier in his 50s noted about the view from a rocky outcrop looking over his property:

***You cast your eye around and you can see just about all of [the property]. And then you sort of – it's then that it sort of dawns on you, I suppose, that I own this land and this is a piece of my property, you know, and a price of – part of Australia. And you know it makes you feel good, it makes you feel proud.***

Similarly a women in her 60s, though having grown up in the city but lived most of her adult life on their property, talks about a special mountain place on her property:

***It's on the western side of the place and up there there's a picnic spot, and if you climb up, there's just a few rocks, but if you climb up ... as far as you can see is [the property]. It is just divine, just divine.***

Such feelings of pride in work are important in maintaining self-esteem and a sense of worth, particularly when times are financially difficult. Ironically property improvements and their maintenance are some of the first expenses postponed during such times.

### **Leaving the property**

During the interviews graziers were questioned about the option of leaving pastoralism. Except for those that had already exited, the graziers interviewed did not consider the option of leaving to be a viable option for them. Importantly, leaving pastoralism requires that graziers not only leave their place of work but also their place of residence. In many cases also leave a place to which they have ancestral and historical ties.

A female grazier in her 50s likened the attachment to a grazing property similar to that experienced by Australian Indigenous people. She noted that in leaving your property you also loose your identity:

***The Aboriginals have this affinity with the land and you have this affinity with this place. ... it's not only your property, it's your home as well, ... the biggest problem most people find is the emotional attachment to both - if you lose your property, you lose your home, and you lose your identity.***

Such comments underscore the importance of grazier's properties and their relationship to them as a fundamental component of their self-identity. That is place-identity based upon a grazing property forms an important element of a grazier's self-identity. The loss of close connection with that place will undermine the capacity to which graziers can reinforce their place-identity and through that, important aspects of self.

In another interview a grazier in her 40s spoke about managing financial difficulties and the impacts of drought on her property. She highlighted the times that she and her family had been through, and that while leaving was an option it was not an option she would pursue:

*So because we've been through so much and what I've just said is life and death stuff, this has to mean everything to me, and it has to be in my heart, yes, the place where I want to live - to die. And, yes, I could go and love somewhere else, but what's it going to mean to me, that other place? You know, this is where I've lived and breathed life and found out what it can be like.*

It is clear from this excerpt that she is not going to leave her home, the place she has 'breathed life and found out what it can be like'. Such attachment to their properties was common in the rationale for not exiting from grazing despite financial and other difficulties being experienced by graziers and their families. Questioning graziers in the interviews about leaving was often emotionally difficult with female graziers in particular, but not solely nor universally, weeping when talking about leaving their property.

## **Discussion**

The properties upon which graziers and their families reside are socially constructed landscapes that are imbued with individually, socially and culturally relevant meanings and symbols. The attachment individuals had for their properties is important in providing a sense of security, in providing a link with people, including family, friends and kin, and also to broader cultural and social groupings. It plays an important role in fostering self-esteem, self-worth and self-pride.

Biographical place attachment was an important component of place attachment; through personal histories the local landscape is transformed into a symbolic extension of the self. In this manner the landscape became full of personal and individual meanings that marked important past events. Memories of parents were attached to specific places; the place where a father had died, or the fence that a father had assisted in building just prior to his death. The property was also a repository of meanings about the raising of their children, and, in some cases, a place where the current owners were also raised as children.

As well as marking important past events, the property also provided a marker to important future events. For example some interviewees spoke about their desire to be buried on the property or have their ashes spread over a particular part. Others talked about retiring on the property, once their children came home to manage and take over the property. In this manner the property also provided a connection from the past to the future, typically through the passing on of the property to a younger generation.

The property was important in maintaining self-esteem and a sense of worth in daily activities and achievements. The property is a physical manifestation of the hard work that has been applied to the landscape. This is not only the labour of current generations but also that of past

generation and their forebears. Graziers referred to high points such as rocky outcrops or hilltops that they liked to visit. These places provided an excellent vantage point from which to survey and generally check over their property; places from which they could feel proud of their achievements.

In most cases individuals were able to identify specific places they considered to be special, although some interviewees focussed on the whole of the property as being special. Many of the special places were more natural parts of the property. They were places where interviewees had a history of regularly visiting for recreational purposes such as fishing, camping, picnics and BBQs with friends and visitors, in addition to the family. Such places provided settings for social interactions and as such these places become imbued with the links and connections with these people.

Importantly the daily work of running the property, of being a pastoralist, acts to reinforce the importance and attachment to the property. Through water-runs and checking on stock the attachment to the property was regularly reinforced and reproduced via the constant visiting and being in personally-important places.

While graziers exhibited a level of attachment to their particular property there was also a more generic attachment to the rural and the country rather than to specific rural places. This form of attachment serves to establish a community identification, that graziers identified with country or rural people as opposed to urban or city people.

In deciding to exit from pastoralism, graziers are not merely leaving their employment, but also their place of employment which is their place of residence, and perhaps they are leaving the place within which they were reared to adulthood. The property is more than a place to run sheep but it is also a repository of important meanings, meanings which are individually, socially and culturally significant. An exit from pastoralism will require the disruption of the attachments that individuals and families have to their property, and the establishment of new bonds in a new place. Not surprising such disruption may cause a grief like response in many individuals. Just as losing a loved one may cause trauma and distress, so too does leaving the property (Brown and Perkins, 1992; Read, 1996).

Place attachment to a grazing property will influence grazer's decisions about their future, and the future of their family. Even when grazing families are in financially difficult situations their attachments to their property will mitigate against an exit from grazing that requires them to leave their properties.

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Figure 1: The Western Division of New South Wales



**Legend**

- % COBAR Township
- Western division boundary
- State/Territory boundary



Digital data: Localities - AUSLIG Geodata V1  
State/Territory boundaries - AUSLIG Geodata V1  
Western Division - Graphics layer

Datum: GDA94  
Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic

Cartography and digital compilation:  
Social Sciences Centre,  
Bureau of Rural Sciences,  
Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry - Australia  
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