

Podcast 91 – The Australian Kelpie

Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia,
with Rob McCormack

Podcast Number 91 – The Australian Kelpie

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Hi,

Dogs make great pets and they are the most popular pet in Australian households. But not all dogs are only pets. In Australia, working dogs have played a big part in the success of our very large cattle and sheep industry. Without them, we just wouldn't be able to successfully run the cattle and sheep stations in Australia. We even created a special breed of dog to help us. It's called the Australian Kelpie. In this podcast, I would like to tell you a little about this wonderful canine worker.



An Australian Kelpie

(By Pertti Kärppä (Own work) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons)

In Australia, we have around 70 million sheep and around 27 million cattle. The stations where these animals are grown can be incredibly large. For example, the largest single cattle station in Australia, and the world, is called Anna Creek. It is in South Australia and has an area of around 23,600 square kilometres. That's about half the size of Denmark. The biggest single sheep station in Australia, and also the world, is called Rawlinna. It is in Western Australia and has an area of around 10,100 square kilometres.

As you can imagine, cattle and sheep are hard to manage over such large areas. This is where working dogs are so important and it is the reason that the Australian Kelpie came into existence.

Australian Kelpies are medium in size with short hair. They come in a variety of colours including black, chocolate, red, blue, fawn, black and tan, and red and tan. Their outer coat

is tough and strong which is useful for working in harsh environments like the Australian outback. They were first bred in the 1870s near a small town called Casterton in eastern Victoria. Casterton people are proud of this fact and have placed a bronze statue of a kelpie in front of their town hall. Kelpies were bred from Scottish smooth haired collie dogs which were brought to Australia in the 1800s to be working dogs on sheep farms. Some people say that there has also been some cross breeding with the Australian dingo, the wild dog of Australia. It would certainly help to explain the unique qualities of this wonderful working dog of Australia – the kelpie.

Kelpies have a natural instinct to round up sheep, cattle and other animals. They are also enormously energetic and can literally run until they drop. It is estimated that a working Kelpie will run around 60 kilometres in a day in rounding up sheep and cattle. They are hard workers indeed and can run very fast for long periods. Not only that, they can also withstand heat well and they just never give up. They are also incredibly loyal to their owners. I love the way they work with their owners to round up sheep and cattle. They can easily be trained and are very smart. They respond to whistles as well as spoken commands such as 'Bring 'em up', 'Go back' and 'Push 'em up'. Incredibly, they seem to know exactly when and where to move in order to control the sheep or cattle. As well as on paddocks and the dry plains of an outback sheep station, they are also brilliant workers in a small fenced stockyard, where they help to move sheep and cattle through gates or through a stock race. They have a special move with sheep which is amazing. They like to run along the top of the crowded sheep in order to get to the spot where they need to be. They are so quick and flexible as they run across the sheep's backs. Like a circus performer performing a trick, they seem to know exactly where to step.

Like Vegemite and kangaroos, Australian Kelpies are an Australian icon. There have even been films made about them. Recently I saw the 2011 film 'Red Dog'. It is based on a true story of a real red kelpie called Red Dog who lived from 1971 to 1979 in the outback Pilbara region of Western Australia. When his second master unfortunately died in 1975, Red Dog travelled alone around the outback of Western Australia and was looked after by various people at different times. It was like he belonged to the community. He was even made a member of the local sports club in the coastal town of Dampier. Someone even opened a bank account for him in the local bank in Dampier. There is now a website where you can read all about Red Dog. <http://www.reddogwa.com/home>

His story in the film called 'Red Dog' is very touching and has a distinctly Australian feel. I can highly recommend it.

A sequel has also been produced showing more about the early part of his life. It is called Red Dog – True Blue. I haven't seen it yet, but if it is as good as the first film, then it will be worth watching.

There is no doubt that the Australian Kelpie is the best working dog in the world and a great Australian favourite. Some people have them as pets, but that only works well when the dog can get lots of vigorous exercise. They need lots of space and very active owners. But the best place for them is rounding up sheep or cattle, as a working dog.

If you have a question or a comment to make, please leave it in the comments box at the bottom of this page. Or, you can send me an email at rob@slowenglish.info. I would love to hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. I will write back to you, in English of course. If you would like to take a short quiz to see if you have understood this podcast, you will also find it on my website. Goodbye until

next time.

Rob

Podcast 91 Quiz - Did you understand the podcast?

You can take the quiz as many times as you like.

[Start quiz](#)

Vocabulary

bank account = when you have money kept in the bank

bred = when animals have their young

breed = a type of animal

bronze = a type of metal

canine = about dogs

cattle = large animals which people keep for meat

circus = a show where performers and animals do tricks

coat = the fur on an animal such as a dog, cat, bear, etc

commands = instructions

community = the people who live in your city, town or area

created = made

cross breeding = when one type of animal has young with a different type of animal

distinctly = something which is easily seen or recognised

energetic = when you have a lot of energy

enormously = very large

environments = the natural world, or a part of it, in which we live

existence = when something is created, it exists

fenced stockyard = a small area with fences for bringing animals together

flexible = can easily change

harsh = when a place or thing is very unkind or cruel

households = a family living in one house

icon = something which is much loved and respected

imagine = to think of something in your mind

incredibly = when it is almost hard to believe

industry = a group of people and businesses which make a product or service

instinct = when you know something without being taught

literally = when you say something that is exactly true

loyal = when a dog always helps his master and stays with him

manage = to look after, to run

master = the person who owns the dog

medium = not small, not large

outback = those parts of Australia which are a long, long way from the cities

paddocks = an area with fences for keeping animals

pets = animals which live with you

qualities = things which are typical of something

respond = listens to and does what is asked

round up = when you gather animals together

run = look after, manage, operate

sequel = a film which follows the story of another film

sheep = smaller animals which people keep for wool and for meat

stations = very, very large farms in Australia which farm cattle or sheep

statue = when a person or animal is made from metal

stock race = a corridor made with fences for bringing animals in a line

success = when things have been done well

touching = makes you happy or sad

unfortunately = when something bad happens

unique = when there is nothing else like it

variety = many different types

various = many

vigorous exercise = when you run quickly

whistles = a high sound made with the mouth, teeth and lips

withstand = when you are not affected by something

working dogs = dogs who help people in their work