Outback Ballads
A.L.Lloyd

1 Flash Jack From Gundagai
2 Lachlan Tigers
3 The Cockies Of Bungaree
4 South Australia
5 The Banks Of The Condamine
6 Bluey Brink
7 The Overlander
8 A Thousand Mile Away
9 The Flash Stockman
1 The Wild Colonial Boy
11 Brisbane Ladies
12 Bold Jack Donahue
13 The Shearer's Dream
14 The Derby Ram

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A. L. LLOYD A short biographical note.

A. L. Lloyd was born in England, and went out to Australia at the age of 15. That was in the nineteen-twenties. He was a station hand for nine years, working in many different parts. From the men he worked with - shearers, drovers and so on - he heard many of the old bush songs, and he learned to sing them himself, in the old traditional bush style. Unaccompanied, rather slow, with the voice pitched high, and rather nasal. He bought himself an exercise book, and began writing down the words of the songs, so as to be sure not to forget them. Many folk singers do this, but in Bert Lloyd's case it was the beginning of something more. As he became more interested in folk songs, he began to collect them systematically, and to study them; in the course of time, he was to become an authority on folk music.

Early in the 1930s, Lloyd returned to England. From there, he shipped out for a time on Antarctic whalers. He spent some time wandering around various parts of the world. All the time he was learning more folk songs and studying them at first hand. Few folklorists can match his wide and intimate knowledge of the folk songs of the English-speaking countries, and he is also something of an authority on the folk music of Latin America and the Balkans.

Lloyd has written a short historical account of English folk songs, called The Singing Englishman. This is probably the best introduction to English folk song that has yet been produced. He is also the author of an excellent short book on Argentine folk dances. He is responsible for a collection of miner's folk songs, Come all ye bold miners, which is the most important collection of British industrial folk songs yet produced, and collaborated with Vaughan-Williams to produce the Penguin Book of English Folk Song.

There have been many recordings of Australian folk songs published recently. But here, for the first time, are recordings of Australian folk songs by a man who has learnt them in the usual manner of folk singers; that is by picking them up from the singing of his workmates in the bush. True, in this record Lloyd has livened up the pace of the songs, and instead of singing them unaccompanied, in the traditional manner, he has the help of two very fine accompanists. But for all that, in the opinion of Australian folklore specialists, Lloyd's style of singing here is the old authentic bush style.

Flash Jack From Gundagai: What is special about Gundagai that earns it such frequent mention in folklore? Perhaps its position as a near-halfway stage on the Sydney-Melbourne highroad made it loom larger than life in the shearer's imagination. Flash Jack evidently did most of his shearing a long way from home, but the fact that he came from Gundagai seems to give him a special character. He appears to be the elder brother of the Flash Stockman, but his boasts are more sober, and he is a workman of some dignity. The tune of this song is a close relative of the Bungaree melody.

Lachlan Tigers: A shearer's song from the Forbes district, that drives on at the pace of a ringer on the long blow in a busy shed. The Ward and Paine's mentioned in the song are a brand of shears. Jackie Howe, likewise mentioned, shore 231 weaners at Alice Downs, Central Queensland in 1892. His record stood till 1947, when Daniel Cooper shore 325 at Glenara, Langkoop, Vic. The tune, best-known in Australia in association with the words of The Shearer's Cook, is a Scottish melody sometimes called Musselburgh Fair (it also exists in America, as The Cruise of the Bigler).

The Cockies of Bungaree: There is some pretty poor country around Bungaree. Perhaps that was what made the cockies such skinflints thereabouts. They tell of one cockie so mean before he put the milk on the hands' table, he used to skim it on top; then when no one was looking, he'd turn it over and skim it on the bottom as well. Perhaps it was the same fellow who was so tight, he laid off the hands of his watch. The great Bungaree song began life as the doleful complaint of a potato-lifter. At some time along the road, this potato song caught up with another, called The Stringybark Cockatoo. The present version is the offspring of this honourable if humble union. In spirit and in melody too, it owes something to an Irish song: The Spalpeen's Complaint of the Cranbally Farmer. I had the tune and some of the words from James Hamilton, of Albury, N.S.W.

South Australia: In the days of sail, South Australia was a familiar going-away song, sung as the man trudged round the capstan to heave up the heavy anchor. Some say the song originated on wool-clippers, others say it was first heard on the emigrant ships. There is no special evidence to support either belief; it was sung just as readily aboard Western Ocean ships as in those on the Australia run. Laura Smith, a remarkable Victorian lady, obtained a 14-stanza version of South Australia from a coloured seaman in the Sailor's Home at Newcastle-on-Tyne, in the early 1880s. The song's first appearance in print was in Miss Smith's Music of the Water. Later, it was often used as a forebitter, sung off-watch, merely for fun, with any instrumentalist joining in. It is recorded in this latterday form. The present version was learnt from an old sailing-ship sailor, Ted Howard of Barry, in South Wales. Ted told how he and a number of shellbacks were gathered round the bed of a former shipmate. The dying man remarked: "Blimey, I think I'm slipping my cable. Strike up South Australia, lads, and let me go happy."

The Banks of the Condamine: About 1690, a ballad called The Undaunted Seaman was published as a broadsheet and sold on the English streets and fairgrounds. It told of a sailor about to embark in a man-o'-war. His sweetheart declares her intention to dress herself in sailor's clothes and accompany him. He assures her: "Your soft and tender milk-white hand a seaman's labour can't do", and she is left to mourn. During Nelson's time, this popular ballad was re-jigged, and became known as The Banks of the Nile in which Willie assures his Nancy: "Your waist is rather slender, your complexion is too fine, your constitution is too delicate to stand the hot campaign". The Banks of the Nile, still much sung in the Scottish North-East, formed the base of The Banks of the Condamine, which must have won considerable popularity in nineteenth century Australia, to judge by the number of different versions that exist. This present set, whose tune comes from Jack Lyons, of Dubbo, N.S.W., sticks rather closer to the Nile version than usual. The tune is related to an Irish melody sometimes called Mary Griffin.

Bluey Brink: Old Dad Adams of Cowra, N.S.W. used to sing this song. Rumour had it the pubs didn't stock anything strong enough for Old Dad. It was said he would bore a hole in the bottom of a silo and suck out the fermented juice of the ensilage through a straw. To one expressing disbelief, the answer was: "All right, look for yourself. All the silos round Cowra have got little holes bored in 'em". Anyway, Old Dad didn't make the song. Perhaps it was made by the Speewasleeper-cutter, who went into a chemist's and called for prussic acid with a vitriol chaser, adding: "And don't go dilutin' it with that ammonia, neither". The tune is just another variant of the old tried-and-trusted Vilikins melody.

The Overlander: As Australian songs go, this is quite a venerable ballad. lt was printed in the Queenslander's New Colonial Campfire Songbook as long ago as 1865. There, the overlander was identified as a Victorian, who had wandered up to Kempsey, N.S.W., and bought a big mob of cattle, intending to pasture them in Queensland. The ballad described some of his exploits on the overlanding trip through northern New South Wales. In later versions, including those printed by Patterson and Vance Palmer, the overlander lost his southern identity, and appears as a dinkum Queenslander. The version given here is in some respects closer to the original. Vance Palmer gives a tune for his version that is related to the Scottish bagpipe melody Lady Madeline Sinclair. Old Bob Bell, of Condobolin, said he made up the melody I've used here; but it's very close to a known tune called The Irish Bull; also it's a distant relative of the fairly familiar ballad-melody of Turpin Hero. Bob said he wrote the words too. Perhaps he did. But he must have been even older than he looked.

A Thousand Mile Away: In the 1840s, for some reason, penal transportation was considered a fit joke for the music-halls, and several English comedians included burlesque ballads of transportation in their repertory. One such ballad told of a bold lover who watches his girl, named Mag, "with a Government band around each hand, and another one on her leg", being shipped off to Australia. He resolves to follow her into captivity, and the refrain of the song goes: "I'm taking a trip on a Government ship, ten thousand miles away". Among students and jokers, this was parodied into the well-known: "I'm off to my love with a boxing-glove", etc. But in Australia, perhaps some time in the 1880s, when the home cattle industry was beginning to make some headway against U.S. competition (the American cattle business having been hit by a sequence of bad droughts and severe winters), some enthusiast made his own parody of the song, which Banjo Paterson thought worth printing in his Old Bush Songs. Everyone knew the tune from the "boxing-glove" version, and so the song got around the continent. On the way it seems to have lost some of its old references and to have acquired some new ones. But as it survived up to the 1930s the song remained substantially as Paterson first had it.

The Flash Stockman: This is the national anthem of that great race of country skiters who have made themselves heard ever since the first man stepped into the bush with his blanket roll, and bolstered up his courage by crying into the emptiness: "I don't have to prove I'm the best man here - I admit it!" Or perhaps he wasn't so much bolstering up his courage as laughing at his own impotence in the face of hardship and disillusion. Whatever the case, boasting became a wry and double-edged part of the Australian national character. Double-edged? Listen to The Flash Stockman and see if you can make out whether it's a boost or a knock for the skiter. The tune, of course, is one that has carried a score of texts, including The Drover's Dream.

The Wild Colonial Boy: Who was the Wild Colonial Boy? In different versions of the song, he is named Jack Doolan, Jack Dowling, Jim Duggan, John Dollard. The date when he "commenced his wild career" is sometimes given as 1836, more often as 1861. Most of the versions agree that he stuck up the Beechworth mail-coach and robbed "Judge McEvoy". There was a District Judge in Victoria named Macoboy, and the Beechworth mail-coach was robbed. But that was in 1869, by the bushranger Henry Power, and the Judge was not among the passengers. Nowadays it`s usually presumed that the ballad is merely a fanciful re-make of the ballad of Bold Jack Donahue. Anyway, it has become one of the widest-known Australian songs. For long a favourite with Irish stage comedians, it spread rapidly to America, notably to the lumber-camps of Michigan and the fisheries of Nova Scotia. But the best native Australian versions are far better than the popular Irish ones.

Brisbane Ladies: A favourite sea-song was called Spanish Ladies. It wasn't a shanty, but was sung in fo'c'sle entertainment, off-watch. When Captain Marryat wrote his novel Poor Jack in 1840, he introduced the song, saying that, as it was almost forgotten, he hoped to rescue it from oblivion for a short time. He needn't have worried, Spanish Ladies must have been tougher than he thought, for it has survived in several varied shapes right down to our time. English whalers and Newfoundland sealers made up their own versions, and sometime in the second half of the nineteenth century, somebody - perhaps an ex-sailor - made a parody of it relating to the life of Queensland cattle drovers. Just as the sea song contains sailing directions for the English Channel, so the drovers' song details the main stage of the cattle route north-westward out of Brisbane, and also tells of some of the attractions on the way. The melody is an uncommonly handsome one.

Bold Jack Donahue: Donahue came to Australia from Dublin in the transport Ann and Amelia in 1825. An old hand says: “He was only twenty when he arrived here, but he was a second Napoleon. He was short, but a model of muscle and bone … He often said he was never designed for a prisoner and whilst he lived he would be free”. Twice he escaped from the iron gang, and the second time he and his band terrorised the Nepean countryside for a brief two years before he was trapped and shot by the police. The ballad must have been made by an admiring Irish convict shortly after Donahue‘s death. It has a contempt for the law, a pride in the outlaw’s independence, an appreciation of Donahue as the kind of man “who would fight till hell freezes over, and then write on the ice: Come on, you bastards”. It is this spirit which has kept the ballad of Jack Donahue going all these years since the troopers shot him in the Bringelly scrub on September 1st, 1830. As good ballads will, Bold Jack Donahue exists in many versions. This one comes in the main from Bob Bell, rabbiter, of Condobolin, N.S.W., who has gone where-ever the good old-timers go.

The Shearer’s Dream: Henry Lawson wrote the words of this song. Of all his poems, it`s perhaps the one that comes nearest to folk song by the way it`s strung together. He made it out of a fantasy common in shearers’ huts, where girls are seldom seen but often thought about. The text owes something to the old “Songs of Marvels” or “Songs of Lies” that used to abound, especially in Irish tradition. The Drover’s Dream is another such, likewise The Big Rock Candy Mountains. We know that certain of Lawson’s poems became hitched to folk melodies and passed into the song repertory of station hands, shearers and drovers. By all accounts, The Shearer’s Dream was one of these. I never heard it sung myself, and I don‘t know what tune was used for it. But I’ve taken the liberty of coupling it to the melody of an Anglo-Irish song called The Girl I Left Behind. It seems to fit snugly enough.

The Derby Ram: This hoary old rogue of a song used to be sung in the English Midlands when village youths banded together and went from house to house at midwinter, with one of their gang dressed in a sheepskin to represent the old Tup. The Tup, so the story went, had the power to confer or withhold good luck for the coming year. Notably, he was supposed to give beasts and humans encouragement to breed. If you gave the gang money, you were set for the year; if you refused you were in for a thin time. Some say The Derby Ram is a distant relative of the Greek god Pan. Others say he represents the Devil himself. Whatever the case, he is remembered with gusto by students, soldiers, shearers and such like bachelors. I have heard of Queenlanders who think it should be called The Dalby Ram, but they’re a minority. The song has many sets of words, not all fit for recording. Likewise it has many tunes. This is the best I know.

A. L. LLOYD.

GLOSSARY OF AUSTRALIANISMS

FLASH JACK FROM GUNDAGAI:
Pinked ’em: shorn the sheep so closely that the pink skin showed.
Wolseleys and B-Bows: makes of machine-shears and hand-shears respectively.
Shaved ’em in the grease: shorn unwashed sheep.
Rung Cujingie shed: was “ringer” (champion shearer) in the shearing-shed on Cujingie station.
Whaling up the Lachlan: fishing in the Lachlan River, a common occupation for “swagmen” tramping the central N.S.W. bush.

LACHLAN TIGERS:
Gate: of the sheep pens on the shearing-shed floor.
Whipping side: second side of the sheep to be shorn.
Contractor: independent entrepreneur who employs the shearers.
Ward and Paynes: a brand of hand-shears.

THE COCKIES OF BUNGAREE:
Whipped the cat: complained.

THE BANKS OF THE CONDAMINE:
Ram-stag: a sheep that has missed castration and grown into an unwanted ram; their mutton often fed to shearers, is very rank.
Sandy cobblers: sheep with sand in the fleece and thus hard to shear tend to be left till last. Cobbler: sticks to the last.

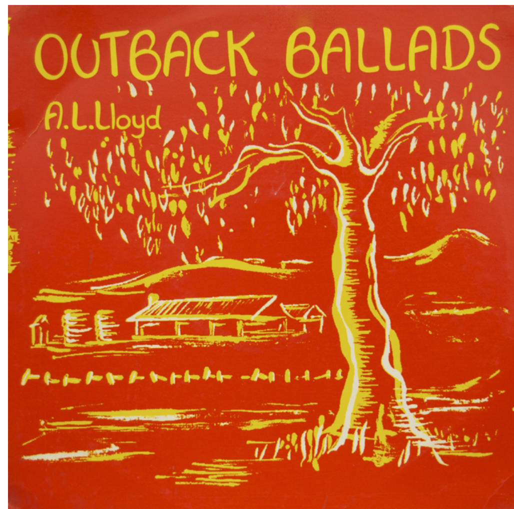
THE OVERLANDER:
Duffers: stolen cattle.
Store beef: lean animals, needing fattening before they are killed for market.
Bone a prad: steal a horse.
Prig: steal.

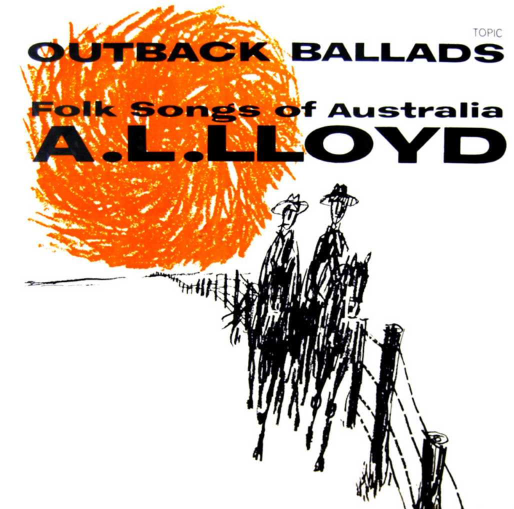
A THOUSAND MILE AWAY:
Baldy: (pron. bawly) white-faced.
Nardoo: a plant native to the interior of Australia.
Snuffy: spirited, touchy.

THE FLASH STOCKMAN:
Gidgee: a small tree of acacia kind, of the eastern inland.
Dewdrop: axe.
Silvertail: one of the social elite, here of big landowner class.

THE WILD COLONIAL BOY:
Iron gang: convict gang kept in chains.

THE SHEARER`S DREAM:
Billabong: a small creek.
Cut out: finished shearing.
Draftings: separating, as sheep are separated according to age, sex, etc., in the drafting yards.





The three alternative covers of Outback Ballads.

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