

OPEN HEARTS AND HISTORY IN CAMOOWEAL

Another wonderful festival was held at the Drovers' Camp in Camooweal over the weekend of 21st – 23rd August.

As usual, the little border town came alive leading up to the three day event. All around Camooweal there were musicians getting ready with performances in the Post Office Hotel and at the local Gospel Church. Bush Poetry was shared with Brenda Joy and friends down by the river and in the PO Hotel camp kitchen and Brenda also visited the State School for interactive workshops with the very responsive children. The school group also performed songs for the drovers at their luncheon on Friday.

On the Friday night, in addition to the usual street parade, mail race and fund raising auction (which sees the main road to and from the Northern Territory closed off to all traffic while these hilarious events are in progress), there was also a jazz concert with Mt. Isa's *Bandana* at the camp itself.

The festival concert this year was special featuring Tania Kernaghan with the familiar face of Camooweal, Tom Maxwell, performing under the star-filled outback sky. Throughout the days there was country and gospel music by the Camooweal and Lake Nash community musicians and singers and even a country race meeting at the racecourse.

A special addition to the bush poetry this year was a presentation by Noel Stallard of the poetry of Bruce Simpson. Although Bruce, aged 93, was too frail to be at the festival, Noel had told him of the tribute and passed on that Bruce was delighted at the acknowledgment. As a drover/poet, Bruce Simpson is a legend in Camooweal and Noel's wonderful rendition of his works was enhanced by having Bruce's pre-recorded voice providing the introduction to many of the poems.

The ever popular Bush Poets' breakfast and the Drovers' Camp Talent Award were once again popular features. There were some who were unable to attend this year due to ill health or other commitments (notably regular participants John and Carmel Lloyd who made it half way only to have to return due to John experiencing another of his heart scares – we wish him well) making the number of performers at the breakfast and in the DCTA less than in previous years. This made more work at the breakfast for Noel (as M.C.) and Brenda Joy but, in particular, competitors Max Pringle and Reg Fickling made valuable contributions to the program and the responsive audience loved it all.

Compared by Brenda Joy and judged by Noel and Hal Pritchard the informal DCTA was closely contested by Yarn Spinners, Poets, Singers and Musicians. It was quite special to be able to announce the judges as the current and past Presidents of the ABPA and the MC as the Secretary (considered by attendees as an excellent representation for little Camooweal) and it was an ABPA poet/yarn-spinner Max Pringle of Narrabri who took out the overall award (see results below). Another very special aspect was the emergence of a young poet of exceptional talent. At age 14, Jack Muller of Mt. Isa recited like a real trouper at the poets' breakfast and he was justly awarded both first and second place in the Junior section of the DCTA. No doubt we will be hearing more of Jack in the future.

The Bronze Spur Award for written bush poetry (which is co-ordinated by Ellen Finlay who, together with her husband Paul and Tommy Maxwell was elected as an inaugural 'diamond' life member of the Drovers' Camp), was announced at the DCTA and the lovely winning poem, *Another Good Mate Gone* by Helen Harvey of Coonamble, N.S.W., was read by Brenda and was very well received being entirely appropriate to the surroundings. Helen also took out the second placing in the Bronze Spur (see results and winning poem below).

A highlight of Camooweal is that it is a genuine festival for drovers and there is a magic in hearing these Australian icons tell of their times on the track. It was particularly poignant this year that many of the places and events in Bruce Simpson's poetry could be shared with others who had driven the same tracks and experienced the same life-style. It was like history being brought to life by those who had actually been there and done that.

Understandably, it is a long way to come to Camooweal but it would be wonderful if more of our poets and yarn-spinners could support this authentic outback event on the 4th weekend of August, 2016. There is competition bronco branding and whip cracking, merchandise stalls and art, historical and photographic displays with Australiana books and produce in the memorabilia hall and, of course, there are the drovers with their yarns and humour. You could not help but enjoy the atmosphere and you would be welcomed with open arms by this special, outback community.

Brenda Joy