

# Rouse about the bush

Put away the stilettos and jump in the ute for a real red-dirt experience.

Rachael Oakes-Ash visits Burrawang West

new south wales



NO ONE goes by their real name in the Outback. Their parents may have named them Robert Miles Smith, but they'll be called Smitty or Smiles or something from left field like T Bags, with no explanation offered.

Big Willy, Dr D and Tractor are my hosts at Burrawang West cattle station 435km west of Sydney.

This is cattle and sheep country, where red dust flows through the veins of the hardy locals. They can spot city prey a mile away.

It's in the way we walk. A lifetime in stilettos gives me a gait more red light than red dust.

Big Willy manages the more than 4000ha that make up Burrawang West and the 1000 head of breeding cattle. The property is known for its tender beef, which is served in expensive city restaurants.

In his 25 years running the station, Big W has lived through drought and floods.

Its lambing season and the Dorper ewes are protecting their flock in a fenced-off paddock.

With no working dogs on offer, I assume the position and start rounding them up, backing them into a corner before launching myself into their midst.

Grabbing the first lamb I can reach, I hold it down 'til the flock has fled, standing tall with my prize above my head.

I think I have caught my dinner. Big Willy just smiles.

Originally encompassing more than 200,000ha, Burrawang Station was founded in 1836 and became renowned for its record wool production.

OVER the years portions of the station have been sold. In 2000 the existing property was bought by Graham Pickles, a city-bred Australian with a commitment to keeping both the station's Aboriginal heritage and diverse ecology alive.

Burrawang was a renowned tribal man and part of the Wiradjuri tribe of NSW. His history is celebrated by the local indigenous artists who frequent Burrawang Station.

Mark Powell is a Wiradjuri traditional landowner with close ties to Burrawang. He spends his days teaching Aboriginal boys of the area the secret dance steps of the corroboree and presenting his own paintings and youth dance troupe to guests of the station before dinner.

After a hard day's yakka among the wild kangaroos and emus, catching lambs and herding cattle, this is one jillaroo ready to eat.

Kangaroo stew cooked on the campfire satisfies a big appetite, and is followed by chocolate dessert.

But the real treat is Tractor, a



Double the value: Burrawang West Station is renowned for the quality of its stock and its Aboriginal heritage.



Mainstay: Burrawang West homestead on Goobang Creek off the Lachlan.



Hot dance: locals put on a show.

strapping, swarthy, country stockman who spins his yarns after dinner by the fire.

Tractor frightens us with tales of gun-wielding ghosts, tickles our funny bones with stories of men and sheep, and has us begging for more hilarious stories before bed.

Burrawang West can sleep up to 24 guests. Private cabins have two bedrooms, ensuites, lofty ceilings, local art and open fires, all within strolling distance of the main homestead and its open-bar billiards room, tennis courts and spa sauna.

Situated on Goobang Creek off the Lachlan River, the homestead overlooks natural wetlands and the year-long water source that saves the property during droughts, thanks to weirs built in the 1930s.

It is here that we meet Dr D, on the edge of the river.

Dr D can tell a yellow-tailed thorn bird from a diamond sparrow finch.

Who knew that the male cormorant incubates the eggs alongside his female partner? Not me.

Dr D takes us on a nature walk like no other, picking up water-sodden bark and showing us the critters underneath.

All too soon we are airborne and on our flight home, Big W's Akubra fading to a speck on the ground.

From the air we can clearly see the winding river, water holes and land features that make up the Aboriginal paintings of Mark Powell.

It is said that Old Man Burrawang's spirit still guards the land and it is true that no one dares cross Old Man Burrawang and his mate, Big Willy.

Rachael Oakes-Ash was a guest of Select Hotels

## traveller's checks

**Getting there:** Burrawang West, between Condobolin and Parkes, is a solid day's drive from Melbourne. REX Airlines flies daily from Sydney to Parkes and transfers are available to the property. See [www.rex.com.au](http://www.rex.com.au)

**Staying:** rates start at \$440 a person and include all meals, drinks and most activities. Burrawang West is a Select Hotel property and available for individual bookings or groups and conferences. Children under 16 not catered for.

**Information:** bookings ph: 1300 368 925. Visit [www.selecthotels.com/burrawang](http://www.selecthotels.com/burrawang)



Ghostly: fireside storyteller Tractor.