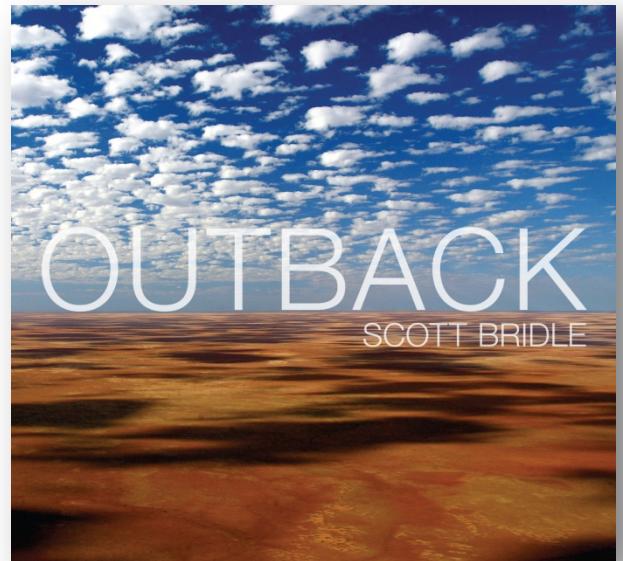


Outback

Author: Scott Bridle



Extract

Introduction

When I was young I loved the bush. I grew up on a sheep and cattle property south of Roma in western Queensland. My grandfather had gone out there and developed it after World War II. My photography started when I was really young. Mum is a painter and a keen photographer so I naturally became interested. I think I was about eight when I got my first little camera. I took pictures of the things I loved about the property: horses, bikes, cattle. I loved what I was doing, being out with Dad. I was proud of our country and our lifestyle.

After I left home I kept it up. I got a really good camera when I was 17, a Hanimex SLR film camera. I did a trip to Cape York on a motorbike and took heaps of good photos. When I went ringing I took photos and put them in albums. My life story is in albums.

I spent a lot of years on the ground, as a ringer then a head stockman. I started managing, but these days that takes you away from working with stock. The helicopter was a way of staying close to the land and the cattle. I'd loved the idea of flying from when I was little, so I got my helicopter licence when I was 32, ten years ago now. When I was learning to fly I had a suspicion I'd be taking photos as well. I bought a really good camera in preparation. It was a manual Nikon film camera, but I soon discovered it was very difficult to use while flying. Despite my initial reservations, I had to get a digital camera. They are so much easier. You can even use them one-handed. Since then I've changed my attitude to photography. It's about capturing an image. It doesn't matter in what form.

My first digital camera was a 6.8 megapixel Olympus. I now use a Canon 1D. The photos I took with the old Olympus are just as good as those on the 1D. The only different thing is now I know I've got the photo in high resolution.

Most of my best images have only taken about three shots. I find that for some of the best I've only taken one or two. If you try to set up a picture too much, nine times out of ten it doesn't work. You can't force a photograph.

Flying for work does give you the advantage of being in the right place at the right time. You're flying a lot, often as long as there's enough light to see the cattle, every day for weeks at a stretch. I have the camera sitting on the seat beside me all the time. If I see something, I can easily grab it. I always hang it around my neck because I nearly lost it once. The wind got it and nearly dragged it out of my hand.

We muster with the doors of the helicopter off. That way you can see the cattle better, and the scrub when you are down low. It also means you can get nice clear photos. A lot of shots I take are looking straight down. This involves rolling the machine on its side, getting a couple of shots and then flying away. It's a combination of flying, getting in the right spot, and working the camera. Often you can feel a good shot. You can feel yourself get to the right place.

I also appreciate the outback characters. I love taking photos of the Aboriginal people, and the old blokes and women who have been working in the bush all their lives. A lot of people don't understand what goes on out there, but you can read it in the faces of these people, you can see the life they've lived. While the young fellas are enthusiastic, it's still a pretty tough lifestyle. These days it's hard to get skilled workers out on the land, but I'd like to think my photos might encourage young people to get out there and try it.

I don't know what I'd do if I had to choose between flying and photography. I was thinking about that not long ago. I realised that if I couldn't fly, I'd take photographs and if I couldn't take photos, I'd fly.