

OXFORD AUSTRALIA
**WORD
OF THE
MONTH**

December
2010

Boundary Rider

noun: a person employed to ride round the fences etc. of a cattle or sheep station and keep them in good order.

Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary 5th Edition

The story behind the Word of the Month

From the 1860s the **boundary rider** was a person responsible for maintaining the outer fences on a station, or a publicly owned vermin-proof fence (such as the rabbit-proof fence). A passage in an 1885 number of the newspaper *Illustrated Australian News* describes the **boundary rider's** typical duties:

The duties of a **boundary rider** for the most part consist in riding round the fences every day, seeing that they are all in good order, blocking up any panels that may be broken, putting out strangers (that is stock that have strayed on to the run), and, in fact, doing all that may pertain to keeping his master's stock on his own land, and everybody's else out of it.

Changes in technology and modes of transport meant that opportunities for the occupation of **boundary rider** dwindled, there was a danger that the word would disappear from Australian English, and exist only in historical contexts.

On the sporting field, some saw an analogy between the property boundary that the traditional **boundary rider** followed in his daily duties, and the boundary of the field. In Australian Rules football, the boundary umpire is stationed along the boundary line of the field and signals when the ball is out of play. Since he moves along the boundary line, he is occasionally referred to as the **boundary rider**, as in this newspaper passage:

Boundary umpire Jackson Clark got the shock of his life yesterday when Territory sports minister Karl Hampton presented him with a ticket to tomorrow night's Indigenous All-Stars v Adelaide clash at TIO Stadium. The 15-year-old **boundary rider** in the NTFL and TEAFA competitions also captains the Waratahs under-16 side. *Northern Territory News*, 6 February 2009.

A more common use of **boundary rider** in sporting contexts is its use

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to describe a roving reporter at a televised sporting game, especially a football game, positioned on the boundary of the playing field, and providing expert commentary, either during the march or at breaks:

Quarter-time. Now we cross to the huddle. On Channel 7, Dipper and the other **boundary riders** purport to tell us what the coaches are instructing the players. *Age* (Melbourne), 24 August 1997.

As **boundary rider** for Ten's AFL matches, she keeps the audience informed about 'what's happening at ground level'. *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane) 23 September 2004.

Finally, the term **boundary rider** is also used in cricket, to describe a cricketer in a fielding position near the boundary. In Australia, if you were a member of the English fielding team, this was a potentially dangerous position in the late 1990s:

On Friday night England **boundary rider** Mark Ealham had bottles and golf and billiard balls thrown at him at the MCG. *Sunday Telegraph* (Sydney), 17 January 2004.

Boundary rider is therefore an interesting example of a word that looked as if it might disappear from Australian English as a result of changing farm management practices, but whose meaning has been refashioned and extended in the world of Australian sport.