

ROBERT L. ATKINSON SNR

(1937 - 2014)

GLEN RUTH, FOUNDATION STUD



ROB ATKINSON SNR spent most of his working life at Glen Ruth, a 50,000 hectare cattle property situated on the Herbert River watershed, 50 kms west of Tully in North Queensland.

He left school at 16, and was given the management of Glen Ruth, running about 4,000 head of Droughtmaster cattle, together with Quarter Horses, Stock Horses and Thoroughbreds.

Glen Ruth was where the Atkinson's had done much of the early Droughtmaster breed development. He, along with his wife, Regina, reared their three children, Robbie, Jim and Julie, at Glen Ruth.

Rob was a noted cattleman, with unbreakable patience, good horseman, bred thoroughbreds very successfully, and served as a Director of the Australian Quarter Horse Assoc. in the 1970's.

Rob served on the Droughtmaster Board for 13 years and was Vice-President for several terms. He was also an active member of the Zebu Cross Breeders' Association and a Board member of the Tropical Beef Breeders' Association prior to the emergence of the Droughtmaster Stud Breeders' Society. He judged at many shows and twice

judged the Droughtmaster line up at the Ekka, 1966 and 1974.

Together with his father Mont and brother Alan, Rob was responsible for the establishment of a Droughtmaster herd at Gusap, in the Markham Valley, 150 kms from Lae in PNG. In 1956, 750 heifers, bulls and 7 horses made the trip to Gusap on open topped barges, in several different trips. They were loaded in Cairns and swum ashore at Lae, a voyage of about 1250 kms, before walking to Gusap another 140 kms. The barges were not built for livestock, the pens were makeshift and feed and fresh water supplies were crucial. Gusap was sold in 1962.

Rob also conducted cattle schools in North Queensland during the 1980's, focusing on adaptability and fertility. This followed his work and learnings from Professor Jan Bonsma, University of Pretoria, South Africa and Beefmaster breed creator, Tom Lasater, in the USA.

In 1970, the 31,000 hectare Hughenden district property 'Katandra' was purchased. 800 select commercial weaner heifers and a mob of Droughtmaster herd bulls were transported from Glen Ruth to establish a large scale herd bull breeding operation. In

1972 a breeder observation trial commenced at Katandra under the supervision of Queensland Dept of Primary Industries. The objective was to record the performance of a control mated herd, joined for 13 weeks, cow age recorded, pregnancy tested, lactation status and condition score, all recorded and analysed. The trial was held for 7 years, 1972-78. Over the trial period, an average pregnancy rate of 91% was achieved with a 92.2% calf survival rate between positive pregnancy test and weaning.

Results from the trial provided much needed objective information for the beef cattle industry which was seeking answers to management decisions and future planning.

Glen Ruth was sold in 1989 and Rob spent the remainder of his life at Furlong Thoroughbred Stud, Greenmount.

Robert L Atkinson Snr was presented with Life Membership of the Droughtmaster Breeders' Society in 2012, at the opening of Droughtmaster House, Ipswich, Qld.

*Compiled by
Rob Atkinson.
Sources included
Droughtmaster. (John Boydell 2001)*