

COME AND VISIT A CATTLE PROPERTY

From our family to yours

Emma Boughen

emma.boughen@cqnews.com.au

SITTING on her horse staring out over the view of Carnarvon Gorge is where a 15-year-old Olivia Evans first dreamed of teaming tourism with her family's 17,000ha beef cattle property.

More than a decade on and the mum of two young boys, with the help of her father Bruce Mayne and husband Nathan, is making that dream a reality.

Bandana Station lies about an hour south-west of Rolleston, and just 10 minutes from Carnarvon Gorge.

Bruce and his wife Lucinda bought the beef cattle property in 1998, in the past five years since Nathan and Olivia have come home they have diversified in organic beef and have developed the property into a must-see tourist destination with their famous Sunset show.

And now Bandana Station is taking the next step, introducing camping stays to the property.

From the very spot Olivia stood as a 15-year-old dreaming of agri-tourism opportunities, the family have pegged 41 sites across 20ha where visitors will have the opportunity to bunker down for a weekend, on a working cattle station.

"At the soul of our business, we always ask 'would we do that for friends and family?' And if the answer is yes, then we do it for our guests as well," Olivia said.

After graduating from school Olivia went on to forge a career in marketing, and tourism as, being the only daughter, coming back to the family farm "wasn't really an option".

While working in Mackay she met her husband Nathan Evans, and just last year the pair bought the property from Olivia's parents.

"Nathan was a suit and tie accountant, I don't think he'd ever stepped foot on a property before he came out to visit me at home," Olivia



» Bruce Evans Bandana Station.

said.

"But he fell in love with the place and mum and dad have given us this opportunity so we're making the most of what he have in the most sustainable way possible."

While the move into tourism seemed like a logical step for the tight-knit family, it took a series of challenges to steer them down the right path.

"Our firstborn son was born with Hypoxic-Ischemic Encephalopathy (a lack of oxygen to the brain) which caused the onset of global development delay," Olivia said.

"We realised early on that we were going to need intensive therapy for Jack to fulfil his potential.

"And so with a nanny chasing after Jack, I had the time on my hands to bring my dream to life."

So, in need of a distraction and time to spare Olivia, Nathan and Bruce set about building the tourism venture, which last year won them the Central Highlands Emerging Business of the Year award.

"I was 12 the first time I saw a sunrise at Bandana, I came home from boarding school and mum woke me up early and took me up to the ridge where we host sunsets now to watch the sun come up over 32km of the Great Dividing Range," she said.

"It's sounds corny but it was just so beautiful I felt



» GET BACK TO COUNTRY: Olivia Evans baking for the Bandana Station Sunset shows.

PHOTOS: CONTRIBUTED

like I was in a story book.

"That scene has just stuck in my mind ever since."

The sunset shows, which kicked off three years ago, are more than just a campfire and a sunset.

Bruce, a fifth generation cattleman and Olivia, spend the afternoon talking about life on the land with billy tea brewing and smoko on the table.

"We give people a run down on our cattle business and our family's background while guests sip on wines and a beers eating cheese and homemade cakes," Olivia said.

"Bruce tells of stupid mistakes he's made that end up giving plenty of laughs when looked at in hindsight,

and I recite mock-up poem of a housewife's daily routine."

But more than a supplementary income, Olivia said diversifying their business into tourism also brought renewed spirits, to what is at times, a tough life on the land.

"It really buoys your spirits," she said.

"If I didn't have tourism here I would probably find it tough as a wife and mother on the land, it can be quite isolating."

In addition to the stunning scenery, and natural history Carnarvon Gorge has to offer Olivia said part of Bandana's appeal was that lost connection between the city

and the bush.

"A friend of mine summed it up perfectly when she said 'everyone used to have a cousin in the bush, but that connection has been lost'," she said.

"It's an opportunity for people who used to live in the bush to get back to nature or for those who have never experienced it before to come out and see how the other half lives."

Money raised from the sale of souvenirs goes towards charities such as the Cambodian Children's Fund and organisations in the local Rolleston community.

For more information visit bandanastation.com.au.